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THE IMPACT OF SERVANT LEADERHSIP ON LEADERSHIP SUSTAINABILITY: EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE FROM HIGHER EDUCATION IN SYRIAN UNIVERSITIES

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Abstract. The purpose of this research paper is to develop a theoretical framework of sustainable leadership model which could be applied to assess Higher education academic and administrative staff perception and level of endorsement of significant leadership behaviours at Higher Education industry. Leadership sustainability is relatively a new trend which requires further examination. The sustainable leadership model comprises a set of leadership behaviours including visionary, team oriented and servant leadership. A theoretical model is established, clarifying the significance of selection of the abovementioned leadership behaviours. Planned Methodology, measurement, empirical testing and application of the theoretical model is investigated. A quantitative approach is employed to design a questionnaire survey to identify the appropriate conceptualisation of integrated leadership attributes and behaviour items. The competitive advantage of the theoretical model is characterised by the combination and integration of various characteristics and attributes of leadership and its relationship to leadership sustainability, a newly defined leadership dimension in the context of higher education. The model argues the significance of the abovementioned leadership dimensions in Higher Education industry, particularly among rectors, faculty deans, vice dean and heads of departments. Cronbach alpha Reliability test shows very strong internal consistency and significance. Higher Education industry is investigated in this research study selecting a convenience sample from Higher Education institutions. Descriptive analysis shows high level of endorsement of perceived leadership dimensions among academic and administrative staff. The regression analysis shows strong and positive significance of servant leadership on perceived sustainability leadership in higher education. The research paper emphasizes the significance of leadership dimensions including vision, influence, team building, and service in higher education industry in Private and Public universities.

Keywords: leadership sustainability, vision, teambuilding, servant leadership, higher education

1. Introduction

Leadership in Higher Education is a significant area of research that requires further investigation. Furthermore, there is no significant research about leadership in higher education in Syria. The need for awareness and knowledge of effective managerial leadership behaviours which enhances successful visions and missions for Higher education institutions, effective communication and team building for academic and administrative managers, has become an increasingly important discipline in organisational pure as well as practical research.

The increasing demand for college's principals, skilful and effective heads of departments requires attention to the field of leadership capacity building (Lambert, 2012). Challenges associated with stressful work environment, information overload, technological advancement and connectivity, battle for analytical and managerial talent and increasing ethical dilemmas have been among important factors stimulating the need for effective principals, deans and rectors, who acquire required effective leadership qualities and behaviours that could transcend cultural, geographical, political, racial and national aspects. Furthermore the concept of sustainable leadership is contemporary as few research is developed in the field of sustainable leadership. The purpose of this research paper is to develop a model of sustainable leadership behaviours and attributes to be applied in higher education measuring academic and administrative staff perception of Sustainable Leadership in Higher Education in Syria. The research suggests a theoretical framework investigating the impact of perceived outstanding leadership behaviours on leadership sustainability in   Higher Education in Syria.

2. Leadership Behaviours in Higher Education

Joo et al (2014) investigated Bolman and Deal framework of leadership investigating a dean in a private university in Malaysia, applying LOS self-instrument which was administered to the dean, and LOS other-instrument which was administered to 35 staff who were responding directly to her. Results of the study shows a difference in leadership orientation between self-assessment and other assessment. Results of the study also show that it is necessary for future deans to be trained for leadership skills to meet demands of the industry(Joo, Hee, & Piaw, 2014).

Chibani and Chibani (2013) explored leadership styles among school principals applying the Leadership Orientation Questionnaire which has two dimensions: one is self-rated by principals, and the other is addressed to school teachers to rate their principals on two dimensions. These include leadership and behavior. The study is divided into two parts. The sample of the study in part one were 8 schools principals and 158 school teachers selected from four private schools and one public school in Lebanon. In part two the sample was selected from two school principals and 40 school teachers from different schools. Results of the study showed that school principals crucially need creativity while school teacher need training(Chibani & Chibani, 2013).

According to Sotirofski (2011) there are internal and external factors to be considered when examining higher education institutions. One of these crucial factors is related to administrators' ability to exercise leadership qualities. The study examines the construct of instructional leadership in higher education institutions where a comparison between Turkish and Albanian universities' administrators   is conducted. A questionnaire survey is administered among a sample of 613 lecturers in universities in Turkey and Albania. Results show no significant difference in the perception of administrator's instructional leadership roles, university mission, managing learning and teaching process. With regard to academic staff, there is a significant difference between Turkish and Albanian lecturers' perceptions of administrator instructional leadership, in the sense that Turkish lecturers have more positive perception than Albanians (Sotirofski, 2011).

