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Expatriate leaders' leadership styles vs. local subordinates' perspectives in a United Arab Emirates higher education institution

Mouna Abou Assali
Mohammed V University, UAE
Mouna.abouassali@um5a.ac.ae

Salah Troudi
University of Exeter, UK
s.troudi@exeter.ac.uk

Abstract: The main aim of this small scale qualitative pilot exploratory study is to examine how the local subordinates in one of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) higher education institutions perceive their expatriate western leaders' behaviors, what work and personal relationship is established between them, what leadership skills, if any, the UAE local subordinates think their expatriate leaders need to improve or develop to cope with their culture, and what strategies the UAE local subordinates use to adapt to their expatriate leaders' behaviors. Semi-structured interviews were used to interview three UAE local subordinates in a higher education institution. The purpose was particularly to answer the following research questions as perceived by the local subordinates: 1) What were your expectations of the expatriate leadership? 2) How would you describe your relation with your expatriate leader? 3) What skills do you think your leader needs to develop to cope with your cultural norms? 4) What strategies do you use to cope with your leader's behaviors? The main findings show a significant contradiction between what local subordinates expected from their expatriate leaders and their perceptions of leadership behavior.

Keywords: leadership styles, expatriate leader, local subordinate, culture.

Introduction

Cross-cultural leadership and expatriation have been the focus of many research studies for a long time. Literature, therefore, is replete with studies that have examined the challenges which expatriate leaders encounter in terms of culture, values, beliefs and other host-country related issues (e.g. Tahir and Ismail [1], 2007; Caligiur,2013 [2]). Little literature, however, has shed light on the other end of the axis, so to speak; the subordinates and followers working under expatriate leaders in the host countries. Like leaders, subordinates might be expected to face certain challenges when they work with expatriate leaders whose culture and expectations of subordinates might be completely different from those of the local subordinates.

This pilot research study expects to contribute to the existing knowledge and literature about leadership in general, and to the leaders' behaviors in particular as perceived by their local subordinates in an Arab context. It is an attempt to explore these behaviors when leadership is practiced in a place other than the home country. These leadership behaviors would probably be perceived differently by different people, even by the leaders themselves at different times, contexts and cultures.

Since 'leadership behavior' has not been sufficiently examined in the Arab contexts, this study aims at spotlighting this missing part in the literature and the researchers hope to gain a better understanding of the UAE local subordinates' perceptions of their expatriate leaders.

The following section will provide a brief overview of the expatriate presence in the United Arab Emirates, followed by a review of some research studies in the field.

Contextual background

Since its official independence in 1971, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), considered one of the oil-rich countries, has witnessed unprecedented changes in all fields: tourism, education, agriculture, industry and the like. In an attempt to keep up with the globalization speed and the market needs, the UAE has endeavored to hire expatriate expertise in search of new knowledge, skills and competencies. In fact, Schiliro (2015) states that "the United Arab Emirates is the most lucrative business market in the Arabian Gulf region and the most innovative economy among the Arab nations" [3]. It has also fostered international relations and linkages with a variety of foreign firms, companies and educational institutions. Hiring expatriates from abroad is one way that may expose UAE locals to foreign expertise and skills. Although, as Daleur (2016) [4] claims, this "rapid, economic development and prosperity elevated the living standards of the Emiratis and the profile of the country to an internationally competitive level", this massive labor requirement for on-going development has led to "far greater numbers of foreign workers, both skilled and unskilled, entering the work force and assuming semi-permanent residence" as Davidson (2005) [5] believes.

This inflow continued in huge numbers "leaving the indigenous 'local' a minority in their own country and, as most would agree, rendering them totally reliant on the millions of foreigners who have built and continue to build the UAE" (Davidson, 2005) [6].

With specific regard to tertiary sectors, there has been a large expansion in universities, colleges and schools. All these institutions were established to cope with the educational and cultural needs of the UAE society, yet with Western systems and programs. Seeking to improve and compete with the globalized world, The UAE has "traditionally relied on expatriate workers to carry out both professional and manual labor work in the country" (Zajda et al, 2008) [7] and education has been no exception.

