



About the Council

Mohammed Bin Rashid School of Government took the initiative to launch the Policy Council, a round table dialogue program, to promote meaningful dialogues that will enrich shared knowledge within government entities. The Council also aims to highlight vital public topics and policies of high priority within the framework of the renown achievements realized by government entities in the UAE in various fields, positioning them locally, regionally, and globally as leaders within their specializations. Additionally, the Council strives to encourage the dissemination of expertise, promote knowledge sharing, and ensure that all government entities benefit from the same. In this context, the School aims for participant diversity at every session, so as to include federal and local levels, central authorities, and specialized authorities, in addition to promoting the engagement of influential non-government stakeholders in relevant discussions. This will enable meaningful, comprehensive dialogues and the ability to tackle topics from a variety of perspectives, as the School seeks to restructure the Policy Council with a view to integrating it within comprehensive action agendas that will enable the Council to conduct in depth discussions of topics on the table. This, in turn, will enhance common understanding and knowledge-sharing efforts. The objectives of the Council can be summarized in providing a platform for cognitive dialogue between experts, specialists and stakeholders involved in the government sector with a view to highlighting issues of priority and importance on government and community levels. The Council also aims to document and disseminate dialogue in a balanced, comprehensive and practical manner to enrich cognitive content within government. Additionally, the Council strives to encourage individual and organizational communication and relationships, and to strengthen the cognitive network within government to enhance effective organizational cooperation. Finally, the Council strives to present insights and recommendations that will have an effective impact on joint action and the development of government performance.

THE FUTURE OF PUBLIC LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT: INNOVATING HOW WE THINK, AND WHAT WE DO?



Introduction

Developing the next generation of leaders is a recognised strategic challenge for UAE governments. The UAE has a population of approximately nine million people, of which nationals are estimated to constitute just sixteen per cent (c. 1.4 million) (UNdata, 2015). Facing such an imbalance in the population, it is a matter of national interest for Emiratis to hold leadership positions in organisations across all sectors and especially in government. As a result, a significant proportion of the Emirati population is expected to fill senior and strategic government posts.

Leadership development is seen as a key intervention to support the development of talent in government, and has seen significant investment. It is in all our interests for leadership development in government to be as effective as possible. This Policy Council creates a space for an invited group of government experts to reflect on recent research by MBRSG into the concept of public leadership and to examine its potential implications for both what we teach in public leadership development, and *how* we do it.



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Aims of this Policy Council

The purpose of this Policy Council is to gather government colleagues together for an exploratory discussion of ideas of public leadership, and how it could help us to think differently about leadership development within UAE government organisations. We aim to:

Explore the notion of public leadership for the UAE

Examine how ideas of public leadership are driving innovations in leadership development for governments elsewhere in the world

Discuss possible innovations in the content and design of public leadership development here in the UAE

Background Briefing

The idea of ‘public leadership’

In recent years, writing about leadership has become an industry that “continues, erroneously, to presume that leaders are all-important, that followers are unimportant, and that context is other than central” (Kellerman, 2013, p.135). Simply put, leaders themselves have received too much attention. Scholars from a range of perspectives have sought to redress this imbalance. For those of us working in government, the recently-emerged contemporary public leadership perspective is particularly relevant. Here the aim is to understand leadership in government and the public sphere, seeing it as shaped by its specific, bounded context. Public leadership is argued to be:

An interactive process between leaders and followers

Shaped by the unique purpose of government and the public sphere

The purpose of leadership in government is to address the challenges generated for our communities by rapid changes in the environment, whether these changes are security-related, economic, social, environmental or political – or a combination. Public leadership therefore involves exploring what might be done to enable society, business and government organisations to adapt to these changes confidently, and ensuring those adaptations are delivered and achieve the public value anticipated.

