Chapter 13
The Role of the Leadership Style in Creating Conflict and Tension in a Higher Education Institution

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ABSTRACT

This chapter examines the influence of context on leadership styles in a higher education institution. Specifically, the enactment of leadership, the consequence of differing leadership styles, and the resultant interpersonal conflict. Informed by the empirical literature examining the Middle East, workplace stress and conflict, leadership and interpersonal communication, the chapter highlights the consequences of a high-conflict external context and the resultant constraints on human resource policies and practices. The recommendations include establishing a leadership development program aimed at creating an awareness of different leadership styles and the leadership of diverse groups. This includes the implementation of a cultural change program, programs to support the empowerment of minority groups, management education focusing on conflict resolution. The chapter adds to the body of literature by addressing the challenges confronting leadership in a high conflict context.

ORGANIZATION BACKGROUND

As Metcalfe (2009) argues, the Middle East, specifically the Arab region, is growing in importance to the world economy. Increasingly, the region is being seen as a lucrative market for multinational companies. Consequently, there is a growing requirement for Arab businesses to expand into new markets in order to become part of the international economy (Metcalfe, 2009). In order for this to occur, and more importantly, for Arab businesses to be successful, there has been an increased priority placed on the provision of higher education. Thus, there has been an almost exponential increase in the establishment of higher education institutions in the Middle East (Abu

Lughod, 2000). However, these higher-education institutions have confronted numerous challenges in their attempts to deliver high-quality programs. Challenges, that have arisen, primarily from, the on-going internal conflict, war, and sectarian violence, that besets the region. Consequently, a major test facing these institutions is to overcome these challenges while at the same time ensuring that their academic reputations continue to grow.

Therefore, the aim of this chapter is to examine the influence of leadership and leadership styles on communication and conflict resolution in a Palestinian higher education institution. In doing so it provides an alternate perspective to the work of Khoury and McNally (2014) who explored the role of external context on human resource policies and practices. Specifically, the chapter examines the influence of differing leadership styles and their impact on interpersonal relationships in a high-conflict transitioning society.

The National Public University (NPU) is situated in one of the more high-conflict zones in the Middle East – Palestine. Palestine is considered to be a transitioning society, that is one that is moving from a high dependency on international aid to one of development and self-reliance (Paprock, 2006). Not only has the country experienced the presence of an occupying force, internal conflict and war, it also faces the considerable internal challenges. The two areas comprising the country, Gaza and the West Bank, are geographically separated and there has been a lack of unity within the political structure. This creates difficulties for institutions that are reliant on external funding and governmental support in order to carry out their core functions.

As with all other universities within Palestine, NPU has been established under the most trying social, political, and economic circumstances (Abu Lughod, 2000) and initially offered two year associate degrees in Arts and Sciences. The establishment of additional academic departments followed, with the Faculty of Business being established in the late 1970's. In the mid 1990's the Faculty of Graduate Studies was established. The University has grown to include Faculties of Law and Public Administration, Information Technology, Nursing and Allied Health Sciences. In addition, to the seven current faculties, NPU has eleven institutes and research centres that focus primarily on community development and research.

The University is governed by a Board of Trustees comprising prominent community, business and political leaders. This feature is a source of pride for the University as many of the country's leaders and prominent business people are graduates of the University. This willingness to contribute is common in the region, as alumni recognize that they have received a unique opportunity under somewhat trying circumstances, to contribute to the economic wellbeing of the Palestinian people. In doing so they wish to ensure that future generations receive the same opportunities as they did. The role of the Board of Trustees is to set the strategic direction, participate in the formulation of the strategic plan and to build relationships with the wider community, with the purpose of raising funds for the university. At the time of writing the gender representation on the Board of Trustees comprises six females and fifteen males.

The University Council is the statutory body that approves regulations and policies of the University. The Council is comprised of the University President, the Vice Presidents and Deans. The gender representation of this body comprises one female and thirteen males. Historically, there have only been two females that have held a Vice-President position which has led to representation on the University Council. Reporting to the University Council is an Academic Council which consists of twenty-seven members, two representatives from each faculty plus all deans and the Vice-President

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