Though some UAE locals are aware of the need for expatriate expertise, skills and competencies, others are still concerned because they worry that their traditions, values and customs may disappear or get affected (King, 2008) [8].

Literature Review

Cross-cultural literature is rich in research studies that sample a range of nations. A number of studies have attempted to investigate leadership and leader behavior in association with culture as it comprises the core of leadership in any context. Organizations and institutions are closely attached to the cultural and social environments in which they exist. Therefore, cross-cultural leadership has occupied a relatively huge area in the literature (Biech, 2010 [9]; Day, 2014 [10]; Moran et al, 2011 [11], Gehrke & Claes, 2014 [12]).

However, it is notable that the Arab world is not abundantly included in these studies, though it comprises 23 countries. Hofstede (1980) [13] investigated the national cultural differences in a number of countries but excluded the whole Arab region. However, in his other books later, he included the responses of participants from seven different Arab countries; namely Egypt, Lebanon, Libya, Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. In addition to these research studies, expatriation has emerged as another field of interest for many researchers. It is assumed that living and leading abroad offer new experiences and probably huge cultural challenges that require necessary adjustments by both; the leaders and their subordinates. Punnett (2015) [14] affirms that "the challenge of getting leadership right is multiplied many times in unfamiliar environments".

Before further examination of relevant literature, it might be helpful to define essential concepts that this study will use; 'expatriate', 'leadership', 'culture' and 'leader behavior'.

- **Expatriate:** an expatriate in this study is defined as "a person who lives outside their native country, and is physically mobile across international borders, whether for professional or personal reasons whether for short or long periods of time, whether organizationally sponsored or no" (Mcnulty & Selmer, 2017) [16] . This definition associated with 'leadership' would add up to the complexity of leaders' behaviors in and out of their home countries.
- **Leadership and Leadership behavior:** Although 'leadership' has not gained consensus on a certain definition (Cloud, 2013 [16]; Northhouse,2015 [17]), one view proposed by Chemers (2014) [18] defines leadership as "a process of social influence in which one person is able to enlist the aid and support of others in the accomplishment of a common task". Such a broad definition entails that a leader should master specific skills and competencies that in turn would facilitate the adaptation process to a variety of factors; one of which, for example, is the subordinates' perceptions of leadership behaviors. Leadership is mainly about human interaction. It is more than just giving orders or leading people to achieve certain goals or visions. It is more about watching one's own behaviors when dealing with others in different contexts. Earlier at the seventies, Bandura (1977) [19] states that "from observing others one forms an idea of how new behaviors are performed, and on later occasions this coded information serves as a guide for action". And the term 'behavior' as the science of behavior defines, explains "why we do what we do, say what we say, or don't act at all" (Braksick, 2007) [20]. Therefore, the term 'leader behavior' includes no assumptions about the leaders or the context where they work. In organizations and institutions, for instance, leaders' and subordinates' behaviors are constrained by cultural norms, traditions, values, beliefs or the organization's policy or system (McFarlin & Sweeney, 2012) [21]. These constraints necessitate coping with and adapting to a number of conditions that impact on the direct/indirect relationship and communication between the leader and his subordinates.
- **Culture:** culture as Dimmock and Walker (2005) suggest "refers to the whole way of life of the members of a society or group. It includes how they dress, what and how they eat, marriage customs and family life, their patterns of work, religion, ceremonies, leisure pursuits and works of art" [22]. Obviously, a leader's or a subordinate's culture would impact on his/her behaviors in different environments. In other words, native culture lives deep inside one's mind and consequently becomes the controller over his/her dealings with others. Therefore, lack of cultural knowledge of the 'Other' may create misunderstanding, conflicts or fights among people of distinct cultures. Leadership practices inside and outside the home country are therefore affected by culture. Consequently, a leader's behaviors are shaped by means of his/her own culture. The way these behaviors are perceived in one culture might not be the same in another. Yet, within the same context, Punnett (2015) states that "aspects of the environment, as well as the leader and followers, need to be taken into account to determine the most effective leadership approach" [23].

