

Leadership in a Military Context: The Case of the Dubai Police

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Abstract: Leadership is among the critical factors in any police force that helps them to achieve their goals. However, limited studies have focused on police leadership and those studies were conducted in western countries. Thus, this study aims to explore police leadership in a military context in non-western countries. Qualitative research methodology was used to achieve the aim of this study and to answer the research questions. Dubai Police which focuses on fostering human capital including leaders, was selected as a sample for military context. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with ten leaders working in the Dubai Police force who were asked about police leader conceptualisation, whether police leaders are born or made, what are the most important traits for police leaders and, finally, leadership development strategies in the police forces. NVivo Software (version 14) was used to analyze the data. The interviews have obtained the aim of the study and answered the research questions. The findings provided a more complete in-depth description of the leadership in a military context. The results showed that; 1) Police leadership conceptualization is defined as influencing others and also it is process. 2) Police leaders are born and made. 3) Strong communication skills, decision making and integrity were observed to be among the most important traits for police leaders. 4) Police leadership development strategies included formal education, training courses, experience and learning in practice. The study had extended police leadership literature, and confirmed the applicability of results of studies conducted in western countries on those of non-western ones that give priority to police leaders and focuses on achieving organizational strategic direction. Concerning practical contributions, this study serves as foundational research for other researchers who are interested in this field in a new regional context, especially in the Dubai Police.

Keywords: Dubai Police, Police leader traits, Leadership conceptualization, Police leadership development strategies, Military

1. Introduction

Alsuwaidi and Mansor (2022) argued that leadership in police forces is a significant element of the managerial process. Moreover, it is among the vital predictors in judging whether police forces are able to effectively perform in dynamic environments (Pearson-Goff and Herrington, 2014).

Pearson-Goff and Herrington (2014:p.5) demonstrated that effective police leaders engage the following five activities; *'creating a shared vision, engendering organizational commitment, caring for subordinates', driving and managing change, and problem solving'*.

Given the significance of leadership in police forces, some authors (Schafer, 2010; Shrestha, 2015) argued that there is a dearth of literature concentrated on police leadership matters, moreover, the majority of studies have been conducted in western countries, such as the United States of America (Oliver, 2013) and Norway (Nilsen, Aaserud and Filstad, 2018).

Furthermore, Hunt and Fedynich (2019) stated that the concept of leadership is shifting in the following areas; definitions, dimensions and methodologies. Finally, there is a new emerging theme in leadership theories such as Transformational, Ethical, Charismatic leadership in which leadership is related to the culture (Shrestha, 2015).

Dubai, one of the seven emirates within the United Arab Emirates (UAE), is considered as one of the safest cities in the world (Alsuwaidi and Mansor, 2022). Indeed, the Dubai Police force established in 1956, is categorized as one of the best security forces at a global level. Currently, the Dubai Police prioritizes its leadership, which is part of its strategic direction. Since the Dubai police announced its three strategic directions, innovation in organizational capabilities is the third main direction which focuses on developing the human capital - including leaders- effectively and efficiently (Dubai Police, 2023).

Moreover, the Dubai Police has won several international excellence awards (e.g. European Foundation for Quality Management model) and local excellence awards (e.g. Dubai Government Excellence program) and in which leadership is a significant enabler and concept (Dubai Police, 2023). Thus, Dubai police leaders could be one of the success factors that lead the Dubai Police to achieve this categorization, as according to Boshears (2020) there is direct relationship between the efficiency and productivity of police forces and the efficiency and productivity of their leaders. However, limited empirical studies have focused on leadership in the Dubai Police (Alameri, et al., 2019; Al Saadi and Al Mahasina, 2021; Alsuwaidi and Mansor, 2022). Thus, there is a need for additional studies to deepen the understanding of leadership in the Dubai Police context.

Recognising the theoretical and contextual gaps, this study aimed to investigate the following research questions; how is leadership conceptualized in a police context? Are police leaders born or made? What are the most significance traits for police leaders? What strategies are used to develop police leadership?

