



# Impact of Leadership Styles on Decision-Making and Problem-Solving: Classical Faculty Leaders at Egyptian Governmental Universities

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## Abstract

*Purpose - This study aims to investigate the impact of the common classical leadership styles (autocratic, democratic and laissez-faire) among faculty leaders at Egyptian governmental universities on their decision-making and problem-solving skills.*

*Design/ methodology/approach - This study uses quantitative research approach; data was collected using structured questionnaires and analyzed using SPSS. The sample included 384 faculty members.*

*Findings - Autocratic and democratic styles have a significant impact on decision-making and problem-solving skills. Laissez-faire style was found statistically insignificant on decision-making and problem-solving skills.*

*Originality/value –The value of this study is that it provides insights on leadership styles and how they are perceived in governmental universities in Egypt. It enlightens the effective styles in terms of decision making and problem solving, therefore provides a framework for these universities. Leadership in higher education which is a vital issue today.*

*Research implications: This research implies that the autocratic faculty leader- deemed ineffective in modern leadership theories-, is significant in governmental universities in matters of decision-making and problem-solving. Concerning the laissez-faire faculty leader, finding indicates that, this style is insignificant in governmental universities in terms of decision-making and problem-solving, contrarily to common belief, it was found that laissez-faire leaders are not effective in public governance in Egypt. The bureaucratic system that is applied in governmental universities in Egypt, leads to the autocratic and democratic style being more effective than laissez-faire.*

**Keywords:** Higher Education; Faculty leaders; classical leadership; management; governmental universities; Decision-making; Problem-solving; Efficiency.

## Introduction

Academic leadership in Higher Education (HE) is the central driver in the pursuit of academic excellence and institutional ranking (Jameson, 2019). Leadership is of great importance in planning, directing and achieving the desired goals; these elements act as the pillar of the educational institution, (Geschwind, 2019), and are needed for faculty and staff to learn and have an input to enhancing the performance of the organization. It is crucial that management style in leading individuals should be replaced by leadership styles for better

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performance in the institution (Bryman, 2009; Parrish, 2013). Productive individuals in leadership roles help academics to perform effectively. Leadership in HE is concerned with maximizing such stakeholders' values of students, staff, government, and the public at large (Parrish, 2013). This implies that leaders in HE has to be more competent and effective in order to satisfy these diverse stakeholders at the same time. Furthermore, Today's leader are required to interact with the work environment and its specific circumstances. When it comes to management in the HE, it requires leaders to evolve in their managerial thinking in order to be able to face the various current challenges and meet the different needs of society (Zyada, 2009). This research focuses on leadership and HE effectiveness in terms of decision-making and problem solving as per common faculty leader style at governmental universities.

Studies have indicated that many institutions, especially in the governmental sector seeks adaptation to the transformations of the organizational context. Thus, to enhance the organizational structure and development in the public education institution, leadership skills are required in order to pursue the logical evolution of the management concept (Schein, 2004). Further insight is needed to understand the essential requirement for the adaption to the management practice. Therefore, this research is practically important as it plans to develop empirical evidences, illustrating to practitioners (government and education officials) the importance to recognize the links between leadership and public service values: achieving the results required by the authorized processes in an efficient, effective and legal manner; developing and supporting the performers who attain these results; and adapting the organization to its environment (Van Wart, 2003).

This study seeks to develop empirical evidence that also supports the mission of the national strategic plan of Egypt 2030. According to the current government plan, in order to facilitate the transformation of the HE sectors, Ministry of Higher Education in Egypt (MOE) needs to improve the management system in HE institutions, contributing to equality teaching, supporting the information technology industry, and inspiring people to meet the demands of the 21st century (Egypt Strategy for 2030). Leadership is needed among these entities (among their administrators and lecturers) to achieve success (Zaidatol et al., 2011). Leaders and lecturers, according to the National Higher Education Action Plan (2007), are considered key factors for organizational performance, in parallel with academic excellence. In conclusion, leadership in the governmental universities continues to arouse the interest among practitioners as it attributed to the widespread diffusion of public management reforms in Egypt, especially in the HE sectors (Ahmed, 2002)

The topic is considered academically important because there are rare significant studies sought to look at the relationship of faculty leaders with HE effectiveness in decision-making and problem solving, especially those in the public sector. This research draws on leadership theories and practices to examine the connection between leading styles in governmental universities. The following section reviews prior studies on the effectiveness of leadership styles in relation to decision-making and problem solving.