Considering expatriate leaders literature, Ton and DeNisi (2005) [24] assert that "many local staff have traditionally expected to learn from expatriates because the expatriates are often viewed to be experts with specialized knowledge". Yet, if the expatriate leaders fail, in a local environment, to have any understanding of this environment, they will quickly lose credibility to manage local staff. Noh and DeNisi (2005) [25] also claim that people's assumptions about an individual's social class, cleverness or even potentials depend on the way the individual behaves and speaks. An experimental study conducted by Thomas and Ravlin (1995) [26] showed that the American managers' expectations about the Japanese managers' behaviors

were matched to actual behavior in a way that resulted in creating mutual trust and the ability to communicate.

Within the same context, Cullen and Parboteeah (2013) stress the fact that leaders need the support of their followers if they aspire to succeed. And just "as a leader's behaviors communicate his or her person or task orientation, subordinates accept or reject certain behaviors as legitimate prerogatives of leadership [27].

Robert J. House (2004) [28], the principal investigator of 'The Global Leadership and Organizational Behavior' project, very well-known as 'The GLOBE', worked with a group of over 180 researchers from around the world. 62 countries were involved, four of which were Arab countries: Egypt, Kuwait, Morocco and Qatar. In this project, all middle-managers rated leaders' effectiveness by means of 112 traits listed in the study. Smith et al (2007) believe that "effective managers from the Arab cluster were found to score significantly lower than those from elsewhere on charismatic, team oriented or participative qualities" [29]. However, higher scores go to other traits like self-centeredness, status-consciousness, face-saving, conflict induction and reliance on procedure. Researchers like Obeidat et al (2012) [30] and Todorov (2014) [31] confirm that Arab managers have strong interest in interpersonal relationships, while Simmons (2016) [32] claims that personality traits can be a source of success in international assignments and in many cases can predict performance.

Similar to 'The GLOBE' project, other studies were conducted using managers and middle managers to determine global leadership dimensions and attributes that vary across cultures (Bass and Bass, 2008 [33]; Wang, 2017 [34]). Attributes like charismatic, self-protective, participative, human and autonomous were prominent opposing other universal 'negative' attributes like being a loner, non-cooperative, ruthless, non-explicit, irritable and dictatorial. Other studies examined leadership behavior in terms of different contexts and dimensions. The Ohio-State University study (Fisher and Edward, 1988) [35] is one of the most popular studies in this field. It considers leader's behaviors in terms of two contexts: 'initiating structure' and 'consideration'. The first refers to the leader's ability in establishing clear and positive channels of communication with others, and the second is mainly concerned with leader's behaviors which reflect friendship, respect and mutual trust. This study also indicated that those who rated high in the two contexts mentioned were the most successful leaders.

Fisher and Bibo (2000) claim that these dimensions proposed by the Ohio-State University "have continued to influence leadership research (in the West) and have been incorporated into other behavioral and contingency theories" [36].

As mentioned earlier in this paper, little literature has been done in relation to the expatriate-subordinate leadership relationship in the Arab world. Thus, this study is an attempt to fill in the gap by investigating the local subordinates' perceptions of their expatriate (Western) leaders' behaviors in the context of the UAE.

The study
This pilot study is qualitative and exploratory in nature. In-depth semi-structured interviews were used to answer the following research questions as perceived by the UAE local subordinates, who work in a higher education institution:
1) What are the UAE local subordinates' expectations of the expatriate (Western) leaders?
2) What kinds of relationships exist between the UAE local subordinates and their expatriate leaders?
3) What leadership skills does the expatriate (Western) leader need to improve as a leader?
4) What strategies do the local subordinates adopt to cope with their expatriate leaders' behaviors?

Three Emirati males who work in a higher education institution in the UAE were interviewed. Their work experience ranges from 5-12 years, of which two were in their current job. Their

ages range between 28-36 years. Each of the local participants works under a different expatriate (western) leader, where English language is the medium of written and spoken communication at their work. The expatriate leaders' nationalities were: Australian, Canadian and American. It is not the purpose of this study; however, to establish any comparison among these nationalities, rather to focus on the UAE local subordinates' perceptions of their expatriate (Western) leaders' leadership styles regardless of nationality.

