Management Development Knowledge Base in the Gulf, Transferability, and Adaptability

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ABSTRACT

Management development programmes and management in transition is taking its shape in the Gulf Region. The purpose of this paper is to address the key assumptions and knowledge base on which Gulf management development programs were built with special reference to images of managerial professionalism and its major issues bearing on the transferability of managerial know-how. Interviews conducted with managers in Bahrain and Oman revealed using some Western Theories may prove not to be successful when fully integrated with the national culture, and therefore there is a need to adapt. Change and transformation is taking place within the GCC, this necessitates careful selection of strategies and ways to implement management development and transferability. Some organizations have been successful in adaptability and transferability of knowledge, others are undergoing the process at the moment and it will be some time when the effect takes place.

Keywords: Bahrain, Corporate Culture, Culture, Development Programme, Gulf Region, Knowledge Base, Management, Oman

INTRODUCTION

Concern with Management Development leads to different approaches, philosophies, and management programmes mix; the delivery methods, which is highly controversial and debatable. The problem is often magnified by issues such as lack of clearly defined subject matter, criteria for evaluation, cross-cultural differences, the transferability of Western management theories to other cultures and the rapid development in the socio-economic transformation of society.

Management development in the Gulf Region is based on assumptions drawn on a knowledge base that have originated elsewhere, perhaps from Western theories and practices to some extent. Development and progress and shift in cultures varies from one country to another within the Region.

This paper is an attempt to address the key assumptions and knowledge base on which Gulf Management Development Programmes are built. The paper also highlights the importance of

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integrating management development process within an accepting organisational and social culture to avoid the risk of compromising our learning objectives and the need to shift from fragmentation to integration.

KEY ASSUMPTIONS

In varying degrees, management development efforts in the Gulf seem to have assumed an environment that was either relatively stable or changing in predictable ways. The future was essentially treated as an extension of the present and very little input has gone into mapping futuristic scenarios. Since the boom of the 1970s, management development was treated more as a luxury that a need and subsequently went into careful screening of the management knowledge base to evolve criteria for selecting what was relevant to the Gulf Region. The result was a random attitude towards management knowledge incorporated into professional development programmes. The Gulf environment seemed accommodating and supportive with no pressure in screening whatever was transferred (AlHashemi, 1996; 1987; AlHashemi, 2013).

An equally important assumption that seems to have influenced management development efforts in the Gulf countries was that management development programmes were bound to be useful. Assuming random relevance as a self-evident truth that naturally led to little or no interest in programme evaluation techniques. Another assumption was the generally relaxed attitude towards the credentials of individuals, groups and outfits that were marketing management development programmes. Tribal-family relations and religion reflect other aspects of management (Allsmaily, 2006) Managers from the Gulf tend to disregard rules and procedures and man-made perfects (Ali, 1993) which influences management development programs and other aspects of management development. They prefer flexibility (AlHashemi, 2006; 2013) but are by no means risk-takers (Allsmaily, 2006).

As a result of the climate reflected in the assumptions above, it became convenient for some organizations in the Gulf to treat management development as a dimension of public relations and establish their records in terms of such criteria as training projects, number of seminars offered, number of trainees covered and so on. Such criteria do not necessarily offer a realistic insight into programme effectiveness, relevance, and long-term viability often escaped unnoticed. This is partly due to the lack of clear management development objectives, which is a result of absence of corporate strategic planning in many organizations.

Among other things, Western management theories were introduced subject to the convenience of management trainers rather than any other formal criterion of relevance. Even a cursory review of materials on leadership and motivation introduced to the Gulf reveal the predominance of the following approaches:

- Trait theory, now all but discarded in Western management literature, also appears among leadership training materials used. This fact is partly due to the cultural appeal of the approach in the Gulf as it appears consistent with popular expectations. Even with that, its use turned out to be very limited mostly due to its static nature and narrow focus as a training tool.
- Another approach to leadership training that seems to have enjoyed immense popularity is McGregor’s Theory X and Y. Without addressing pressing issues of culture-relevance and situational requirements, Gulf managers were ‘over exposed’ to important streams of subsequent research on contingency and situationalism were largely ignored.
- Management development concentrated on leadership style approaches mostly emphasized the superiority of ‘participative’ over ‘autocratic’ styles (AlHashemi, 1987; Ali, 1993; 1990).
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