Thus, this study is among the first to overcome the limitation and investigate police leadership in a new context such as the Dubai Police.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Leadership in a Police Context

Pearson-Goff and Herrington (2014:p.2) defined policing as ‘the act of enforcing laws, preventing and solving crime, maintaining order, and promoting security and safety through the use of legitimate authority’. Toch (2008:p.82) described police forces as ‘hyper-bureaucratic military organizational attributes-those of formal rank, formal hierarchy, and a chain of unquestioned and unquestioning command’.

Haberfeld (2006:p.3) defined police leadership as ‘the ability to make a split second decision and take control of a potentially high-voltage situation that evolves on the street’.

Police forces are interested in leadership for several reasons: it supports police performance (Alsuwaidi and Mansor, 2022), leads to the achievement of required results and organizational effectiveness (Al Saadi and Al Mahasina, 2021) and enhances organizational innovation (Alameri, et al., 2019).

Several scholars attempt to identify major themes in police leadership. Schafer (2010) clarified that the main two directions in policing leadership literature are; 1) Implementation of both organizations’ and leadership theories in a police context. 2) Empirical studies aimed to describe how ranked employees go about engaging in the acts of leadership, supervision and management, principally through the progress of behavioral typologies. While Haake, Rantatalo and Lindberg (2017) added other themes by mentioning that international police leadership studies have focused on how it can be characterized (i.e. transactional or transformative), factors that influence leadership, and the culture(s) of the police informing leadership initiatives .

Indeed, the majority of prior studies have been conducted in western countries (Pearson-Goff and Herrington, 2014). Thus, there is a need for additional studies in police forces in new areas such as Dubai to compare to what degree studies related to police leadership in western countries are applicable to other forces.

2.2 Are Police Leaders Born or Made?

Chaturvedi, et al. (2012) clarified that scholars are interested to investigate to what extent both genetic and environmental factors influence leadership. That’s why some scholars (Durić and Šumi, 2018; Afrianty, 2020) clarified that whether leaders are born or made is a debatable question.

The following could be the reasons of the difficulty for identifying whether leaders are born or made. First, Conger (2004) clarified that many factors structure the degree to which a person becomes a leader, such as genetic predisposition, family environment, education experiences, hardships, work experiences, managers, organizational incentives, and training. Second, the leadership theories are also not agreed in terms of whether leaders are made or born. Shrestha (2015), reviewed the main leadership theories and found that some leadership theories such Great-man theory and Trait theory believe that leaders are born, while Behavioural theory states that leadership is made. Contemporary leadership theories (e.g. Emotional intelligence, Servant, Team , Cross- cultural) consider leadership is by choice. Finally the new leadership theories (e.g. Transformational, Ethical, Charismatic) stated that leadership is by culture.

However, it has been observed that there were a lack of police studies that attempted to answer this question. Thus, there is a need for additional empirical studies to investigate whether leaders are born or made in police forces, such as the Dubai Police where focusing on human capital, including police leaders, is one of organizational strategic direction.

2.3 Police Leaders’ Traits

Zaccaro, Kemp and Bader (2004:p.104) defined leader traits is ‘as relatively stable and coherent integrations of personal characteristics that foster a consistent pattern of leadership performance across a variety of group and organizational situations’. These characteristics represent a variety of stable individual differences, comprising personality, skills temperament, abilities, motives, cognitive and expertise (Zaccaro, Kemp and Bader,. 2004).

Oliver (2013) clarified that identifying police leaders' common traits has as a positive impact on police leaders job effectiveness, since effective and positive leaders are distinguished by traits that are not usually owned by non-leaders (Zaccaro, Kemp and Bader, 2004)

Limited studies have been conducted in a police context (Schafer, 2010; Oliver, 2013; Shrestha, 2015), however, there is no agreement among these studies with regards to the most significant traits required for police leaders. For example, the study by Schafer (2010) highlighted 12 police leaders common traits and habits, on the other hand Oliver (2013) suggests 12 competencies, 12 qualities, and 11 attributes required for effective police leaders.