All of the three Emirati subordinates participated in this study on a voluntary basis. Every one of them is leading a group of people that ranges from 5-10 Emirati staff members. Two of the participants are Master degree holders and one of them has recently joined a Master degree program. Consent forms were given to all participants and their confidentiality was assured.

For the purpose of this study, two UAE local female team leaders were also contacted. Although both of them showed willingness and enthusiasm to participate, they later dropped out.

Data Collection and analysis

The decision made upon using in-depth semi-structured interviews is based on Klenke's (2016) perception that in-depth semi-structured interviewing is "the tool of choice for exploring personal and sensitive issues or morally ambiguous choices people have made and is intended to combine structure and flexibility" [37] In addition, utilizing interviews in qualitative research enables the researcher to be closer to the participants and results in collecting invaluable data at the factual and meaning level.

For confidentiality purposes, interviewees were named as follows: speaker 1 (S1), speaker 2 (S2) and speaker 3 (S3). Interviews were recorded with the three participants whose jobs were:

- S1: a head of finance department, with two Master degrees; one in Accounting and the other in Applied Finance
- S2: a team leader of IT department with a higher diploma in Computing
- S3: a team leader of the recruitment department with a Master degree in Human Resources.

The interview questions attempted to explore the Emirati subordinates' views of their expatriate (Western) behaviors in terms of work and personal relationships, the leadership skills that expatriate leaders lack, as they perceived them, and the strategies the three locals adopt to handle any conflict, if any, with their leaders. The three interviews lasted between 30-45 minutes each. Two of them were in Arabic, requested by the participants (S2 and S3) and one in English (S1). It is worth mentioning at this point to confirm that the researchers are bilingual and have extensive experience in translation. Therefore, the language of the interviews was not an issue in this research paper. It also allowed for security and comfort to the participants. Interviews were transcribed, returned back to the interviewees for confirmation, and translated into English. Themes, categories, and subcategories emerged after multiple readings and comparisons. In the process of initial data analysis redundant and off topic information was eliminated. The final process resulted in 5 major themes and a number of categories under which the findings were structured.

Findings

Headings of the themes and categories that emerged in the interviews reflect three Emiratis' perceptions of their expatriate (Western) leaders.

1) Expectations of expatriate (Western) leadership

An overview of the preliminary results obtained from the interviews showed that the local subordinates' previous views of expatriate (Western) leadership were framed within three major molds:

- **Experience**

The three participants believed that experience is at the heart of leadership. They showed some degree of commonality over what type of experience is expected by a western expatriate leader. They assumed that experience necessitates an educational degree in the field of leadership and long years of leadership practice in home and host countries. In other words, they expected that an expatriate leader would have a multi-cultural experience which in turn should benefit the local subordinates of a host country. To S1, for example, an expatriate (Western) leader should be:

> An experienced person in several areas, or a practitioner in the scope of work, whether in Asia…emm…whether in Europe, in their own country or the like.

S3 confirmed that:

> Leadership stems from experience, study and practice for long years in the country of origin…that was my expectation…that he had [the expatriate leader] studied leadership and practiced it, whether in a university or through other institutions… for at least 15 or 20 years in his country.

S2 also asserted what both S1 and S3 believed as he said:

> I expected something big…that foreign leaders are understanding and knowledgeable… with good knowledge on leadership.

- **Organization Efficiency**

Only one participant out of the three, S1, related his previous view of expatriate leadership to terms like quality, goal settings, outputs and outcomes, and vision and mission. S1 emphasized that an expatriate Western leader is:

> expected to reach his objectives as soon as possible…especially that he should be an experienced person. Let's say… the quality or the service that may come from a foreign leader to be good… Every organization has specific goals and every organization has a certain vision, and setting goals helps you achieve the vision… and of course, you, as an administrator or a senior manager should keep these goals in front of your eyes and develop your own vision… with good quality and efficiency.

- **Personality traits**

Only one participant of the three, S2, related personality traits to his previous expectations of the expatriate (Western) leaders. S2 expected expatriate leaders to be:

> Understanding and knowledgeable. I mean…words and pictures were very Utopian about them; people who are very transparent and estimate their employees fairly.