## **Literature Review:**

Prior studies confirmed that leadership comes in many forms. There is no such thing as one leadership style that is effective in all entities (Al-Daibat, 2017).

HE effectiveness is a central field of research in education studies (Juntrasook, 2014) educational leadership is multidimensional area of research (Ijaz and Iqbal, 2012). In educational institutions, leaders seek to influence and guide others' behaviors, inspire appropriate decision-making, define goals and tries to reach them. Thus, leadership aids the organization's goal achievements, which is a core function of management process (Prysor and Henley, 2018). Decision-making process exists at all levels of administration and is carried out by every manager and administrative official, it is found in every part of the institution. Leaders serve as a top down motivator for authority, leadership is achieved by giving subordinates the power to make and execute decisions (Ghadi et al., 2018). In the process of management, in planning function,

officials determine the decisions of the work that must be performed and the ways to be followed to accomplish this work, by consequence, the decisions determine the type of work that is distributed to certain members of the group, and the delegation of the appointed amount of authority that enables them to do the work, solve problems and achieve goals.

The implementation of the right leadership style is known to lead to solving problems that provide indication to effectiveness and success of HE (Rossi, 2014). According to Talanker, the problem-solving and decision making are just different facets of the same goal oriented multistage cognitive cycle (Talanker, 2016). At same time, taking the responsibility of decisions and solving problems lead to the development of the administrative body and help to reach required performance (Laughlin, 2011). On other hand, the oversight function of the decision focuses on the review of the performance of the act, seeking to see that *"what is planned is done with success"* (Geschwind, 2019). Therefore, the leadership style of a leader is an essential element affecting the decision-making process to solve problems. McGregor (2000) stated that the style of management and leadership is influenced by people's perceptions of human nature, summarizing two contradictory views of managers. Theory X concerns leaders adopting the autocratic style and theory Y for leaders adopting the participatory style. There are several divisions of leadership styles from the point of view of delegating authority. In the classic division, which is the most common especially in governmental sectors, it is according to the leader's style of management and their way of influencing their subordinates or middle managers in their sectors (Bryman 2009).

### **Effective Leadership:**

In the current era, new demand has questioned HE's civic mission (Juntrasook, 2014). HE institutions have been encouraged to teach students a broad range of disciplines, specific and general skills in order to lead innovative lives and to be leaders in a dramatically changing world (Rossi, 2014). Communities expect that HE should ensure the needed knowledge, attribute, responsibility to students, developing their required basic skills which include, organizing expertise, written as well as oral communication skills, open-mindedness and consideration as well as their attitudes, principles, and interest. (Forrester, 2011. P.17). This is considered effective performance of educational institutions (Ramsden, 1998). Research show that "effectiveness" is defined through a number of terms and concepts, that include competency, development, quality, improvement, assessment, monitoring, reviewing, and performance (Bryman, 2008). According to Chapman (1991) educational institutions are considered effective if they promote students' success across a wide variety of academic, social, and emotional outcome; Mintzberg (1994) clarified that faculties and personnel in HE are successful strategists. Their role is to guide an organization's ground breaking strategic path, not as passive "implementers" of predetermined actions. Staff are seen as: *"notoriously loosely coupled" to the organizational processes, making top-down approaches to management and control in these organizations problematic*" (P. 256). Management theory indicates that organization effectiveness, specifically in educational institutions, requires highly adaptable organizations, which are inclusive of faculty and staff in strategic decision-making (Marron and Cunniff, 2014). Thus, it is important for research to investigate *'What is an efficient way to manage HE?' to 'What is the most effective?'* (Juntrasook, 2014. P.21) The role of HE institution in an increasingly globalized, highly dynamic competitive environment became maintaining positive performance and effectiveness in the market (Bryman,2009). He also has indicated that management and leadership style are significant for organization's success because it leads human resources toward the strategic objectives of the organization. Effective leadership in HE ensures that organizational works, functions, activities, and tactics are aligned with the external environment. Successful leaders may also: *"predict the future probabilities and design choice strategies to satisfy uncertainties"* (Riaz & Haider, 2010. P.33). The proper leadership style of management of the educational institution is one of the possible solutions to eliminate and prevent the educational crisis and to promote effective performance among faculty and staff (Bryman, 2009).