There are three major consequences for public leaders. First, leadership is about responding to and achieving change, collectively. Leaders must be able to strategically analyse change and determine options to respond (Van Wart, 2012). Second, in a world characterised by profound change, managing your own organisation well remains important, but is not enough: public leaders must be able to collaborate across organisational, sectoral, and national boundaries (Ansell and Gash, 2008; Crosby and Bryson, 2005). Here, leadership involves asking questions (Grint, 2005), through inspiring and encouraging innovation (Hartley, 2011), and consciously orchestrating change within communities (Heifetz, 1994). Third, public leaders need to pay attention to trust. As complexity increases, partners and co-producers need to trust public leaders and each other, both to collaborate and to accept the risks of innovation; the need to collaborate drives a need to attend consciously to trust, which is achieved through human relationships (Osborne, 2006).



Note: in the United Arab Emirates, it is important to exclude royal leadership from this discussion; here, we focus on leadership within government by senior government executives below the level of our royal rulers.

Public leadership in the UAE

MBRSG has recently conducted research into the presence and nature of the concept of public leadership in the UAE. The study involved empirical research into the personal accounts of public leadership by top government officials, and consideration of the emerging understanding of UAE public leadership for future research, and for leadership development. Key findings from this study were shared with Council members; these studies are however not reproduced or summarised here as it is anticipated they will appear shortly in academic journals.

Discussion Themes

The key themes that emerged during the policy council centred on the themes posited to frame the debate:

Theme 1: Public leadership in the UAE

This discussion focused on addressing the question below, with three key sub-themes emerging:

Do you agree that while good practices can and should be adopted from the private sector, leadership in government demands greater emphasis on particular values, skills and processes?

There are important skills and competencies that should be learnt from the private sector. It is important for the public sector to learn from leadership styles in the private sector. The Government Excellence Programme affords an example of successfully translating management concepts across the two sectors, introducing new tools, results, and practicality into the public sector since its inception 19 years ago.

Such adoption of practices should however be done thoughtfully: we need to have an eye on the context and the direction of policy-makers, and be ready to be inspired by private sector breakthroughs. For example, innovation, entrepreneurship, and foresight skills are all new desirable leadership competencies – introduced because the UAE government moves quickly to respond to new ideas, challenges and opportunities.



However, we do need to understand the different mix of competencies required in government; we need more research on which are specific to which sector (or context), and what the differences are. We need a mix, and we need to be dynamic, updating that mix as conditions change. In thinking about this, it is important to consider that in the UAE we also have significant cross-over of leaders between the public and private sectors

The purpose and values of public sector leadership are different. The public purpose and values of the public sector mean that government organisations have a different nature. For example, public sector values in the UAE include a commitment to happiness, public service, and long-term thinking. Further, the processes of government are also delimited by (values-inspired) bureaucratic laws. Thus the public sector context bears both greater complexities and unique responsibilities owing to the purpose and status of government. Our leadership development interventions must respond to these differences.

Some leadership development programmes for government are too focused on private sector competencies (examples given in Council but not reproduced here). Instead, we need tailored programmes that are based on the values of government in the UAE. Moreover, there are aspects of public leadership that offer advantages over private sector methods: for example public leaders build strong relations between government and its partners, drawing on the status of government to influence behaviours and organisational practices. We can draw upon these public leadership strengths to innovate leadership development.

The speed of change globally requires all of us to adapt quickly. Governments should however respond fastest because, as the briefing quoted, citizens turn to government to resolve challenges for them (Bennis, 2007). Governments hold a regulatory role, and so they need to anticipate and be ready for changes in markets and society. A recent example is the response to Uber (which turned the taxi industry model upside down). Leaders' thinking is central in this. This is a key distinctive characteristic for public leadership: needing to respond faster than business and wider society to rapid external changes.

We can of course borrow some ideas from the private sector. These must however be adapted. A key example is target orientation, but only if our target is trust. Trust is key: how do we teach future public leaders how to gain trust? Overall, being a government leader is harder.

