

**Re-examining Leadership Styles and Practices  
at the Saudi Arabian Educational Context: a  
review of praxis and a critical study**

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## **Re-examining Leadership Styles and Practices at the Saudi Arabian Educational Context: a review of praxis and a critical study**

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### **Abstract**

This article discusses the ramifications of inappropriate leadership style(s) and practices of those leaders/sub-leaders on their subordinates (staff members) at the Faculty of Education (FE), Taibah University. Re-examining leadership models/styles at the FE in particular as an exemplar college of the university in general, this paper diagnoses leadership status quo (as supported by certain practices) against appropriateness to the world development, new theories and the stakeholders (claimed) vision for development. Adopting the critical theory, collaboratively with a team of practitioners (staff of the department of School Administration at the FE), an investigation was undertaken echoing action research principles with transformative mission aiming at problem-posing: i.e. tracing leadership-related activities, and critiquing the agenda behind such model/practices taken as naturalized notions. Findings of the study indicated existence of inadequacy at the leadership level. As the situation evokes necessity for 'action' the study empowers 'theory and practice' as internalised twin – a stance of the critical theory. The action attempted (Sustainable Dialogues & Consultation Project, SDCP) is an introductory step for a holistic plan for change at the FE and the university setting. Interviews were administered to detect the impact of such initiative-as-action project. Analysis of the interviews data has revealed three facts: desperate need for change/development, effectiveness of the project taken by the staff members, and appropriateness of the 'Dialogue' styles followed to convince leaders/sub-leaders about taking action for change in the leadership models.

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## 1. Introduction

Leadership style(s) and practices are effective driving forces that directly influence the smooth run of work. The quite rapidly changing nature of the leadership realm is non-stoppable (Wirba, 2015: 1); as such to cope with these rapid developments is so demanding, especially at the most sophisticated organization: the university setting.

*“Living in a world of challenges’ is not an exaggerated description of the schooling environment” at Taibah University, context of the study* (Idrees, 2017: 32). It is viewed in a critical lens as a context full of serious problems. The leadership or management question (or even system) is no exception: serious problems in relation need control/reform/solution, sometimes at the presidency level, but mostly the faculty-level reform can be a good start. However, a promising light spot in this concern is the tendency, orientation, empirical projects for improvement featuring the educational movement in KSA (ibid).

The researcher's focus was directed to one challenge: the leadership style and practices, we had to take action appropriate to the seriousness of the event: alleviate this compound problem by finding out the causes and treat them.

Relying on *“common-sense knowing”* (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2000), I realised unwillingness sense to accept the taken-for-granted: leadership practices that cause *a dysfunctional environment* for the university leaders: head of departments and staff.

Additionally, disharmony among different sub-leadership authorities at the university level, and at the FE level (heads of the departments) emerged as a serious problem that causes great tension in the learning

environment that impacts the outcomes, and results in bad consequences. Contradictions exist between theory and praxis: i.e. the FE practitioners' activities, situations, ...etc. and the appropriate style ideally called for in the government's 'Vision 2030' along with its 'National Transformation Programme' making 'quality improvement and progress of education a top priority'

Do we know "where you're going" as Shuler and Wallace (2016: 7) inquire? If not, then "any road will take you there". They ascertain that principals need to understand what the district expects of them and what the 'guiding light' or 'compass' is, as it relates to the mission and vision.

Here is then a context – an actual setting – with a major problem that demands control and cries out for solution: one of the major concerns of Critical Research Theory (CRT). As a 'School Administration Department' directly concerned with the 'Leadership' issues, we had to take action appropriate to the seriousness of the event: alleviate this compound problem by finding out the causes and attempting to treat them.

## **2. Contextual background and a view of praxis of the leadership status at the Saudi universities:**

The Faculty of Education is one of the twenty-two colleges of Taiba University, Al Madinah Al Munawwarah, KSA; incorporating nine different departments; namely:

- Dept of Educational Administration,
- Dept of Curriculum and Teaching Methods,
- Dept of Educational Psychology,
- Dept of Education Basics,                      - Dept of Physical Education,
- Dept of Teaching Techniques,                - Dept of Fine Arts
- Dept of Special Education,                    - Dept of Adult Education.

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Most of the staff are Saudi nationals, due to the Saudization plan implemented for years. While the study tackles the issue (in a detailed critical lens) within the department of ‘School Administration’ (as the small-scale study does not give as big capacity as to include all nine departments or numerous colleges), staff members from other (five departments) also shared as data informants. However, it relies on reviewing the literature for examining the praxis of the leadership status at the Saudi universities; in addition to data in relation from insiders at Taibah University.

Key findings of the studies concerned with leadership in the Saudi Arabian educational context revealed a clear diagnostic picture about the educational setting in KSA.

Aldawsari (2016: 19-20) portrayed the leadership praxis in Saudi Arabia. She identified it as “instructional and transactional”: leadership theories that depends on the subordinates (staff members) having no choice but to actually implement. Pedagogical supervisory department’s instructions are ‘given’, the educational organization (school/college) principal convey them to the staff members/teachers who “*would translate them into action*”. As a topmost leader one character (or a few) have this capability of making decisions: thus, “responsibility is not shared by the remaining teaching staff”. Aldawsari (p. 20) critiques such situation as “*change and reform rarely occur, or is invisible*” operationally speaking. This is, she adds, because capability of decision making is restricted in one person rather than a council.