3. Higher Education in Syria

Primary, secondary and Higher Education is provided by state in Syria. However a legislation applied in 2001 allowed for the formation of private schools and colleges. Public higher education institutions in Syria are state controlled and financed. This is achieved through ministry of higher education and the Higher education Council. There are six public universities, and over fifteen private universities, and six higher institutions and tens of intermediate vocational, professional and technical training institutions that are under the responsibility of the ministry of Higher Education. The most influential legislative reforms for higher education in Syria was the presidential decree no. 36 for the year 2001, which governs the work of private universities in Syria. The other legal framework that governs higher education in Syria is Law No. 6 for the year 2006. This law governs

the work of public universities in Syria which is called "The University regulation Law". The new law gives more autonomy to universities with regard to staff appointment and promotions. The ministry of the Higher Education is striving to set priorities, set plans and implement them and continue the process of modernizing of HE industry in Syria (Al-ahmar & Ahmar-dakna, 2009).

The prevalent organizational environment of Higher Education industry in Syria, particularly public universities, could be characterized by a traditional managerial approaches with strong bureaucratic environment, application of outdated methodologies, lack of individual recognition, lack of effective encouragement of outstanding performance; limited collaboration with international conferences and academic journals, and most important a turbulent political environment which goes back to the past five years, represented by a political and national crisis in Syria. Against this background, a theoretical framework of leadership sustainability in higher education is developed in this research.

4. Sustainable Leadership in Higher Education

Sustainable leadership is a newly defined term in organisational leadership research(Hargreaves 2007, Lambert 2012). The term was coined by Hargreaves and Fink where sustainable leadership was stressed as a leadership paradigm which "matters, spreads and lasts. It is a shared responsibility that does not unduly deplete human of financial resources and that cares for and avoids exerting damage on the surrounding educational and community environment (Hargreaves & Fink, 2003).

According to Hargreaves & Fink 2003 a model of Sustainable leadership in Higher education was developed which consists of seven components which includes depth, length, breadth, justice, diversity, resourcefulness and conversation. The term was introduced to develop a framework which could balance between short term organisational objectives and long term grand goal regardless the change of the individual leader represented by the institution rector or faculty dean or department head in the institution.

Lambert (2012) develops a model for sustainable leadership to be implemented as a tool for organisational capacity building in Higher Education institutions. The model consists of six components including capacity building in staff, strategic distribution, consolidation, building long term objectives from short term targets, diversity and conservation.

5. Developing a Model of Leadership Sustainability in Higher Education

The theoretical model examines a set of sustainable leadership behaviors and dimensions, which are building on prior research on leadership in organizations not exclusively in Higher Education sector. The model builds on a set of independent variables of outstanding leadership behaviors which are predicted to have an impact on perceived leadership sustainability

5.1. Visionary Leadership

The first component in the theory of sustainable leadership at Higher Education builds on prior research of outstanding leadership in organizations emphasizing the importance of vision in organizations (Tichy & Devanna 1986, Bennis & Biederman 2009, Conger & Kanungo 1998, Yammarino et al. 1993, Kouzes & Posner 1995, Conger & Hunt 1999). Organisational vision is defined as a set of idealized future goals developed by the leader which represents purpose and values shared by followers who embrace ideology of the leader (Strange & Mumford 2005, House 1999, Collins & Porras 1994, Ergeneli et al. 2007). According to Zaccaro & Banks (2001) to improve a business competitive advantage, managers and business leaders need greater strategic flexibility which is developed through several factors, two of which include firstly ability to manage change, and

secondly developing organizational vision which could be translated into a strategic plan. Building on previous research on leadership in organisations, vision as a quality and competency possessed by leaders at higher education sector, is developed as the first component in sustainable leadership in Higher Education model. Visionary leadership reflects leader's ability to inspire and motivate followers, establishing clear image of the tasks and what could be done better in the future of the organization. Visionary leadership behaviour comprises subscales including (a) visionary, (b) future oriented, (c) performance oriented, (d) risk taker, (e) industry knowledgeable and (f)agent of change.