2) Work relationship

Stroh et al. (2005, p.9) claims that "global assignments provide the opportunity for people to work together side by side over an extended period of time, thereby developing the level of trust and understanding necessary for rich information". Work-related interview questions focused on four main areas: task distribution, taking decisions, leaders' expectations of employees and standards of performance. Analyzing the respondents' answers showed the emergence of two themes: equity and justice and delegation.

A. Task Distribution

The interviewees' responses to the task distribution question indicated a partial agreement on the fairness of their leaders. Examples and situations were mentioned where the Emirati subordinates expressed their uncertainty about their leaders' justice. S1 described his work relationship with his leader as a 'leader-subordinate relationship'. When asked whether he thought of his leader as being fair in distributing tasks among employees, S1 said:

> If you want an answer to this question, then, yes…he is just…em…just in the distribution of tasks.

But pausing for a while, he then continued saying:

> At the moment, I don't think he is…I don't think…why? Because the distribution of tasks according to the qualifications and experience of the person himself… let's say the skills possessed by the employee, is not happening [at this time]…em…this may require time!

S2, on the other hand, described his work relationship with his leader as ' formal' and ' a-yes-Sir' relationship. As a result, he accepts whatever task is assigned to him.

S3, on the other hand, preferred to make a comparison between his previous and current expatriate (Western) leader, showing a great deal of satisfaction about the way his previous leader treated him. He said:

> The previous boss was more protective and approachable to me. He listens to my ideas, and sometimes he applies some of them…I mean…those ideas with which he likes or feels persuaded. Even if he doesn't like my ideas, he would reject them kindly and would provide me with other alternatives.

S3 paused for a while and then said:

> But now, I don't find any kind of protection…even my personal things can be vulnerable to looting out of my office… I mean…em…I mean…others can easily take things from my office if I'm not there and he won't do anything about it! He only communicates with the narrowest limits…he doesn't give me the freedom of movement and the freedom of taking action in my job. I mean…em…he is always right and I am always wrong.

It seemed that the three participants felt unfairly treated by their leaders and two of them, S2 and S3, believed that their leaders are biased and in favor of employees from their own nationality or simply Westerners. S2 states:

> As an Emirati [S2], he [the leader] shows a great deal of respect to me. He is never critical of me…never sends me any note and never comments on my performance…em… probably because I'm an Emirati and because he works in my country. I'm saying this because I frankly think that the way he deals with other Arabs in the same section is quite different and unfair.

Similarly, S2 expressed his dissatisfaction with his leader's bias and said:

> I don't think he is fair, or let me say, if I am allowed to put his fairness into percentage, I would say he is 60% fair. He is biased to his Western followers. He never allows us [the Arabs] to be in the position of authority. I mean, I don't have the power to do a lot of tasks whereas our Western colleagues have. He always gives us false promises.

S3 expressed the same degree of dissatisfaction with regard to his relationship with his leader and thought that he was not fair enough with him and other employees in distributing the tasks. He said:

> There is no relationship between us. I never…never ask him for any kind of support or help. Yes, there is justice in the division of tasks. I mean, I am the one with the highest qualification among other members in the department and I am the team

leader, but…em…we have a Western employee who does not work for me…he is directly following him [the leader]… I mean, this is not justice. As I see it, it is a relationship in terms of personal interests and bias…I don't know…may be because both of them are Westerners.

On the other hand, two participants, S1 and S2, referred to the delegation skill handled differently by their leaders. S1 thought that his leader wastes a lot of time giving instructions to some employees asking them to do certain tasks where others can perform them better. He said:

I don't feel satisfied, for example, when the senior manager talks to the IT [Information Technology] help desk employee and gives him instructions on how to download or upload a file! Or sometimes, to talk to the accountant to demand a check payment. This is a waste of time. He can simply learn how to delegate tasks to other employees and get himself busy with other important issues.