Featured as “*central and directive*”, formal leaders under ‘instructional leadership’ commonly spread in Saudi Arabia, “*revert to managerial activity*”: i.e. they become

managers, whose biggest concern is ‘student achievement and performance, rather than real leaders. It is a situation that “*creates a dysfunctional environment for the leaders*”, as ascertained by Palaiologou et al. (2015: 123).

Hargreaves and Shirley’s (2009; in Alnahdi, 2014: 2) proposal for reform tackles the importance of “*students’ voices and preferences*”: decision making related to students’ issues of interest (schedules, activities, curriculum content, ...) should take into consideration their voices (if we are after a successful reform); but unfortunately for the Saudi Arabia students, Alnahdi (2014: 4) ascertains, these are kind of taken-for-granted types. See also Altayar (2003) and (Al-Sadan, 2000).

In his discourse of criticizing the Saudi Arabian reform movement in the educational setting, Alnahdi (2014: 4) highlights how “*complex, difficult, and very slow*” this process is; and “*that the chance of seeing tangible results quickly after applying reforms and changes is minimal*”. There were many previous projects for educational change (in the leadership styles or other areas) but educationalists were “*fooled*” as to mistakenly target their goals towards “*changing the content of the textbook only*” (Alnahdi, 2014: 4) as was the case with The Ministry of Education of Saudi Arabia’s (2007) project; ignoring necessary changes of the leadership approaches at the different levels.

As for the educational leadership selection, despite Shuler and Wallace’ (2016: 7) precaution that “*it would be foolhardy to take a position where a good fit doesn’t exist*”, his critique in this respect (commenting on some situations worldwide) are applicable on the Saudi Arabian higher educational setting: leadership/management “*selection is a highly political endeavor! It’s not about the “methods” we use to select the best possible candidate,*

*but whether or not we are WILLING to select the best candidate!*". Hence, much of what we in the higher education setting consider professional development is really little more than arranging and holding meetings the staff feels obliged to attend as they are of very little use (practically speaking). Another critical point in this concern is the fact that Saudi nationals are identified as dominating the scene, and those Non-Saudis (working at the same faculty) are only symbolically represented, and are having no contingency or power in the group: they are called *tokens* or *symbols*. Non-Saudis are "outsiders" in educational leadership" (Aldawsari, 2016: 10), due to the Saudization strategy. "Silencing of the outsiders' voices in the leadership field" is the norm (ibid: 21).

### **3. The research questions**

The study in hand attempts to answer the following questions:

- 1- *What is the general tendency: the leadership model/style used within the faculty of Education departments at Taibah University?*
- 2- *Can interventional / therapeutic actions of the kind prescribed in the procedures make a change?*

### **4. Literature review**

Research "*tightly links school leadership*" style to the school success and quality outcomes, especially with regard to "*student learning and achievement*" (Shuler and Wallace, 2016: 5). In their Q and A dialogue Shuler and Wallace (2016: 6) introduce unique perspectives on the development of school leadership and reproduce criteria for a successful school leadership. They focus on the importance of "*Developing leadership capacity and ensure that administrators are prepared to manage operations, guide instructional improvement and collect*



*efficacy*”; and after all a primary determining factor for school/faculty leaders is to “*ensure that high quality teaching and learning is occurring*”. This is in line with Edmonds and Lezotte’s (1982) effective school principles: they set some key responsibilities for a successful school leader as a lead learner. Of these are:

- “*Creating a climate hospitable to education*”, so that “*a cooperative spirit and fruitful interaction prevail*”; and
- “*Cultivating leadership*” within the staff members.

They added that a way to envision a work is to “*create learning leaders that combine the role of the effective manager, instructional leader, and transformational leader*”.

Hamouda (2006) suggests that improvement of leadership stems from the staff members (establishing a core for a college council) brainstorming reform/improvement projects based on a participative plan. This can only be done when an organization is open to the surrounding; i.e. a democratic leadership style that believes in ‘partnership’ and decentralization of decision making; hence it allows open mutual communication aiming at investing everyone’s ability. In the same vein, Al Duraij (1996: 77) ascertains two concepts for an educational improvement project: ‘freedom’ for the subordinates to do the tasks at hand, and ‘decentralization’ of decision making. The ‘National Convention for Education’ (in Morocco) states that educational principals/supervisors and subordinates (teachers) have equally the same rights (of leadership participation) as they bear the same responsibility; thus, dialogue and consultation should prevail as a core element of school leadership. Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission (2006), The Ministry of Education of Saudi Arabia (2007), and Saudi

Guide Book for Quality and Academic Accreditation (2008) also support this tendency in an overall project, though the later focusses on developing curricula, in particular. These principles were newly presented by (Dogra, 2018: 1) as affiliating to the “*delegative leadership style*” which “*gives full freedom to the subordinates while decision-making or doing the tasks at hand, in any given manner they find suitable*”. Dogra adds an element for the leader to possess. He thinks that *motivation* is a driving forces that directly influence subordinates to “*perform to the best of their abilities, to achieve a given set of goals*”.

Hargreaves and Shirley’s (2009; in Alnahdi, 2014: 2) proposal for educational reform incorporates “*inspiration and innovation, ...; pushing beyond standardization and involves a trade-off for educators*”. In terms of educational leadership, Hargreaves and Shirley’s ‘Fourth Way’ emphasizes (among other principles) the catalyst of “*sustainable leadership, responsibility before accountability, and differentiation and diversity*”. Their proposal also highlights the importance of “*students’ voices and preferences*”: these should be heard in respect of any decision making if we are after a successful reform (Alnahdi, 2014: 4). This was also supported by Altayar (2003) and (Al-Sadan, 2000).