5.2. Team oriented Leadership

The second component emphasises the significance of teambuilding in Higher Education and the importance of developing team leaders who can play crucial roles at individual, departmental and institutional levels. House et al. (2004) define team-oriented leadership behaviour as a leadership variable which emphasizes effective teambuilding and accomplishment of common goals among team members. A team is composed of some number of relatively independent individuals who are connected together in a work activity and each have their own needs, goals and expected outcomes that motivate their behaviour (Day et al. 2004, Tolle 1988, Salas et al. 1992, Salas et al. 2005, Cannon-Bowers et al. 1993). Team-oriented leadership reflects ability and knowledge of teambuilding, establishing common purpose for team members and social collective identity for followers. Team oriented leadership behaviour comprises subscales including (a) team builder (b) collective (c) sensitive to team needs (d) role model (e) communicative.

5.3. Servant Leadership

The third component emphasizes service, fairness, self-sacrifice and modesty as components of a sustainable leader. The dimension of servant leadership is originated from prior research demonstrating aspects (Greenleaf 1977, Graham 1991, Farling et al. 1999, Liden et al. 2015, Mittal & Dorfman 2012). Servant Leadership behaviour reflects ability of building trust by selflessly serving others; stressing personal integrity and, sensitivity to the needs of stakeholders including larger society. Servant leadership behaviour comprises subscales including (a) just (b) sincere (c) humble (d) dependable (e) self-sacrificial.

5.4 Leadership Sustainability in Higher Education

The fourth illustrates perceived leadership sustainability as a characteristic quality and behaviour within leaders in higher education. Promoting and encouraging diversity as a behaviour and values in higher education setting would be represented by demonstrating leader's awareness of differences among individuals related to higher education including students, academic and administrative staff   and stakeholders in general. Sustainable leadership behaviours comprises subscales including (a) trustworthy (b) egalitarian (c) culturally aware (d) performance oriented (e) self – interest transcendent.
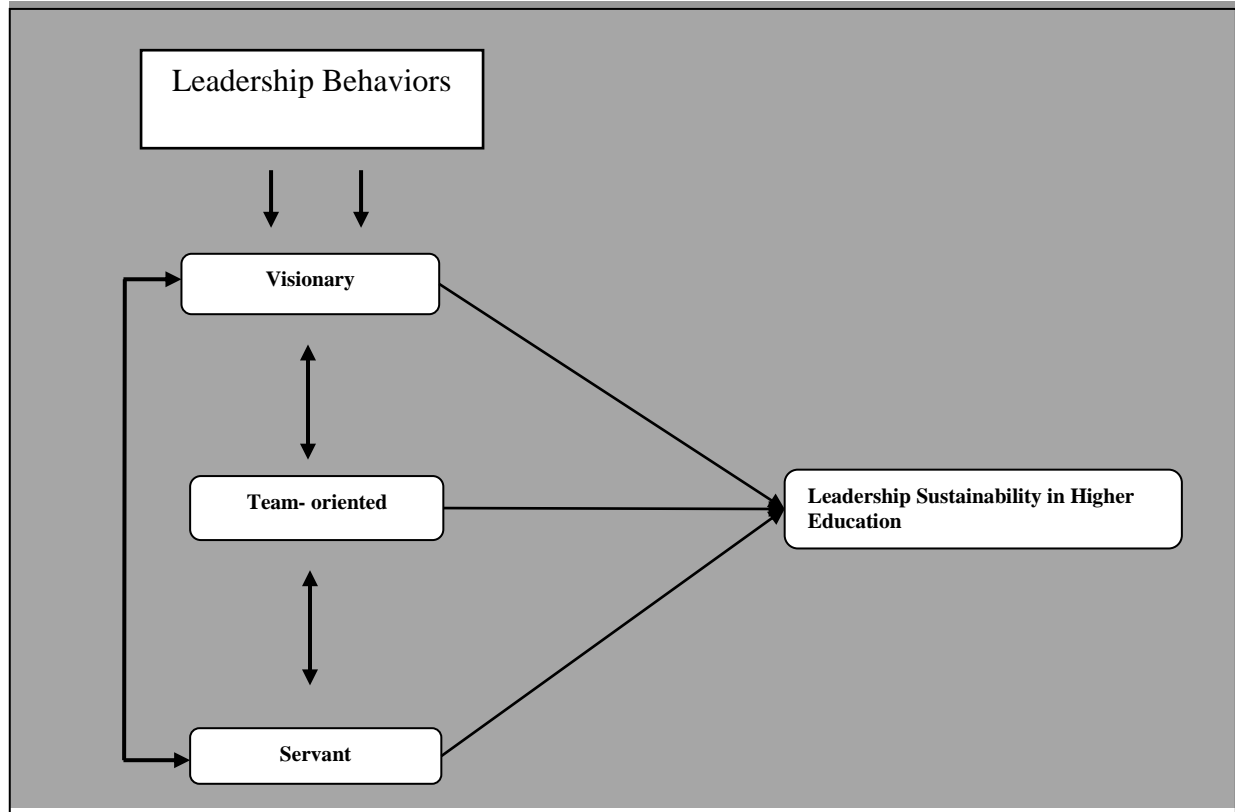
Figure 1: a Framework of Sustainable Leadership in Higher Education –Source: Researcher.
Source: author