**Leadership at Universities:**

Ramsden (1998) explains in his research that leadership at universities help faculty and staff in various ways. The research mentioned that effective leadership style at universities assist in implementing the strategic through furthering, networking the knowledge and creating interests in different departments across the university. University leaders are able to create collaborative and motivational management, demonstrating it among others employees in the entity by honesty and integrity and openness. (Juntrasook, 2014). They can develop team performance, promotes recognition of faculty and staff performance, which can include praising and sustaining success of the staff (Juntrasoc,2014). According to Scott *et al.* (2008), successful cultural transition in HE is more than just a development; it is a dynamic learning and unlearning cycle for everyone, especially in this era where we confront new generations (Ramsden, 1998).

There are numerous leadership styles that can be found in the recent academic literature (Kaleem, 2016). Heresy and Blanchard (1977) explained that different leadership style can be adapt to different circumstances. Nevertheless, the suitability of various style is a great question, leaders may learn to extend their repertoire and become successful under various conditions that lead to the theories of situations. According to Heresy and Blanchard (1988), they considered that: *“Leadership in relationship to several factors: preferred style of leadership, maturity of followers, expectations of followers, and task at hand. They developed the well-known Situational Leadership Model that identified four styles of leadership: autocratic (telling), democratic (selling), encouraging and social (participating), and laissez-faire style (delegating)”* (P.197). These leadership behaviors can vary from a driven leader to other non-directive approaches. In this study, the chosen leadership styles are; the democratic, the autocratic and the laissez-faire styles. According to Yang, (2014) the most commonly investigated leadership styles are democratic, autocratic, and laissez-faire styles when it comes to overseeing governmental education institutions (Yang, 2014).

According to Kalargyrou (2012), a Democratic leader has been found to be the most successful among the classic division of leadership styles as he/she improves subordinate’s performance, involve and skill them. Subordinates could add perceived value towards their role in the entity. Thus, this leadership style provides *“encouragement of participation in decision-making”*(P.191). According to Yang, this style is able to strengthen relationships between the leaders, colleagues, and followers (2014). It is perceived as the opposite of autocratic leadership style in behaviors (Smith, 2016).

Autocratic leadership is a leadership style in which a leader emphasizes maximum control over the environment. It is the extreme version of the laissez-faire leaders. An autocratic leader is a leader who retain control by stringent laws, guidelines and rules (Smith, 2016). An autocratic leader does not consult with others when making decisions (Bass,1985). In this type of leadership style, only certain behaviors, tasks, and activities that he approves are acceptable for the subordinates to perform. According to research, punitive actions and restrictive behaviors are used (Smith, 2016).

Laissez-faire leadership is a leadership style in which a leader emphasizes the: *“avoidance or absence of the leadership and is, by definition, the most inactive leader”*(Bass and Avolio, 1994. P.4). This type of leaders estimate that subordinates know how to get the job done and do not seek any guidance (Antonakis et al., 2003). Some researchers have considered the laissez-faire leadership style as a non-leadership dimension of the transformational theory (Forester 2011). However, others have explained that this leadership style is only successful if the subordinates hold high familiarity in the work field and have prior knowledge and experience (Bass,1985).

Research have summarized that there are different approaches of leading people that evolved over the years to describe leadership styles (Yang, 2014). Selecting the right leadership style in a position is significant because it supports in communicating desired goals and assist to achieve them. According to Singh (2011), Leadership style can be described as perceived behavior patterns, which an individual exhibits while trying

to influence other people's activities. (Biggerstaff, 2012). Table (I) summarizes the main skills and behaviors of leadership styles that will be assessed in this study.