Harris (2008: 175) prescribed ‘Distributed Leadership’ as a solution for the unrested state of affairs in the leadership. This model implies that everything depends on everyone participating in leadership. It is “*concerned with the co-performance*” (Harris, 2009: 5). Hence, “*the leadership practices and learning take place through interactions within and across various teams, and realized within extended groupings and networks*” (Harris, 2008:

175). As such “*power is distributed to those groups*” characterized as having the knowledge of and the potential to develop. Harris (p.183) adds “*it is grounded in activity rather than position*”. Aldawsari (2016: 25) ascertains the Saudi Arabia emphasis on such “*collective and distributive approaches to leadership in educational settings*”, but this seems to be only theoretical as any traces of “*change and reform are invisible at the operational level*” (p. 20).

Transformational leadership model also has a potential solution for a restive setting. “*Recognizing everyone’s (leader or subordinate’s) role and efforts*” (Aldawsari, 2016: 26), transformational leadership seeks to expand the ONENESS of leadership capacity/power as to involve all/most members (regardless of their position) as they also have potential innovative thoughts for creating or developing “*common vision and mission*” in the educational body they affiliate to. As change, reforms and effect towards achieving the goals in a given organization is the product of such “*collective work*” effort (ibid: 25) promoted by the transformational leadership, opportunities for increasing leadership capacity, innovation, change, reform, positive effects, are more effectively enhanced than when done by one entity alone. (ibid). Hallinger (2003: 330) highlights the transformational leadership “*focus on developing the organization’s capacity to innovate*” and its pedagogical role in creating “*innovative teaching-learning practices*”. Additionally, under the transactional leadership, staff members’ level of motivation and morality and compatibility with one another are raised”, states Palaiologou et al. (2015: 122), as a result of endeavoring together as partners in the decision-making and equally share responsibility of acting or achievement.

## **5. Theoretical framework and methodology: *integration of thoughts and action:***

In such a situation described above comes the critical theory to “*retain its ability to disrupt and challenge the status quo*”, (Kincheloe, 2011: 285). The issue was highlighted by myself (the main researcher) to head the research team problematizing the ‘leadership style’ and related practices. Looking for possibility to change, as stances emphasized by critical theorists, the team members (staff and head of the education college) were asked to brainstorm over the issue.

Troudi (2009: 13) has determined the role of a school staff focusing on teacher-as-researcher as “*evaluating, challenging, playing an active role, and even redesigning*” a state of affairs, in line with Corson (1999) and Tollefson (2002). Skutnabb-Kangas (2002) went farther explaining teachers-as-researchers' role as to critically examine the essence of all schooling activities in terms of how appropriate they are and to what extent they meet the school/college needs, educational conventions and global conceptions up to date. In the same vein Troudi (2009), Halai's (2011: 202) thought of “*teachers as action researchers*”, professionals in the field “*are required to act*” as a team, fulfilling the second stance of action research, and “*create a collaborative work atmosphere to provide help*” (Gahin and Idrees, 2012) whether directly in the teaching-learning processes or in relation to management/leadership principles or practices.

Zuber-Skerritt (2001: 1) thinks that every staff member can and must be “*a personal scientist and create contextual knowledge (grounded theory) in an organization*”. A strong supportive factor that can empower us (professionals at the faculty of education) is

the government's realization of the "*challenge of catching up with developed countries in education*", and their recognition that "*reforms must be well thought out, and it is important to benefit from the experiences of other nations*" (Alnahdi, 2014: 4). Hence, came this research paper in response to that call.

Adopting action-oriented transformation in schools/ colleges/ ...etc. *requires critical self-reflection*", Brian Morgan (2007: 949). Critical thinking research theory implies that we scrutinize "*our own world distancing ourselves from beliefs that sustain social injustices*" (ibid). "*To be critical is to call up for scrutiny: an analytic move to self-position*" explains Luke (2004: 26; in Vicars et al., 2015: 77). That is a positioning that "*can be already lived, narrated, embodied, and experienced*". Auerbach and Burgess (1985: 475) highlight the importance of problem-posing and problematization of curricular aspects, echoing Wallerstein's (1983a) perspective of initializing improvement by posing a problem first. Hence, comes the research idea in this paper as to analyze the leadership/ management question, constructively critique it, and implement a continual process of action for the sake of sustainable improvement and reform.

"*There is no shortage of research, articles with best practices, and 'how to' books on educational leadership*", states Shuler and Wallace (2016: 5), but research analysis of the mode followed in this study in the Saudi or the Arabian Gulf context are not readily apparent within the published literature. The fact that distinguishes this study with a solid morale and adds stronger significance to it. Wirba (2015: 1) ascertains that leadership style type of studies at the Saudi universities are rare.