S1 also assumed that this inability to delegate is "because of the lack in experience, or misunderstanding of job descriptions". Unlike S1, S2 asserted that his leader delegates different functions to his employees but this delegation is unfair. He said:

Sometimes he [the leader] might ask us to work for extra hours…and with his 'companions'. I mean…em…the Western employees, he might even work late at night, but he would allow them to be in charge of every sensitive IT devices, and would ask me and my Emirati colleague to do only simple PCs [computers] things.

B. Making decisions

The three interviewees seemed aware of making decisions as a key skill in leadership. They believed that effective leaders are those leaders who can take the right decisions at the right times. Yet, the participants' responses varied and issues like carelessness of the leader, arbitrariness, team work and culture and traditions were raised.

S2 for example, denoted to his leader's way in making financial-related decisions as 'careless'. He looked obviously discontented while trying to explain his reasons for feeling that way. He said:

In general, he is hesitant in making his decisions. I mean, he may take a decision but in less than 15 minutes this decision may be cancelled or changed. Ten decisions may be made within a very short time.

After a short pause, S2 added:

He is careless…he doesn't care about the costs of the products. I mean, you as a head of the IT department need to be wise in handling your department expenditure…sometimes, when he receives certain products' tenders, he directly makes a decision about buying a product from a certain company without examining other available offers which might be cheaper and of a better quality. In short, he's careless, hesitant and most of the time he doesn't know what he wants.

Nevertheless, S2 showed his satisfaction with his leader's sensitivity to cultural issues in making some of his decisions. He said:

Sometimes he doesn't know what he wants, but one good thing he knows very well is our culture. I could see this in the way he greets or addresses locals in our institution, the way he celebrates the National day with us and other similar things.

Within this context, S3 felt that his leader is arbitrary in making his decisions. He gave an example where his leader's arbitrary decision contradicted the Emiratis' culture and where it was seen as a sign of insult. S3 said:

The next office has got two glass walls. He [the leader] asked every employee in that office to face the wall, as if punished, and give their backs to their colleagues in the

same office. In this case, our computer screens will not be seen by outsiders. The poor employees had no say! … we in the UAE, in terms of culture, the culture of Abu Dhabi in particular, see it as scandalous to give your back to others while in office or in any other place…he just doesn't understand that!

S1, on the other hand, tried to be neutral when he started talking about his leader's way in taking decisions and praised him for consulting his employees on a team-work basis, but then he recalled some examples where he thought that his leader's decisions were against the UAE culture and traditions. S1 said:

> Honestly, he brings people together and asks them for any piece of advice, but then there are some personal decisions taken and I think they contradict the system and may be against the culture.

S1 continued showing discontent with his leader's decisions of allowing certain budgets to go for buying learning materials that are against the UAE Islamic culture. He said:

> This means that…em…there are certain things that might be against our culture or the system. You should not allow such materials into the college's library…or to bring magazines that students can use, read or skim. Such magazines might include sexual topics, pictures or articles that might touch upon religious matters.

C. Leader's expectations of employees

There was a commonality in the interviewees' responses to their leaders' expectations of them. Two of them, S1 and S3, affirmed that their leaders never discussed with them the issue of work or performance expectations, while S2 was trying hard to recall the moment his leader told him about his expectations of him. S2 said:

> Let's see, em…emm…as I can remember he told me once that he would love to see me holding the position of a manager in three years…but he always thinks that I still need some experience.

D. Standards of performance

There was an agreement among the three participants on the absence of performance criteria at their work. S3, for example, showed displeasure at the way his leader gives instructions without making it clear how an employee's performance would be evaluated. S3 said:

> The only way he [the leader] knows is to say: do this, don't do this! He never talks to me about my performance. Until this moment, I am still thinking of how fair my evaluation would be and which standards will be used!

For S2 and S1 the standards of performance were unclear and "are based on his [the leader] own judgments", as S2 said.

E. Encouraging initiatives and new ideas

The participants' responses in terms of encouraging new ideas varied. S2 and S1 showed appreciation for their leaders' constant support for initiatives or suggestions proposed by any one in their departments. However, S3, felt frustrated about the way his leader suppressed employees' new ideas or in some cases attributed them to others. S3 said:

> I'll never do it again! I'll never show them [the ideas] to him as I do know his answers. His answers are always ready…I mean…em…his rejection. But even if he accepts my ideas, they'll be attributed to someone else. They'll come under a different name; most probably under a Western name…yes…it happened to me!