### ***Decision-Making and Problem -Solving:***

The decision-making process appears because the leader defines a goal or to reach and it could not be achieved without successful decisions. It cannot be replaced by the core functions of management, just as the entire management process cannot exist (Isen, A.M., 2001). The decision is defined in this context as the ones that were taken to reach the goal in the fastest time, with minimal effort and costs. (Luc and Separi, 2001). Frauenknecht in 2010, defined the decision as *"a course of action chosen by the decision maker as the most appropriate available means in order to achieve relevant goal or goals, to solve the problem that concerns it"* (P.117). Other researchers define decision as: *"the process of careful selection of an alternative among a group of alternatives so that this alternative achieves the maximum of results using the same resources"* (Brest, 2010. P.67). In this perspective, decision-making refers to the process by which the best available alternatives are chosen to solve a specific problem or face a situation that requires it, after studying the expected results of each alternative and its effect on achieving the required goals within the parameters of the regulatory environment. Campitelli explained that: *"decision-making is choosing an alternative from the available alternatives to find the appropriate solution to a new problem, resulting from a changing world"*. (2010. P350). Isen defined it as a rational process, mainly in three sub processes: research, comparison between alternatives, and selection (2001). The decision-making process relates to current developments and events up to the moment of selection and what follows them. It is a set of consecutive practical steps that the decision maker uses in order to reach at the most appropriate and best decision selection (Zaidatol et al., 2011).

Implementing a convenient leadership style has been found in previous researches to lead to better decision-making and problem -solving are indicators of effectiveness and success.

Effective Problem-solving is one of the crucial outcomes that makes an organization successful and promote the right performance needed among the leaders, colleagues, and followers (Yang, 2014). It has major effects on effectiveness, profitability, employee relations, absenteeism, turnover and success of the company (Rossi, 2014). According to a research conducted by Kalargyrou in 2012, results explained that: *"effective problem-solving makes employees satisfied in their job, they feel more responsible, accountable and committed to the organization"* (P.54). According to Coates et al. (2010 P.332), it is essential to have *"a motivated, positively oriented, empowered and satisfied academic staff to be able to solve problems"*.

Reviewing the literature allowed the researcher to identify the leadership styles mostly existent among governmental universities in Egypt. Now, these study intents to investigate which of these leadership styles: democratic, Autocratic and Laissez-Faire, lead to better decision-making and problem-solving.

## **Methodology**

Based on the review of the literature, the following proposed conceptual framework was developed. The research aimed to measure leadership styles presence at governmental universities and its impact on decision-making and problem solving among faculty leaders. Accordingly, the researcher follows a *quantitative research approach* in order to test the model shown in Figure 1. This study also seeks to answer the following research questions: (RQ1) what are the most common leadership styles among faculty leaders at governmental universities in Egypt? (RQ2) do faculty leaders at governmental universities in Egypt have decision-making and problem-solving efficiency? (RQ3) is there a relationship between leadership styles, and decision-making and problem-solving efficiency, among faculty leaders at governmental universities in Egypt? (Refer to Figure 1)

The *quantitative research approach* was conducted through the use of a structured questionnaire. The researcher examined many studies and researches that dealt with the decision-making for problem-solving efficiency. The researcher examined the measures that were used in these studies to measure leadership styles, decision-making and problem-solving efficiency. These scales were taken and adjusted by the researcher to suit the current research, like the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) developed by Bass and Avolio (2000), Faruk et al, in 2017 and Hubahib, in 2015. These measures used Likert scale statements. The Likert scale was a five-point scale from 5= very Available, 4= Available, 3= Somehow available, 2= Not available, 1= absolutely not available. The following table (Table II) shows the number of items to each scale. (Refer to Table II)

## Research Findings

For the statistical analysis of the data, the researcher used the SPSS (2.0) for the conduct of statistical treatments. The analyses performed were frequencies, reliability, correlation and regression analysis. The pilot study first consisted of 97 faculty members at three governmental universities: Cairo, Alexandria, Tanta. The total sample consisted of (384) faculty members at the three universities and the following sections will discuss the findings and the description of the sample.

### *Frequency Analysis:*

This study sought to ask academic faculty and staff for their input in this study. The participants came from different socio-demographic background. (Refer to Table III)

Considering the gender, 52.6% of the samples were Male and 47.4% were female. The respondents consisted of 56.7% Associate professors and 43.2% Professors. As for the specialization, 63.8% of the respondents had a theoretical specialization and 36.2% had a scientific specialization. Table 3 illustrates the output of the frequency analysis.