Hence, this research study is a qualitative research that "*frames its purpose in the context of critical theory*"

(Kincheloe, 2011: 286). It is a "*collective self-reflective inquiry undertaken*" by a team of practitioners (Kemmis and McTaggart, 1988: 5) at the department of 'School Administration', and other departments within the FE. It adopts the critical theory research paradigm developed by the Frankfurt School (Adorno, Horkheimer, Benjamin, Fromm, Marcuse, and Habermas) and linked with Appel, Habermas and Freire, as the most famous critical theorists, (Carr and Kemmis (1986). The Critical Theory school adopted two major principles:

- "*symmetrical communication*": assuming that "*each member has knowledge, skills, capabilities in a particular area which need to be used effectively*" (Zuber-Skerritt (2001: 11); and
- "*becoming critical*": adopting a self-critical attitude not to be used destructively but as constructively as to prompt a "*condition for organizational change, innovation or recreation*" (ibid: 12)

Ontologically speaking, "*persons in society and social institutions*", are the objects and the emphasis of this paradigm, (Ernest, 1994: 30). Epistemologically, critical theorists adopt the social post-structuralism theory of research, viewing knowledge as socially constructed. They conduct action research on social institutions, the epistemological base of which are deeply rooted in the critical theory; and are interested in social emancipation. The researchers' objectives as a team of educational practitioners giving voice to other participants are to intervene for leadership/management reform, aiming to empower subordinates – staff members in particular – to be critical. As a constant way of questioning about leadership/management issues and a reflexive integration of *thought, desire and action* (Simon, 1992), this research

mode, assumptions of which are represented in Pennycook (2001), is employed in this study.

Utilizing the action research approach, this study echoes Zuber-Skerritt (1996 b: 85) and Winter (1996: 13-14) key principles of *"reflective, dialectical, collaborative critique, creating various accounts of interpretive structures, with theory and practice internalized"*. As a participatory action this research paper assumes that the researchers' role is to *"facilitate, guide, formulate, summarize knowledge, and raise questions – consequences of an action"* (Weiskopf and Laske, 1996: 132-3; Spivak,1993); e.g. concerning leadership modification or management styles. All within an emancipatory vision for *"preferred future: a vision of alternative realities telling the transformative mission and giving directions for reconstruction, not merely criticism of things"*, (Pennycook, 2001: 8). A vision of professional teachers-as-researchers who 'set the highest standard for best practice', (Tichenor and Tichenor, 2005) through a 'restive problematization cycle', (Dean,1994); and objectivist evaluation. As ascertained by Zuber-Skerritt (2001: 22) *"when seeking innovation, change, growth and transformation of organizations and their leaders and managers"*, the action research approach is used. When an educational world is in urgent need of reinterpretation, the critical theory associated with action research approach within the qualitative research paradigm is most appropriate to use.

## **6. Method:**

This action research aims to review Taibah University leadership style represented by the nine-department faculty of education, and analytically scrutinize the leadership styles practiced by those nine heads of departments and the faculty dean with their

subordinates: the staff members. These styles/practices/inappropriate behaviours (if observed) are put to the tests of appropriateness in the light of the Saudi recurring calls for development; and particularly the Saudi education policy represented by ‘Vision 2030’ and the ‘National Transformation Programme’ in relation (and also in light of the Saudi education policy and objectives). As university faculty, we need to be mindful of “*developing collaborative action research*” Shuler and Wallace’ (2016: 8); thus, to achieve the aims of this study, action research investigation was launched. Then, as action research holds, possibility for change or alleviation of such a pain (inappropriate leadership styles/practices) is sought as follows.

### ***Sampling***

The case on which information was obtained was *mainly* the department of ‘School Administration’ with its twenty-five staff members affiliating to the FE. The researcher adopted the purposive sampling as it is considered satisfactory to the research specific needs (see Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2000: 103). (#25) staff members were purposively chosen. (#10) others from the other eight departments at the FE also participated. Two staff members were selected from each of the Departments of: Curriculum and Teaching Methods, Educational Psychology, Education Basics, Physical Education, and Dept of Adult Education; (see **2** above: Contextual background ...). These were randomly selected as the subjects constitute a structure of homogeneous features: the same academic level: PhD in Education, similar age group (approx. 40-50) and gender (male). Most of them are Saudi nationals, except three of the whole sample who were Jordanian. They have five to twelve years of higher



education experience; with their L1 as Arabic. The staff lists (in each department) were used as the basis for ‘systematic sampling’, “*a modified form of simple randomization*” (Cohen et al., 2006: 100). A starting point was chosen as a random number generator to select those ten participants. Selection of all subjects also depended on willing to freely participate. All (#35) staff members of the sample were considered appropriate cases to *register their observations*. and *share their vision and beliefs* on the issue, (subject of the investigation).

As such, the study tackles the issue in a detailed critical lens (mainly) within the department of ‘School Administration’; and a bit more broadly widening the research capacity as to include other five departments. It relies on the staff members and the researcher as data informants (researcher-as-informant): i.e. “*common-sense knowing*” of the insiders, a thought supported by Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000).

Figure (1) below summarizes the sample characteristics for both observation data and interviewing.