3) Personal relationship

A variety of attributes was used by the three interviewees to describe their personal relationships with their leaders. Data analysis of the participants' responses indicated that

some of the attributes were used both; positively and negatively by each interviewee. Table 1. below shows these attributes as they appeared in the Emirati subordinates' answers.

Table 1. Personality traits of Western expatriate leaders as perceived by the Emirati subordinates

Negative personality traits	Positive personality traits
• Communication skills: Does not listen, does not know how to address people, arbitrary • Interpersonal skills: Lack of self-confidence, insecure, scared, hesitant, disrespectful, strange, cautious	• Communication skills: Good listener, open, flexible, problem solver, positive • Interpersonal skills: Ambitious, committed, well-educated, kind, understanding and hardworking, competent, respectful, friendly, human, approachable

S3, for instance, compared his personal relationship with his previous leader to the current one and said:

> Now, there is no personal relationship. Never!...my previous boss, though a Western expatriate too, was easy going, very human… I could communicate with him by any possible way. If there was any problem, he made it simple to me. He was never nervous or angry, approachable any time!

4) Leadership skills required

There was a common perception among the three participants that their leaders lack certain essential leadership skills which may need time to be fully or well-developed, and S1 thought that these skills are "almost non-existent". The major skills expatriate (Western) leaders need to develop, as perceived by the Emirati subordinates were: decision making, problem solving, planning, delegation, communication skills and team work. Due to the word limits of this paper, examples of each one of these skills would be hard to accomplish. However, S3's words highlighted most of these skills as he said:

> He needs [the leader] to learn and acquire 'respect' before learning any skill. He needs to learn how to address and talk to people…planning, em… yes, and communication skills, the skills of dealing with teams…respect of culture… not to use his fingers to point at people or call them, how to use my name instead of 'you come'. This style does not fit into our culture.

5) Adaptation strategies

The three Emirati subordinates seemed aware of the necessity to find ways that help improve the relationships with their leaders. S1, for example, believed that any conflict that may arise between him and his boss can be simply resolved by staying calm because:

> We need -as locals- to develop and learn. We need to understand someone's personality; we need to know the 'Other'… If there is any conflict, I simply try to make it less severe… I always try to calm down…and absorb the other's points of view, but at the end, I do what I see right!

S2 asserted his loyalty to his country and the need to avoid conflicts with his leaders for the benefit of work and better improvement. He said:

> He [the leader] does a lot of things which I do not like, but at the end: where do both of us work? We work in an educational organization, local students … where? In my

country. Thus, if he does not care, I care. He gives orders, I follow. You can say it is a ' yes-Sir' strategy, but only in the sense of serving my country. It can never be slavery!

S3 metaphorically described his adaptation strategy saying "if you cannot face the storm, then bend with it". He confirmed that the only two strategies he prefers to adopt to cope with his leader's behaviors is by either verbally defending himself in front of his leader, or simply by reporting him to the higher authority.

Interestingly, two participants believed that the nationality of a leader is not an issue to them and that working under a local leadership might not be better. They confirmed that the most important thing for them was to work under a professional and experienced leader. In contrast, the third participant affirmed that he will always prefer to work with a UAE local leader because this leader would be able to "achieve the goals faster with less time and less cost…and he is fully aware of the culture, the country law and regulations".

Discussion and Conclusion

The researchers of this pilot study hope to provide a better understanding of the relationship between expatriate western leaders and UAE local subordinates. It brings additional knowledge in terms of adaptations on both sides; the expatriate leaders and the local subordinates. It also demonstrates the need to assure the continuity of communication via appropriate cultural channels.