### *Reliability Analysis:*

The researcher measured the reliability of the questionnaire of using the Cronbach's alpha method. The second analysis that was conducted was the reliability analysis; it seeks to confirm that the scale consistently reflects the construct it is measuring. Cronbach in 1951 introduced a measure that is now common in the reliability analysis. Thus, the researched checked for the Cronbach alpha. According to Kline (1999), the acceptable value of Cronbach alpha in reliability analysis is at least 0.7. Any number lower than 0.7 indicates that the questionnaire is not consistent. The following table shows the coefficients of the scales. (Refer to Table IV)

### *Correlation analysis:*

Pearson correlation coefficient, as the correlation coefficient is a measure of the strength of the relationship between two variables (their level of measurement is either relative or irrelative), and the direction of the relation; and correlation coefficient value ranges between (+1: -1). The correlation coefficient (+1) indicates a perfect positive relationship, the correlation coefficient (-1) linear indicates a perfect negative relationship, while the correlation coefficient (zero) indicates the absence of the relationship (Senthilnathan, 2019). The following paragraphs illustrate the outcomes. Table V shows the coefficients.

- Democratic style & decision-making and problem-solving efficiency: According to the Pearson correlation coefficient, for the relationship between democratic style & decision-making and problem-solving efficiency, the coefficient was 0.561\*\*, this number indicates that there is a positive significant relationship (significant at the 0.01 level). The relationship is positive and moderate.

- Autocratic Style & decision-making and problem-solving efficiency: According to the Pearson correlation coefficient, for the relationship between Autocratic style & decision-making and problem-solving efficiency, the coefficient was -0.226\*\*. This number indicates that there is a negative significant relationship (significant at the 0.01 level). The relationship is negative and weak.
- Laissez-faire style decision-making and problem-solving efficiency: According to the Pearson correlation coefficient, for the relationship between laissez-faire style & decision-making and problem-solving efficiency, the coefficient was 0.042. This number indicates that there is no significant relationship. (Refer to Table V)

### **Regression Analysis:**

The method of Multiple Regression analysis to know the effect or the relationship between the dimensions of the explanatory variables and the dimensions of the dependent variable by estimating this relationship (Golberg, M. & Cho, H., 2010). The relationship between Leadership style and decision-making and problem-solving efficiency, will be considered significant because their p-values are lower than 0.05. However, if the p-value is greater than the common alpha level of 0.05, it indicates that it is not statistically significant. The numbers below 0.05 indicate that the relationship between the variables is supported. The following paragraphs illustrate the outcomes. Table VI shows the coefficients

-Democratic style & decision-making and problem-solving efficiency: According to the p-value, for the relationship between Democratic Style & Decision-making and problem-solving efficiency is supported. This number indicates that there is a significant relationship (sig.  $\leq$  0.05).

-Autocratic style & decision-making and problem-solving efficiency: According to the p-value, for the relationship between Autocratic Style & Decision-making and problem-solving efficiency is Supported. This number indicates that there is a significant relationship (sig.  $\leq$  0.05).

- Laissez-faire style decision-making and problem-solving efficiency: According to the p-value, for the relationship between Laissez-faire style & Decision-making and problem-solving efficiency is not Supported. This number indicates that there is no significant relationship (sig.  $\geq$  0.05). (Refer to Table VI)

### **Discussions and Conclusion:**

In this study, they were three research questions that the study sought to answer. The researcher used iterations, percentages, weighted average, percentage of availability, and estimating the answer to determine the reality of decision-making for problem-solving efficiency among faculty leaders in government universities

**Research Question 1: What are the most common leadership styles among faculty leaders at governmental universities in Egypt?** Based on this research, Prior studies indicate that there are various leadership styles present at governmental universities in Egypt. The common leadership styles that exist among faculty leaders in these universities are: democratic, autocratic, and laissez-faire styles. Leadership styles have modern and classical divisions. These present leadership styles in governmental universities in Egypt are the classical ones: autocratic, democratic, and laissez-faire. The reason for the presence of only classical leadership styles is the hiring policies that have always been present in governmental universities. Hiring in governmental universities is still to this day based simply on grades with no consideration to the individuals' leadership skills or decision-making skills. Each style could be effective to an extent according to administrative conditions and depending on the group of people being managed.