Fig. (1). Sample characteristics for both observation data and interviewing

<i>Data Collection Type/Instrument</i>	<i>No. of Participants</i>	<i>Department</i>	<i>Nationality</i>
	22	School Administration	Saudi
<b>OBSERVATION</b>	3	School Administration	Jordanian
&	2	Curriculum & Teaching Methods	Saudi
<b>(Internet-based</b>	2	Educational Psychology	Saudi









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			correlation/ hypothesis; and others.
4	Redefining the Problem:	Problem reformulation & focus.	Restive situation due to leadership practices that lead into slow attitudinal disposition towards reform.
5	<i>(First Step of the Plan)</i> a) Intervention of some sort:  b) Evaluation:	Developing and testing hypothesis: Tracing inappropriate leadership practices / behaviour.  Monitoring difference.	Reexamining leadership styles/ practices for appropriateness with locally- universally expert validated models  Significant improvement in the attitudinal disposition towards a 'reform process'
6	<i>(Second Step: therapeutic stage)</i> a) Implementation of the project:  b) Evaluation:	Developing dialogue  Monitoring difference.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ FE staff involvement (counseling);</li> <li>▪ Seminars, meet ups (as small-scale experiments).</li> </ul> <p>Reformative signs appear: Less offensive leadership behavior; more interaction, and participation in the decision making. Comfortable feeling: "we are on the right way..."</p>
7	<b>Data Analysis</b> - Content analysis quantitative data: (frequencies, averages, comparisons). . - Staff's attitudes qualitative date: (frequencies, averages. means): T-tests - Staff's interviews: Radnor's (2001) qualitative data analysis method and techniques.		
8	<b>Findings and Conclusions</b>		
9	<b>Discussion, Interpretation, Reflections</b>		

**Second stage, observational data of leadership practices:**

In order to "create a collaborative work atmosphere to provide help" (Gahin and Idrees, 2012) utilizing action research "achieved through the critically examined action" (Kemmis and Mc Taggart, 1988: 5), the staff 's observation data on leadership behaviours and practices was collected. FE staff members (#35: sample of the

study) collaborated to collect data – filling up the forms with their observational notes of the practices related to leadership styles: i.e. frequency of cases concerning violations to the job morality, contradictions with the higher educational general and specific goals, disharmony among different sectors within the FE, ...etc; in order that the researcher scrutinize these behaviours, assay them and refer to the leadership method they belong to; as such to judge the general tendency: the leadership model/style used within the faculty.

Third stage, the therapeutic stage (implementation of a reformative project):

Adopting Hallinger's (2003) thoughts engaging all faculty's dean, vice deans, departments' heads in *collaborate constructive dialogues* constitutes a cornerstone to *articulate shared views*: a reorganizational initiative and the core 'action towards change'; and gradually alleviate *the deleterious effects of the transactional and instructional leadership* suffered for ages (Aldawsari, 2016). Hence, as an action research, a 4-phase action plan based on and linked in with an umbrella of 'sustainable dialogues' is discussed and suggested as remedial work for the restive leadership educational setting in KSA. These are meet-up communications that can be sustainable procedures, and a core for extended sustainable dialogue (as a further step in this action research paper) as to include (more) faculty deans, heads of departments, university managerial positions (deans/vice-deans/rector/vice rectors, ...), principals, educators, and stakeholders at the ministry. Utilizing the advent of the Internet and related technology, these can also be developed into *universal* meet-up or interest group communications to serve the same purpose.

This initiative-as-action represented by a ‘Sustainable Dialogues & Consultation Project’ (SDCP) is targeted to articulate the following (most important leadership) reformative issues:

- *First, reviewing necessity for change, and brainstorming mechanism for it:*

**This component of the dialogue incorporates ‘what is needed to change? How can it be changed?’**

Review of the praxis portrayed above shows how demanding change of the leadership style and the subsequent practices is. Dialogues at this phase centered on two concerns: ‘*accepting a critical analysis of the ‘thematic concern’ under investigation and be open for the suggested change(s)*’ Zuber-Skerritt (2001), which was not a golden path; and *awareness of the necessity to alter the current approach(es)* in a society characterized by high cultural sensitivity, which is absolutely considered a great advancement founding for the next phase. The ‘Distributed leadership’ and ‘Transformational leadership’: kind of combined model was suggested as it has the potential merits to solve the pitfalls of the dominating leadership types and practices portrayed above; and is an approach void of the demerits reflected by such leadership models. (Full description of these models is detailed in the literature review).

- *Secondly, exchanging knowledge concerning leader selection:*

This implies exchanging knowledge about the necessity to find out successful ‘leader selection’ criteria universally recognized, in an attempt to willingly apply a mechanism for this.

- *Thirdly, necessity of the tokens’ participation in leadership matters:*



Emancipating the so-called ‘tokens’: i.e. the non-Saudi members of staff considered so far as ‘outsiders’ (as explained above), constitutes the third action to be taken in this research paper. A vision for leadership associated with positive view and perception of the ‘*outsider/foreigner*’ is basic in this concern.

**- *Fourthly, views about utilizing relative expertise and experience worldwide:***

To catch up with sophisticated countries in the field of leadership *reforms must be well thought out* as a priority in education. *Benefiting from the experiences* and (selected) reform / improvement / standardization / accreditation... programmes worldwide is necessary.

Further discussion of these dialogues follows in the discussion section.

**Fourth stage, the open-ended interviews:**

Utilising the *theme focus* technique (Cohen et. al., 2006: 273), the FE staff members (#35: sample of the study) were interviewed to detect specific data to answer the second research question. The interview discussion centered around the staff members’ perceptions: their views, inspirations, feedback evaluative data concerning the therapeutic intervention: the monthly seminars, the weekly meetings ‘Sustainable Dialogues and Consultation Project’ (SDCP); i.e. issues related to the staff’s notion of the usability, benefit(s), change effect, change size, added values ...etc. As such they are utilized to judge effectiveness of the initiative-as-action to make change. This is administered immediately after the therapeutic intervention.