5. 5. Research Hypotheses

According to Leithwood & Duke (1999) there develops a set of leadership behaviors which are correlated with educational leadership. They include instructional leadership, moral leadership, transformational leadership, participative leadership, managerial leadership and contingency leadership approaches. Summarizing previous studies, a positive relationship between the prospective leadership behaviors is suggested.
H1
Visionary, team oriented and servant leadership behaviours are positively associated in the Higher Education environment.

H2

Visionary, team oriented and servant leadership are predicted to have a positive impact on leadership sustainability in Higher Education.

6. Methodology Design

The Managerial Leadership behaviors theoretical framework employed the application of a quantitative approach collecting primary data through self-administered questionnaire. The methodology of research is developed through the design of a self-administered questionnaire. According to Cooper & Schindler (2014) advantages of

self-administered survey include less cost, sample accessibility. Leadership behaviours scale is based and originated from prior leadership (Conger & Kanungo 1998, Kouzes & Posner 1995, Strange & Mumford 2002, Kotter 1996, House, Paul J Hanges, et al. 2004, Mittal & Dorfman 2012b). The questionnaire comprises a set of 36 items measuring perception of leadership behaviours and sustainability leadership.

6.1. Sampling Design and Strategy

Sampling design employed a convenience sampling strategy due to lack of resources to conduct a probability sampling strategy. The questionnaire survey was distributed to one private and one public Higher Education institutions. The total number of collected questionnaires is 68 responses. Only 56 of the questionnaires were employable due to lack of reliability in responses.

7. Reliability and Validity of the Scale

Cronbach alpha test is conducted to provide a measure of the internal consistency of the scales. Internal consistency describes the extent to which all the items measures the same construct and are connected to the interrelatedness of the items within the scale (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011).Cronbach alpha Reliability test shows optimal reliability ranging from 0.87 to 0.91 which is to be considered an excellent indication.

Table 1 Cronbach alpha reliability test (n=56)

Variable Components	Number of Items	Alpha (α) without deleting any item
Visionary	7	0.89
Team oriented	9	0.87
Servant	10	0.91
Leadership Sustainability	8	0.85

8. Descriptive Analysis

8.1 Demographic Profile of Respondents

The demographical profile of respondents includes respondents' age, gender, type of institution, work experience in Higher Education, work experience in their present organizations examined in this study. Descriptive data shows that the average age of respondents is 43, work experience in Higher Education average mean is 11 years and work experience in current institutions is 8 years. Table 1 illustrates demographical data of respondents. 77% of the respondents were male, 23 % female. 79 % of respondents are PhD holders and 68 % of academic staff are instructors (Table 2).

Table 2. Demographic Profile of Respondents (n=56)

Respondents Demographic Profile	f	%
Gender		
Male	39	75
Female	13	25
Higher Education Institution		
Private	28	53
Public	25	47
Faculty		
Business	13	26
Pharmacy	6	12
IT	7	13
Economics	23	45
Administration	2	4
Education Level		
Bachelor	7	13
Master	3	5
PhD	42	78
Other	2	4
Academic Level		
Instructor	23	56
Assistant Professor	10	24
Professor	8	20
Administrative Level		
Staff	8	35
Head of Department	6	26
Vice Dean	6	26
Dean	3	13

8.2 Descriptive Data Analysis

Descriptive analysis illustrates managerial leadership behaviours profile investigated in Higher Education institution in Syria. Descriptive analysis shows that perceived leadership behaviours in HE institutions in Syria have high scores (Table 3).