Public leadership in the UAE has unique characteristics. Not only is public leadership harder than in the private sector, but leadership in UAE governments is particularly pressured. Working as a Director General for His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Prime Minister of the UAE and Ruler of Dubai is not easy! There are constant customer demands, budget demands, as well as urgent and direct instructions from His Highness. There are also regular announcements of new initiatives such as the focuses on innovation and foresight – and all of this generates lots of pressure to deliver, usually within tight time limits.

Government in the UAE has transformed in recent years, especially in Dubai. An excellent example is Jebel Ali Port which has shifted from a bureaucratic institution to a global organization managing 70 ports worldwide. (Indeed government worldwide is a source of more innovation than it is often credited for – for example, spinouts from the US military ecosystem). In the UAE private companies are now learning about customer service from government. It is perhaps wrong therefore to compare



all governments to the UAE, which is unique. It is therefore worth researching how UAE governments works in detail, especially the Dubai government [and so introduce that knowledge into leadership development programmes].

Leadership learning in the UAE operates like a peer system: we learn by observing and collaborating with others. Learning comes not from taught competencies in training courses but learning on the job, and here we get lots of opportunities to do that.

Theme 2: Innovating (public) leadership development

This theme focused on the following questions:

How might we innovate the content of leadership development (what we teach) to reflect the concept of 'public leadership'?

How might we innovate the design of leadership development (how we teach it) to reflect the concept of 'public leadership'?

How do we know when leadership development is successful?

We need to focus on values. If the values of the public sector are different to elsewhere, then the starting point is values. We need to consider how we define values, whether and how we can teach them, and how we might measure their impact. Leaders should be trusted by followers. To date, we have not sufficiently considered how to teach people to generate and sustain trust in leadership development interventions. There is an opportunity to enhance leadership development to address values, and to do so by exploring ideas of trust.

A strong example of trust is the people's trust in their leaders here in the UAE. We believe in our national leaders. We believe that under their leadership our KPIs in education, in healthcare, in competitiveness will improve. Some key values of public leadership include: transparency and being open, speaking with open hearts, and creating team spirit – all are important to gain trust from our people. These values should be supplemented by good communication skills too (which are key to enabling the intent).

Leaders must also be fair. The UAE is free from corruption at the leadership level today; it is important to remain vigilant that this remains the case. An important value here is fairness, which means people are evaluated fairly – on the basis of their contribution to the efficiency and effectiveness of our government, rather than on the basis of who they know.

In summary, future public leadership development programmes should emphasize soft factors. Technical ability, competencies are relatively easier to build; it's behaviour, or personality, that distinguishes leaders. We should specify the desirable characteristics of public leadership, especially the values. A key characteristic of a good leader is that, over time, he role-models achievement, building trust, to the point that people say 'he does what he says he'll do'. Lots of values are relevant to this leader: follower relationship, alongside competencies. The challenge then is to explore developmental processes: how do you nurture the desired characteristics, values? One option is mentoring, which is an effective tool because it ensures people are heard, listened to – as well as



being guided. A further idea may be to introduce values based tests prior to promotions and / or as part of the selection process for development programmes.

Experience-based leadership development. Many current government leadership development programmes in the UAE are conventional, focussing on the competencies and conditions required at a certain tier in government organisations. The key factor for success in leadership development programmes however is what we experience, how we experience it. Eighty per cent of leadership learning should be generated through the creation of learning experiences. The examples given in the briefing paper (of experience-based programmes in Australia and the USA) are what's needed: take trainees out into the field. Values, skills and techniques will come with this experience. In essence, this approach is in play in the Innovation Accelerators initiative here in Dubai because it brings innovation teams into practical partnerships with government departments – so an example is now available in the UAE too.