**7. Findings of the study**

***Research question 1:***

*What is the general tendency: the leadership model/style used within the faculty of Education departments?*

Quantitative data analysis (basically averages and means) of the observational data concerning leadership behaviours and practices was used. It adopted actual frequency averages of 35 respondents' forms/registers which eventually produced Table (2) providing sufficient data collected over a term period to judge leadership type of the context under investigation. Analysis took only the *ten* most frequent leadership behaviours/ distributed to *five* major strands: universal aspects utilized as criteria for the 'leadership tendency'. The table has shown that the leadership model/style used within the faculty of Education departments is:

*'central and directive'* as:

- no staff participation exists in the decision-making process except for a few (ranked 1 in terms of frequency of occurrence within 3 months);
- principal conveys instructions rather than discuss them (ranked 2); and
- 'giving-orders' is the common style used by the faculty leaders (ranked 5)

*'Silencing voices and potential capabilities'* is also typical of the style used at the FE as:

- non-Saudi staff's voices are not heard (ranked 2);
- they are marginalized/ have little/ no power (ranked 4);
- they have little effect (ranked 8);
- they are restrictedly captured to the 'rules' (ranked 9); and
- are considered outsiders (ranked 10).

As for *'change occurrence / preparedness'* the informants have stated that:

- change is difficult and very slow (ranked 3);
- there is little opportunity for change/reform (ranked 6); and

- because preparedness for change is weak, rarely occur (ranked 9).

The table has also shown that '*leadership/management selection*' is:

- a political endeavor (ranked 3);
- managerial with no care for reform ((ranked 7);
- never based on criteria; and there is little chance for distinguished candidates (ranked 8).

Table (2). The 10-item form used by the FE staff members to collect leadership-related practices data as observational register

	<i>Type of Behaviour</i>	<i>Subdivisions</i>	<i>Practical Behaviour</i>	<i>Frequency average</i>	<i>Rank</i>
<i>Leadership analysis criteria based on Universally recognized successful leadership norms and stylistics presented by scholars in the field in the literature review</i>	<b>1- <u>entrality and directiveness</u></b>  Recurrence of offensive situations related to:	1.a) giving orders vs suggesting thoughts stylistics	<i>giving-order style. instructions are 'given' highly central</i>	28 21 23	5 12 10
		1.b) negotiability of decision making and staff participation	<i>no staff participation in the decision-making process except for a few</i>	33	1
			<i>principal conveys instructions rather than discuss them</i>	31	2
		1.c) role of staff in leadership	<i>Not effective role; no share in responsibility</i>	17	16
	<b>2- <u>change occurrence / preparedness</u></b>  Recurrence of offensive situations related to:	2.a) managerial or real leadership	<i>Managerial; no care for reform</i>	26	7
		2.b) change/reform occurrence	<i>difficult, and very slow rarely occur</i>	30 24	3 9
		2.c) change/reform preparedness	<i>little opportunity</i>	17	16
	<b>3- <u>eadership/ma nagement selection</u></b>  Recurrence	3.a) Type of leadership selection:	<i>political endeavor</i>	30	3
		3.a.1) a political endeavor!			

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	<b><i>Type of Behaviour</i></b>	<b><i>Subdivisions</i></b>	<b><i>Practical Behaviour</i></b>	<b><i>Frequency average</i></b>	<b><i>Rank</i></b>
	of offensive situations related to:	3.a.2) based on clear criteria!	<i>never based on criteria</i>	25	8
		3.b) willingness/non-willingness to select the best candidate!	<i>no willingness except a few little chance for the distinguished candidates</i>	20 25	13 8
	<b>4- <u>silencing voices and potential capabilities</u></b> Recurrence of offensive situations related to:	4.a) non-Saudi staff's role:	<i>are marginalized/ have little/ no power</i>	29	4
		4.a.a) have power/are only symbols!	<i>their voices are not heard</i>	31	2
		4.a.b) have right to attempt change!	<i>Restrictedly captured to the 'rules'</i>	24	9
		4.a.c) have real effect / outsiders in educational leadership matters	<i>considered outsiders have little effect</i>	23 25	10 8
	<b>5- <u>students' voices and preferences</u></b> Recurrence of offensive situations related to:	5.a) how much it is taken for consideration:			
		5.a.a) respected and taken for consideration!	<i>hardly ever considered</i>	27	6
		5.a.b) taken-for-granted type!	<i>kind of taken-for-granted</i>	18	15
	Recurrence of <b><u>others:</u></b> any other offensive situations related to leadership style		<i>staff obligatory implement, have no other choice</i>	22	11
			<i>Dean and Dept head do only managerial activities</i>	21	12
			<i>ignore changes or reform</i>	19	14
			<i>topmost character's instructions are divine</i>	15	17

Final criterion was ‘*students’ voices and preferences.*’ These are hardly ever considered (ranked 6 in a list of 25 practices).

Comparing those leadership behaviours affiliating to the five major aspects utilized as criteria for the ‘leadership tendency’ with the leadership models and their associated features discussed in the ‘Literature Review’, we can conclude, in an answer to the first question of this research, that:

The general tendency: the leadership model/style used within the faculty of Education departments is “*instructional and transactional*”.

*Research question 2:*

*Can interventional therapeutic actions of the kind prescribed in the procedures make change?*

The interviews focussed on feedback evaluative data concerning the therapeutic intervention.

Coding into thematic issues and subsumed codes, labelling processes, categorization, classification, listing, and organizing major thematic themes that emerged; along with identifying quotes and interpreting and writing descriptions of the themes and relevant sub-thoughts and quotations, etc. were used following Radnor’s (2001: 70-71) method and techniques of the interview textual analysis, and Myhill et al. (2013: 82), and Wellington’s (2000) notions in relation.