Local subordinates, as this study shows, have traditionally expected to learn and improve their skills, each in his specific knowledge area, from being under expatriate leadership. This assumption was obvious in the expressions they used, i.e. 'Utopian', 'transparent', 'experience', etc. to talk about their previous expectations of expatriate western leadership. These expectations, however, once encountered with a practical direct experience with their expatriate leaders, contradicting their previous perceptions, turned into frustration and lack of trust in the quality of leadership brought to them by those western expatriate leaders, in particular.

The findings of this pilot study indicate that a number of issues need to be further examined in literature:

As many researchers claim (e.g. Obeidat et al, 2012 [38]; Abu-Saad, 1998 [39]) Arab managers strongly adhere to religion which is characterized by high collectivism. Therefore, they are more inclined to value interpersonal relationships and show little interest in individualism. In contrast, Minkov (2013) [40] indicates that wealthy countries scored high on individualism. This contrast probably explains the local subordinates' dissatisfaction with the individualism expatriate leaders tend to implement in the work environment. However, these contradictory perceptions by expatriate leaders and local subordinates suggest lack in cultural knowledge of the 'Other'. The 'glass wall' incident mentioned in this study can be one relevant example in which the expatriate leader could have avoided being misunderstood by his local subordinates by simply learning more of the Middle East Arab cultures where turning one's back to another is considered a sign of disrespect and unwillingness to socialize with others. In this case, a good cross-cultural training as Machado (2015) [41] suggests, could have provided the leader with some awareness in terms of norms and behaviors of the host country and enhanced the leader's cross-cultural experience.

The three participants show agreement in certain aspects related to their leaders' behaviors such as absence of equity and performance standards, lack of communication and delegation skills. All of these make up the basics of leadership, whether expatriate or local. Yet, having the voice of expatriate leaders in a further study may help in providing a better and fair analysis of the findings.

Some responses by the UAE local subordinates showed paradoxical perceptions. For instance, while a participant described his relationship with his leader in terms of formality, or leader-subordinate relationship, other responses of the same participant revealed a tendency to describe the leader as understanding, kind and friendly. There were also instances where the interviewees were uncertain of what they wanted to say. Describing the leader's fairness is one example. These paradoxical perceptions in viewing the expatriate leader's behaviors can be probably linked to the local subordinates' lack of working experience in cross-cultural contexts and consequently a lack of knowledge of the 'Other".

Mistrust and suspicion of western expatriate leaders appeared occasionally in the interviewees' responses. This could probably be due to their feelings that they are being unfairly treated in their own country, or likely because they are unable to accept the reality in which expatriate leaders work as their superiors in terms of qualifications, experience, salaries and benefits. Toh and DeNisi (2005, p.133) state that "local staff may feel that they are treated as second-class citizens when working alongside expatriates in their own country, and may resent that fact".

Although this study does not aim to generalize the findings, it claims to have provided significant cultural data which may benefit planners of orientation programs in expatriate organizations that wish to send their leaders to work abroad in a context different from their home counties. Likewise, it suggests that local organizations' leaders, subordinates and followers need to raise their awareness of cultural aspects which are the cornerstones of leadership such as flexibility in adapting to the 'Other's' norms and customs, proper communication skills and acculturation.

Future Research Directions
This study has investigated local subordinates' perceptions of their expatriate (Western) leaders' behaviors. A further study to investigate those leaders' perceptions of their local subordinates' leadership behaviors will certainly bring the balance to the equation.

Conclusion
There is no claim to generalize the findings of this pilot research as the study sample is very small. Yet, the findings contribute to better understanding of the possible cultural issues that may occur in similar work environments. In addition, it provides an insight into expatriate leaders' behaviors who are mainly westerners from three different countries. The small scale of this study is one limitation which could not be avoided due to accessibility and feasibility reasons. However, having in mind that it is qualitative and exploratory in nature, in-depth interviews were used to obtain as much data as possible so that findings and results will be of value. Moreover, further research is needed to examine female local subordinates' views of expatriate leaders, and whether gender may lead to other issues which are worth researching. By and large, the results of this study make clear that a close look at the local subordinates' relationships with their expatriate leaders provides a better understanding of where and why conflicts may arise between the both sides. Creating learning opportunities and a harmonious professional working environment seem to be the key for successful leadership; whether expatriate or local.

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