Table 3. Descriptive Data Analysis for Leadership Behaviours (n=56)

Servant Leadership Behaviours Items	Mean	SD
1. Sincere and means what they say	3.92	1.05
2. Reliable and dependable	3.92	1.05
3. Stimulating others	3.57	1.14
4. Encourages others to use their mind and challenge beliefs	3.50	1.26
5. Willing to give time, money and resources	3.54	1.05
6 .Tends to be good friend of subordinates	3.66	1.11
7. Has empathy for others	3.69	1.07
8. Tends to be helpful	3.74	1.01
9. Modest	3.88	0.968
10. Presents self in a modest way	3.75	1.06
Visionary Leadership Behaviours Items	**Mean**	**SD**
1. Idealises future goals	3.55	1.11
2. Risk Taker	3.41	1.24
3. Ability to interpret and use knowledge of industry	3.73	1.05
4. Ability to set future oriented goals	3.73	1.00
5. Awareness of organisational barriers that may impair organisational goals	3.87	1.06

6. Vision of future for organisation	3.67	1.14
7. Reviews performance and plan of action	3.38	1.22
Team oriented Leadership Behaviours Items	**Mean**	**SD**
1. ability to influence people to commit to team goals	3.81	1.25
2. aware of team members ability and what they could contribute to the team	3.83	1.09
3. sensitive to the abilities and emotional need of team members	3.40	1.08
4. Ability to communicate effectively and clearly with team members	3.67	1.02
5. works towards one collective team identity	3.53	0.971
6 .makes sure attitude is clear to the team	3.55	1.02
7. ability to establish common ground of understanding with team members	3.60	0.845
8. acts as a role model for team members	3.80	1.03
9. Change team members attitude to advocate a proposed vision	3.74	1.02
Leadership Sustainability	**Mean**	**SD**
1. Deserves trust and can be relied on to keep their word	3.89	1.05
2. Acts according to what is right or fair	3.76	1.02
3. Works jointly with others	3.62	1.18
4. Forgoes self-interest and make personal sacrifices	3.30	1.17
5. Performance and Standards of excellence	3.57	1.12
6. focuses on personal welfare of employees	3.25	1.04
7. aware of gender differences and treats team members with egalitarian approach	3.61	1.03
8. awareness of team members cultural backgrounds and values	3.58	1.02

9. Correlation Analysis

The correlation analysis shows positive and strong significance between the variables of the study and strong association between the aforementioned leadership dimensions. The correlation analysis shows strong association ranging from r=0.71 to r = 0.91. The correlation analysis indicate significant relationship between leadership variables which supports the first hypothesis (Table 4).

Table 4. Means, Standard Deviation and Correlations (n=56)

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4
1-Servant Leadership	3.72	0.806	1			
2-Visionary Leadership	3.62	0.887	0.821** 0.000	1		
3-Team oriented Leadership	3.66	0.732	0.780** 0.000	0.830** 0.000	1	
4- Leadership Sustainability	3.57	0.765	0.869** 0.000	0.806** .0000	0.793** 0.000	1

10. Regression Analysis

A regression analysis is conducted between a set of outstanding leadership behaviours which are employed in this study as the predictor variables. Leadership sustainability is examined as the outcome variable. Multiple regression analysis between Leadership behaviours and sustainability in Higher Education is conducted. In the first model, the multiple regression analysis indicates a significant relationship between servant leadership and leadership sustainability where the multiple regression test produces a standardised beta value of 0.86**, p= 0.000, confirming that servant leadership has an impact on leadership sustainability.

In the second model the regression test indicates a significant relationship between servant leadership and leadership sustainability. The regression test produces a standardised beta value of 0.64**, p= .000. The regression analysis also illustrates a significant relationship between team oriented leadership and leadership sustainability in higher education producing a standardised beta value of 0.29**, p=.005. The regression analysis confirms that servant and team oriented leadership have positive impact on Leadership sustainability. This result partially supports the second hypothesis. Table 5 illustrates the coefficient testing for hypothesis 2 regression analysis results reporting on standardised beta, F value and significance level (Table 5).