As shown in Table (3), analysis of the interview data on the SDCP evaluative feedback yielded a number of thematic sub-codes that reflected the participants’ views towards the therapeutic action attempted in this study. The most important of these, represented in the most frequent perceptions of frequencies (those above the mean ‘13’; namely, 17 to 13) are embodied in the following sub-themes:

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a) The SDCP indicative-as-action was as effective as the staff members ascertained occurrence of “*considerable signs of change*” at the FE. The following quote (by Dr Islam) represents this thought:

*“For the first time for ages we feel big changes and reform signs of some kind are occurring on the ground, some of these are radical”*

Table (3). The Sub-codes Synthesized as a Result of the Interview Analysis

Investigation Focus	Sub-codes Synthesized	Frequency
Evaluative Feedback Concerning the Therapeutic Intervention: Sustainable Dialogues & Consultation Project (SDCP)	<i>Existence of considerable signs of considerable changes in the institution</i>	17
	<i>Success of the action was attributed to self-imposing style: voluntarily involvement of everyone gave them power</i>	15
	<i>Acceptance of constructive criticism</i>	14
	<i>Willingness to consider and take reformative initiative even when it touches as radical as alternative leadership model / approach</i>	<b>13</b>
	<i>Achievement of Kissenger’s conception of a leader’s task: “getting his people from where they are, to where they have not been or should be”</i>	11
	<i>The initiative as a programme in the context of ‘Vision 2030’ in the educational context</i>	8
	<i>The action model holding merits to solve the pitfalls of the leadership style and practices in the FE</i>	7

b) The SDCP gave the staff power since it was self-imposed: the staff volunteered to attempt change; the fact that made success of the action initiative. This was obviously expressed by Dr Usamah, saying:

*“Success of the action attributed to self-imposing style: voluntarily involvement of everyone gave them power”*

- c) A sense of acceptance of constructive criticism prevailed. Such a sense was stated through a staff member’s voice (Dr Muhammad) who thought:

*“Witnessing/Living the actual benefits of the leadership reforms, we are readily prepared for accepting constructive criticism”*

- d) Willingness to consider and take reformative initiative even when it tackles as radical change as thinking of an alternative leadership model / approach. One exemplar quote (by Dr Ali) read:

*“Readiness/ preparedness and even devotion, collaborately with others, to consider and take reformative initiative based on mutual consultations”*

Data analysis revealed more, though of less frequency (below the mean: frequency average 11 to 7), but they were paramount and should be taken into account when success of the project is judged. The SDCP created a prompted sense of the action model:

- *being a promising light spot: a start point for implementation of ‘Vision 2030’; and*
- *holding merits to solve the pitfalls of the leadership style and practices in the FE.*

To sum up, such discourse concerning the interviews analysis revealed the staff’s favouring of the action model’s aspects represented in the above-mentioned thematic.

The ‘*criticism acceptance*’, as a start; then ‘*working through mutual dialogues & consultations and collaboratively consider and take reformative initiative*’ led into such *big changes and reform signs* that brought

about *merits to solve the pitfalls of the leadership style and practices.*

The above are indications of actual movement from a restive situation (where they were), to a better one (where they should be), achieving Kissenger's conception of a successful leader's task. As such, in answer to the second question of this research:

- *The interventional therapeutic action (SDCP) prescribed in the procedures CAN make change: a promising light spot in the Saudi educational context.*

## **8. Discussion**

Henry Kissenger (in Dogra, 2018) identified the leader's task as *to get his people from where they are, to where they have not been* or should be. Did the prevailing leadership styles and the people in charge drive the educational bodies/organizations into the desired promising position, so far?

Palaiologou et al. (2015) ascertain that Saudi Arabian education is now going through large-scale reform where leadership roles and responsibilities are key issues. Additionally, the recently launched 'Vision 2030' and relevant 'National Transformation Programme' have constituted hope on the right way. Despite all those programmes, and all previous attempts and reform projects (Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission, 2006; The Ministry of Education of Saudi Arabia, 2007; Saudi Guide Book for Quality and Academic Accreditation 2008), change and reform rarely occur: superior leadership improvement reflected in the claimed fundamental *change and reform* are still invisible on the operational level up to date?

The findings shown in answer to the first question of this study concerning leadership model and styles used within the faculty of Education departments, and the



portrait displayed by Aldawsari about the praxis of the Saudi educational leadership, and the sever critique by her and others (Palaiologou et al., 2015; Alnahdi, 2014; Altayar, 2003; and Al-Sadan, 2000) does not only indicate specific deficiencies somewhere, but shows clearly a deleterious status quo and practices everywhere, the fact that demands action. The whole leadership system and approaches followed lack in ‘practical change/reform on the ground’: I strongly think that it is not about projects we launch, or existence of glittering programmes; but whether or not we are WILLING to do it: willingness to start reform and accept radical changes is the question. With a strong belief that *superior leadership performance occurs* when all stakeholders – leaders at the different levels and subordinates – are readily prepared for accepting the concept of reforms and changes, as a result of realizing actual benefit of such reforms. We, professionals in the faculty of education support any action in this line, on top of which is changing the leadership model/styles spread in the educational setting even if those reforms and changes oppose the current system; e.g. leadership selection criteria and policy. The author of this paper (and all those collaboratively worked with him: members at the faculty) are aware of the *cultural* and *structural* barriers that make choosing and applying new alternative leadership styles/ theories so difficult to achieve: *cultural sensitivity in Saudi Arabia is absolutely fundamental to even the thought of suggesting change*, states Aldawsari (2016). Nevertheless, there is always a right way to do things. Through ‘Dialogue and consultation’ as opposed to top-down autocratic and instructional leadership practices, change objectives can be achieved.