A number of approaches to experience-based learning are suggested. First, it is important to think globally and manage locally, learning from best practices. Good leadership development programmes should therefore include practical training that exposes participants to great practices, for example through benchmarking visits to developed nations. Second, leadership development programmes should enhance challenge management. Most programmes these days across both sectors follow the same model / approach, with the only differences being the teacher and perhaps the cases used. They have become normal, standardised training programmes. Now we need to focus on tackling challenges and problem solving, not just leading people. Fifty per cent of the programme should support learning through challenge-based experiences, for example learning from CEOs who are successful – and indeed those who have failed. Third, rather than put people in courses, we can instead consider supporting people during real projects to learn skills, competencies in context: this can create real leaders. Finally, we should aim for development to be tailored to individuals, not organisations or even groups. It is important to acknowledge however that while desirable, experience-based learning brings practical challenges for course designers; finding organisations willing to collaborate in particular.

Measuring leadership and leadership development effectiveness. The impact of leadership development is known to be difficult to measure. The reality for key programmes here in the UAE is that we don't definitively know how successful they are. It is hard to define and quantify success: what is successful, and what is not? How much of what participants later achieve as leaders is due to the earlier development programme? This is complex but important and needs more research.

In terms of understanding whether national leaders are successful, we can look at results. 'Give me a good leader and I'll show you a good country, organization, team'. In the UAE we have the examples of Sheikh Zayed – who demonstrated the principles of respect, love, respecting law, respecting others; and in Dubai we have His Highness Sheikh Mohammed, who has been the driving force in Dubai. How do we know their leadership is successful? Results.

Planning for future leadership. Alongside discussions of how we might innovate leadership development for current government talent, a fourth theme took a wider view, raising ideas and questions about future leadership over a longer-term horizon.

Public leadership capacity is a strategic issue for the UAE. The UAE demographic context is unique,



with roughly ten per cent Emiratis and ninety per cent expatriates. This makes it important for Emirati leadership programmes to remain a focus. Young, active UAE national leaders need to come through to replace older bureaucrats, who have older ways of thinking. Programmes to date have already had an important impact: these fresh new leaders are talking a completely different language [to their predecessors] because of these programmes.

Leadership might be considered at three levels – national, group and individual. At the national level, the role models are strong and the distributed leadership values very clear, exhibiting positive energy, innovation, happiness, and future orientation. His Highness Mohammed bin Rashid has given many lectures, and of course written Flashes of Thought – all of which can be sources for leadership development. National leadership was also the subject of MBRSG's first Policy Council, entitled 'The UAE Leadership School'. At the group level, we have made huge investments, but it is generally agreed that the outcomes achieved are less clear. At the individual level, the success achieved so far is debated. A key question for the future is therefore whether we invest in group or individual leadership programmes.

It is crucial that we ensure sustainability of the leadership style embodied by our current leaders. This means we must concentrate on leadership processes, not on individual leaders. A leader will pass away. We can keep up the momentum through style, principles, and attitude. Future forecasting is a central process and ability of leadership: predict the future and find alternative to upcoming challenges.

In fact, it is important to identify strategic capacity in all sectors, and identify the local capacity in each. As new sectors expand [owing to economic diversification] more opportunities open up for young people, giving them more options. This will afford young people the opportunity to pursue wider interests, so that they can pursue what they are interested in; they will have wider options than to join government. It will be important to measure the extent to which strategic positions across public organisations and organisations in emerging sectors are filled by local capacity.

We should also think globally! We have, and should have, the ambition to be looking at UAE nationals filling global leadership positions. This is an important and timely ambition for the UAE at our current level of maturity, for our leadership programmes and for the young people involved. We must innovate programmes accordingly: what worked 15 years ago may not be relevant for today's 'glocalised' world.

Young people across the country are key to the long-term future. In terms of inspiring leadership values, The Youth Gathering in September is a great example of our ministers and royal leaders sharing their values. Leaders being humble, listening – for a few hours – has a huge impact. Leaders pass positive energy on. The Youth Gathering is an example of leadership development in practice and potentially a model to be emulated? It is important to consider the pipeline of the young UAE nationals and residents who are coming through, as we need to direct them towards constructive outlets for their energy and skills, not just trying to go up existing career ladders – or falling into non-constructive activities. We need to think about what leadership will be like in the future, to help them (and us) prepare. For example, leaders are getting younger: you can be a Director General within 10 years and private sector organisations are increasingly led by younger people too. We must strategize about what will be needed and support young people to meet the challenges that they are likely to face in the future.