Table 5 Regression Analysis of Leadership behaviours and Leadership Sustainability (Dependent Variable: Leadership Sustainability)

Independent Variables	Beta	F	Sig
Servant Leadership	0.64**	166.370	0.000
Team oriented Leadership	0.29**	98.759	0.000

11. Results and Discussion

The descriptive analysis of the study shows generally high levels of perceived leadership behaviours among academic and administrative staff at Higher Education in Syria. The descriptive analysis results indicates high level of endorsement of the abovementioned behaviours and leadership styles. Results presented the research paper investigates descriptive analysis illustrated in table 3. With regard to managerial leadership dimensions in the study, few items were moderately rated. For example with regards to servant leadership, challenging beliefs and stereotypical approaches were moderately rated indicating that such a quality does not frequently exist in this culture or institution. That could be related to emphasize on religion and not encouraging provocative challenging questions. Risk taking is also an item which is perceived moderately, due to conservative aspect that characterizes Syrian Culture. The concept of challenging the status quo and motivating force for change is also perceived moderately in this research indicating possible lack or resistance or this quality. Leadership behaviours which include inspiring change, challenging thoughts and beliefs, questioning the status quo, are qualities that would need further consideration in the Syrian social and organisational environments. The correlation analysis shows positive and significant association between the variables of the study. The results of correlation analysis supports the first hypothesis. The regression analysis illustrates positive and significant relationship between servant and team oriented leadership and leadership sustainability indicting significant impact of servant leadership on leadership sustainability in higher education (Fig.2).
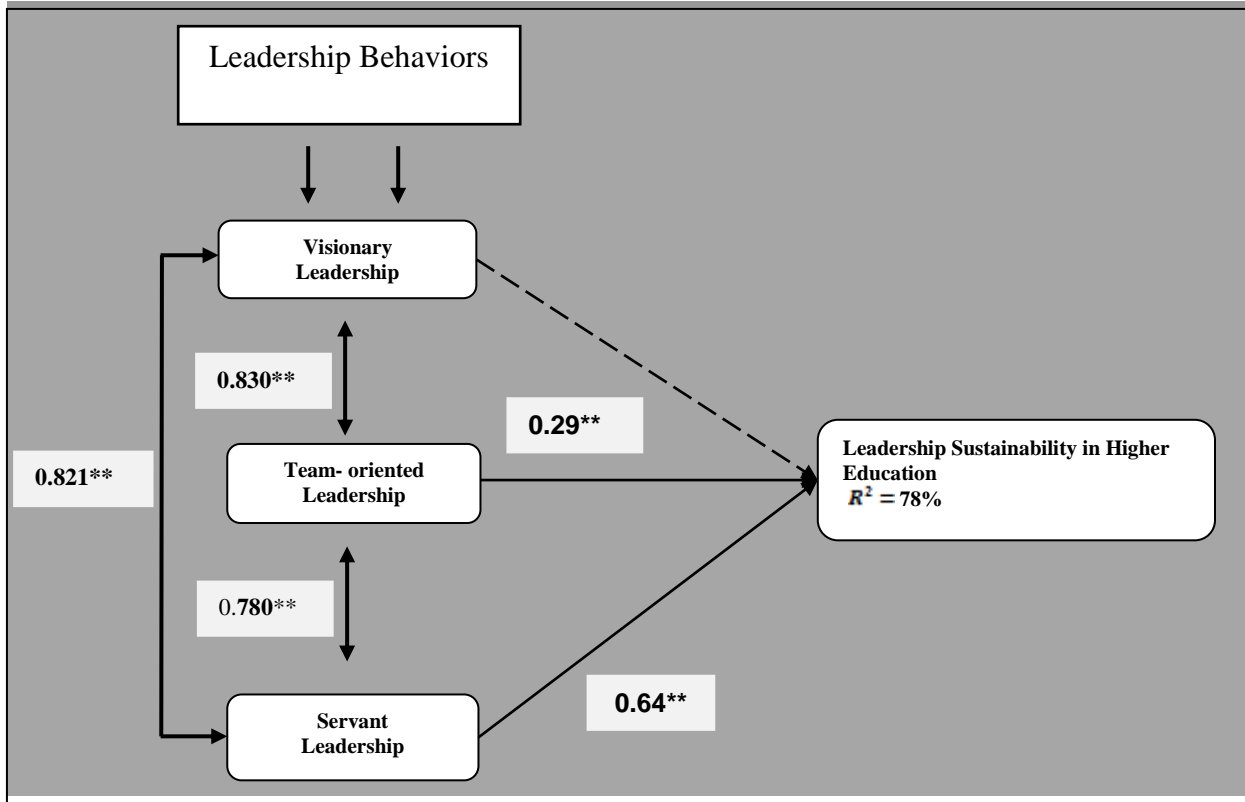
Figure 2: Regression Model for Leadership Behaviours and Leadership Sustainability
Source: author