Harris (2002:37) ascertains that changes that are imposed without consultation are most likely to incur resistance and sabotage. Conversely, change that is self-imposed or voluntary is more likely to succeed simply because individuals feel involved and have some power over the situation.

The ‘Sustainable Dialogues & Consultation’ as action project is experimented as remedial work for the restive leadership educational setting in KSA. This initiative-as-action on the leadership issues set above included:

***First**, reviewing necessity for change, and brainstorming mechanism for it:*

Two theories are suggested for leadership reform at the Faculty of Education, that can be generalized to other faculties at Taiba University or Saudi Arabian Educational setting. The model holds (a lot) to solve the problems dominating as leadership style and practices portrayed above is a combination of ‘Distributed leadership’ and ‘Transformational leadership’. Wright (2007) also supports this tendency noting that *transformational leadership can function alongside distributed leadership*. This can be a pinch mark and fundamental initiative in the history of the faculty of education.

***Secondly**, exchanging knowledge concerning leader selection:*

This is considered by many researchers in Saudi Arabia (Aldawsari, 2016, for example) a paramount *step to bringing about effective change*: as we don’t like to see resistance from ‘insiders.’ A paramount issue in relation is employment of non-Saudi experts/scholars (in senior educational leadership in particular). While it is a great problem (as it violates the Saudization strategy), this issue

continues to plague the quality of school leadership; and consequently, the school outcomes.

**Thirdly**, *necessity of the ‘tokens’ participation in leadership matters:*

This is embodied in supporting the ‘distributed leadership’ concepts that everyone is a ‘great value’; hence, they should participate in leadership establishing interaction within and across various teams. In line with this is the conception that all have the knowledge of and the potential to develop; so, ‘power is distributed to those’. Responding to the transformational leadership model, everyone’s (leader or subordinate’s) capacity should be invested as to be given a role and make effort. As such from now on there are no more ‘outsiders’ but ‘more effective insiders’ in a collective network; in line with Zuber-Skerritt’s (2001) thought that every staff member can and must be “*a personal scientist, and create contextual knowledge (grounded theory) in an organization*”.

**Fourthly**, *views about utilizing relative expertise and experiences worldwide:*

Saudi Arabia’s ‘Vision 2030’ refers to the government’s early realization of the size of challenges facing the country, and the need for reform.

Some suggested reform projects or criteria for reform standards that can be made use of (but not necessarily entirely implement) are: International Organization for Standardization (ISO), (ISO 9000) in particular; American National Standards Institute (ANSI) British Standards Institute (BSI); US National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (2001) guidelines; School Improvement projects in the UK, USA and Singapore; The ‘National Convention for Education’ (in Morocco); The Finnish Project for Reform (Sahlberg, 2010); The Thai

Educational Reform Project (Fry and Bi, 2013); and The American document '*The Goals 2000*'.

To sum up, the process starts with '*acceptance of constructive*', to build up '*willingness to change*'; then, '*working through mutual dialogues & consultations*' in order to '*collaboratively consider and take reformative initiative*'. These must be a *sustainable process* that necessarily bring about *big changes and reform* in the leadership style development.

As an experimented project, the SDCP (and thought content) avails the key responsibilities for a successful leader; i.e. it is a hospitable climate that creates such a cooperative spirit and fruitful interaction: it is the desired climate that cultivates the leadership sense within the staff members. We are quite closer than any time to WILLING to start reform.

## **9. Conclusion:**

The current leadership model(s) used at FE are not appropriately suited: in accordance with a locally-universally integrated and expert validated models. The Faculty of Education does not have within-components harmony as to cope with the university objectives and the MHE in Saudi Arabia. The SDCP can be a basis for a desirable reformative plan within the 'National Transformation Programme' of 'Vision 2030.' Thinking of an alternative model / approach in the educational leadership: a delegative model that *creates learning leaders that combine the role of the effective manager and transformational leader* is targeted.

The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, on top of which is Saudi Arabia, enjoy stronger economic resources: KSA holds an exceptionally distinguished prestigious position among other Arab countries. Hence,

affordability for development in general, and in the (higher) education sector at the state level does not constitute a burden. Poorer Arab countries (e.g. Mediterranean countries) have more academically qualified manpower than the GCC countries but they suffer from affordability for development at the state level (Al-Khateeb and Idrees, 2010). Surprisingly, the two forces – manpower in the Arab Mediterranean countries, and the economic/financial power in the GCC counties – have never been invested well (economically and educationally speaking) as to meet and make a super educational/intellectual and civilizational power to achieve standardization (or approach close to it) in line with the Saudi Guide Book for Quality and Academic Accreditation (2008) or the US National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (2001) guidelines. Future generations are the nation's true fortune (Al-Mousa, 2010): Why don't we invest for them as to introduce for a better leadership style?

The study recommends further research on the issue; particularly on usability of universal thematic in relation with leadership for the Saudi educational setting, and ways to minimize cultural and structural effects in terms of leadership style and leadership selection.

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