Council Recommendations

- The Council concluded with each participant highlighting the most important ideas or themes that emerged for him during the discussion. In summary these were:
- Simply put, **we need more and more effective public leaders** in the UAE: this remains a strategic issue.
- **Values are vitally important** to the development of public leaders in the future. Designing development interventions to inculcate values may be a complex task to deliver, but it is important. There may be different ways of examining and articulating values – for example, being clear about the distinctions between public and private values; articulating values in terms of the personalities desired, rather than technical competencies; focussing on behaviours; and/or starting from the concept of leader-follower trust.
- We need to **encourage innovation in leadership development**. Until now, standard, typical approaches have been adopted. We need to be more innovative, to develop new types of programmes; and to ensure the programmes we develop are themselves adaptive to the changing context.
- **More challenge-led development** would be a good innovation to introduce; however, we should not underestimate the practical first step of finding people willing to open up their organisations and public problems to our students.
- We must identify **how we can learn across all the leadership development programmes** here in the UAE, to accelerate the learning cycle and help to ensure each is more responsive to the future needs of our governments.
- We need to **make development opportunities more interesting** to stimulate and be relevant to young people.
- **Research how government works in the UAE**, so that tailored and specific content can be introduced into leadership development programmes.



Reflections from an International Expert

Rajeev Peshawaria is CEO of The Iclif Leadership and Governance Centre, Malaysia, a partner of MBRSG. Rajeev was asked to offer some reflections on the discussion and recommendations of this leadership development policy council from a distance, helping to bring an additional international perspective to the table. Rajeev's thoughts are presented below.

The \$80 billion a year leadership development industry is simply not delivering better leaders in both public and private sectors. Why? Because of some age-old myths about leadership that need to be busted:

Myth 1: Followership = Leadership: For hundreds of years, we have confused followership with leadership. Parents love and reward kids who listen and are obedient. School and college teachers do the same. They don't like students who ask too many questions or think "outside the classroom." Thomas Edison was thrown out of class for asking too many questions. Organizations too reward compliance in the name of leadership, and even Boards demand best practice case studies before approving new ideas. Whichever way we look at it, followership is confused for leadership.

Myth 2: A position of Authority = Leadership: Two of the most powerful examples of leadership in the 20th century are Mahatma Gandhi and Nelson Mandela. Both had no political office, authority or position for much of their lives. The Dubai miracle is hardly because of His Highness' power of oil wealth. A simple comparison with other governments in the region that also have oil wealth and power but haven't succeeded at all, tells us that leadership is made up of something other than position power or wealth.

Myth 3: Leadership can be learned through competency models and best-practice case studies: In today's world, the rate of change is faster than ever before. The days of look-back competency models are over.

Myth 4: Leaders are born, not made: There is absolutely no proof that genetics or heredity have anything to do with leadership. Charisma, personality type and other external traits have no correlation whatsoever to leadership greatness. Instead, leadership has everything to do with character, which is deeply intrinsic.

So, what then is leadership? It is a burning desire to create a better future, and not giving up when the going gets tough. To not give up, the leader needs limitless "leadership energy" which is the combination of deep values and purpose clarity.

And how should leaders be developed? At the individual level, leadership development must move away from competency models and personality tests towards awakening the force (leadership energy) within, and developing character by helping individuals uncover their unique values and life purpose. At the organizational level, leadership development must decode the forces of collective energy, and teach leaders how to harness it.

Using life-changing experiences rather than PowerPoint presentations, leadership development must become a deeply reflective journey if re-invention.



Participants

Deciding how we might innovate leadership development in government demands a series of inter-related choices that involve consideration of evidence, values, and capacity. In this MBRSG Policy Council, we brought together key influencers surrounding leadership and leadership development in UAE government departments to explore some key options.

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