The model emphasises the significance of team dynamics and servant leadership to leadership sustainability in higher education. The research paper argues the importance of such behaviours in a sensitive and demanding approach at higher education industry. The importance and significance of the research has a future implication as these dimension has relationships with many work related factors, such as job satisfaction, commitment, work stress and organisational citizenship. Unfortunately there is lack of prior literature on leadership behaviours in Higher Education in Syria to compare or relate to.

According to Selamat et al. (2013) there is a positive relationship between transformational leadership and organisational commitment, emphasizing the role of principal in practicing transformational behaviour to stimulate teachers' organisational commitment. The application of the proposed leadership behaviours model in higher education context is an interesting application.

Another motivating notion that could be investigated in higher education environment is the relationship between leadership behaviours and organisational cynicism. According to Mete (2013) organisational cynicism in a new notion in the discipline of organisational behaviours, and represents person's negative attitudes towards his/her organisation. The result of the study shows significant effect of ethical leadership of faculty administration on academics' organisational cynicism.

Obviously the constructs of ethical, servant, and transformational leadership behaviours are crucial dimensions of leadership in higher education. Honesty, integrity, humility, service, self-awareness, self-actualization and

role model building are crucial element in building mentor- student relationship, as well relationship between deans and rectors and their relationships with staff.

What could also be discussed in this research is related to the research environment that exist in Syria. During fieldwork and data collection stage few observation could be concluded in this context. The first observation is related mainly to administrative staff conceptual understating of leadership in the sense that they have good understanding of management but not leadership. When asked to bring back from their collective memory and experience in Higher Education an example of a co-worker or a superior who possessed leadership abilities and assess him/her according to the scale, most of administrative staff had difficulty of relating to the concept of a leadership in organisational environment. Whereas the concept of bureaucratic management is strongly clear in the minds of academic and administrative staff, the notion of leadership in organisations is not familiar. Some of the respondents related to their immediate managers and preferred rating them, although they were told to relate to a character who possessed leadership qualities and demonstrated leadership behaviours. The concept of perceived leadership was somehow too abstract for some of the respondents.

12. Limitation of Research

The most important and significant limitation of the study is related to sample size and strategy. The most important concern in this research is that the small size of sample could jeopardize the validity, reliability and generalisation of the results of the study. The size of the sample is 56 which could be considered as a good pilot test with significant results. Reliability test shows excellent results, however, the lack of validity tests and probability sampling strategy could risk robustness and generalizability of the research results.

The second limitation of the study is related to the simplicity of the framework which is building relationships between significant leadership dimensions and behaviours, without attempting to develop a sophisticated model that would build causal relationships between leadership as a crucial organisational variable with, variables which could in this context include, organisational commitment, motivation, academic job satisfaction, and individual performance.

13. Future Research and managerial Implication

Future research of outstanding leadership behaviors could investigate empirical testing of the model at a cross cultural approach. An empirical testing could include samples selected from different regions representing Western, Middle Eastern, European and Ocean Pacific regions. Future research could also investigate a contingency model of leadership and culture examining leadership behaviors that could be applied in specific cultures. A cross cultural sample could be selected from different regions taking in consideration harmonizing the target industry and unit of analysis of the research. Questionnaire translation could also investigate better enhancement techniques. Back translation could be conducted for cross research purposes (Brislin, 1970).

Significant implication could be the application or benefit of this research in a practical approach. Few lessons that were learnt from this research is lack of training and awareness of managerial leadership in organisational aspect. Training leadership skills programs to both academic and administrative staff could make a difference in organisational culture sense in the target institutions. What is desperately needed is a social and organisational culture which stimulates an empowering leadership approach versus a conventional bureaucratic approach.

Conclusions

The research paper examines the development of a theoretical framework of leadership behaviours and leadership sustainability in organisational approaches. The empirical testing of the model, which is selected from

two Higher Education institutions, shows high level of perceived leadership behaviours endorsement among academic and administrative staff in Higher Education in Syria. The association between leadership shows strong and positive significance. The regression analysis shoes positive and significant relationship and positive impact of servant and team oriented leadership on leadership sustainability.

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