**Research Question 2: Do faculty leaders at governmental universities in Egypt have decision-making and problem-solving efficiency?** Based on the results of this study, faculty leaders at gov-

ernmental universities in Egypt have decision-making and problem-solving efficiency depending on the leadership style promoted in the HE institution. This research showed that the democratic and autocratic styles among faculty leaders have decision-making and problem-solving efficiency. Democratic leaders allow group members to participate in the decision-making and problem-solving which enlarge benefit to the decision by being performed to the real situation observed by the group member and solve real problems with effectiveness. When it comes to autocratic leaders, the relationship with decision-making and problem-solving skills have also been supported. This style performs well in crisis but group members grow and learn through observation only. Laissez-faire leaders make decision based on superficial knowledge and data. The Statistical analysis indicated that the relationship with decision-making and problem-solving skills is not supported.

**Research Question 3: Is there a relationship between leadership styles and decision-making and problem-solving efficiency, among faculty leaders at governmental universities in Egypt?** The research analysis shows that democratic and autocratic leadership styles are significant in decision making and problem-solving efficiency. Democratic leadership is a management style in which the leader encourages people to share their ideas, and then create all the available information into the best possible decision for the university. Autocratic leadership is a form of management in which one person makes decisions for his/her subordinates. Laissez-faire leadership is insignificant. Laissez-faire leadership is a form of leadership in which faculty leaders are hands off and leave group members to make decisions, which could lead to the lowest productivity among group members.

Based on previous findings as discussed in the literature and the emerged empirical analysis, the study recommends the following:

- For the democratic leader, the most effective style among the classic division of leadership styles, training courses are recommended to increase the capability of subordinates for enhancing the behaviors of empowerment and retain their performance.
- For the Autocratic leaders, they should start paying attention to the personal, practical and technical needs of the subordinates to confront the authority of autocratic leaders. Leaders should also take into account the individual differences between the subordinates, especially in the work assigned and tasks. More power should be given to subordinates for strengthening the delegation process.
- For the laissez-faire leaders, maintaining communication with subordinates is an important part of effectiveness. Giving direction guidelines and needed outlines for a better comprehensive workload and maintaining constructive and positive feedbacks is a great initiative to motivate employees.

This study provides several recommendations for future studies to improve the current research. It is proposed to investigate the interactional relationship between democratic leaders and change management process in Egyptian governmental universities in order to apply the mindset of development. It is also recommended that they investigate the relationship between leadership styles and decision-making and problem-solving in other contexts. Finally, it is recommended that future studies examine other managerial styles.

## **Research Implication**

In Egypt, public universities are organizations that exercise a public function, operating at 'arm's length' from Government. These universities perform their functions with some autonomy from ministers and public servants in their day-to-day decisions. This research paper seeks to examine each of the classic types of Faculty leader to better serve the current goals of public universities. Since public universities depend on strict guidelines or compliance, not all leadership styles are applicable.



The current results in this study indicated that autocratic leadership styles are significant in these institutions. This outcome implies that public universities need authoritarian style of leadership. This type of leader is essential and prerequisite. The university requires a person to focus almost entirely on results and efficiency. In public universities, the require leaders to ensure everyone is clear on the expectations and follows each procedure carefully and exactly so the work goes as smoothly as possible. The current research results also indicated that democracy style of leadership is significant. Therefore, this implies that leaders in public universities should make decisions alone or with a trusted group of employees. This research also shows that laissez-faire leaders are insignificant in public universities. This deems true since this leadership style is the opposite of the autocratic leadership type, focusing mostly on delegating many tasks to team members and providing little to no supervision. Thus, this study implies that this leadership style seems to appear less effective among faculty and staff when a leader gives them work without supervision. It causes an incline in productivity if employees are used to need consistent motivation and boundaries to work. High flexibility can lead to employees' being confused about how to do the work.

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