Furthermore, it has been noticed that these studies were conducted in the United States of America (Schafer, 2010; Oliver, 2013). Therefore, Oliver (2013) called for additional research that might generate other findings and conclusions.

2.4 Police Leadership Development Strategies

Leadership development is defined as 'the expansion of an organization's capacity to enact basic leadership tasks needed to accomplish shared, collective work' (McCauley, Van Velsor, and Ruderman, 2010).

Dalakoura (2010) clarified that leadership development strategies are generally designed and conducted either internally by the human resources specialists or externally through consultants, and academic co-coordinators.

There is agreement among some scholars (Durić and Šumi, 2018; Boshears, 2020) that leadership development is significant for police leaders. Boshears (2020) highlighted the fact that leadership development strategies provide leaders with the crucial skills needed to perform their tasks more effectively, to solve work challenges, besides making capable decisions.

Few police scholars aimed to identify police leadership development strategies. For instance Durić and Šumi (2018) categorized the following three strategies; 1) Structured programs which concentrated on a human's skill development (e.g. feedback, coaching, assessment, action-oriented development plan). 2) Developing leadership through experiences: since on-the job experience through assessment, challenge, and support advances leaders' capabilities. 3) Deliberately developmental organizations which is considered a new concept that reflects continuous leadership developmental practices in the culture of an organization. While Nilsen, Aaserud and Filstad (2018) argued that there are three leadership development strategies as follows: 1) Teaching leadership in official leadership training programs or more specific education. 2) Learning in practice: such as learning by doing, conversations and exchanging ideas with experienced leaders. 3) Learning through reflection: which involves leadership development outside of a leader's everyday practice and utilizing peers for the chance for reflection, in addition to exchanging experiences with others.

Murphy (2022) clarified that the picture of police leadership development literature is incomplete. Thus, there is a need for additional studies in new contexts to generalize the achieved results.

3. Methodology

The study employed qualitative methodology, using semi-structured interviews with participants from the Dubai Police.

Qu and Dumay (2011) illustrated that semi-structured interviews are based on prepared questioning directed by recognised themes in a convenient and systematic way. Moreover, these kinds of interviews can disclose central and often unknown features of individual and organisational behaviour.

As there was insufficient knowledge about police leadership, particularly in non-western countries, interviewees from the Dubai police force were asked questions with regards to 1) Identifying how police leadership is conceptualized, 2) Highlighting whether police leaders are born or made, 3) Recognising the most important traits for the leaders in police forces, and 4) Distinguishing leadership development strategies in police forces.

3.1 Participants and Interview Guide and Procedures

The sample consisted of ten police leaders in the Dubai Police, seven were males and three females. The participants' ranks ranged from lieutenant to colonel. Regarding job titles, three were directors, the other three were head of sections and the rest had other job titles.

The interview protocol drew from the main themes in the literature, such as police leadership conceptualization, their main traits and current strategies used in police leadership development.

To determine the adequate amount of interviews required for qualitative studies, many scholars depend on theoretical saturation, which is defined as *'the point at which no unique information or themes are observed in the data'* (Guest, Bunce and Johnson, 2006:p59). Conducting ten interviews, each of approximately one hour, helped to reach data saturation.

To preserve the identity of the participants, they were distinguished by referring to them with numbers from 1 to 10, as will appear when the results are discussed in the next section.

3.2 Data Analysis Procedure

Codes were influenced by the data, the relevant literature, the study aim and the research questions. On completion of the interviews, the qualitative data analysis process began. With the goal of exploring police leadership, a thematic analysis was used to code the data. A maximum of three layers of nodes was used in coding to conduct a fine-grained analysis of the qualitative data.

Rowley (2012) stated that NVivo software is very helpful in simplifying the analysis of interview transcripts. Thus, NVivo (version 14) was used to analyse the collected data.

4. Findings and Discussion

The following four themes emerged from the collected data:

4.1 Police Leadership Conceptualization

Participants were asked: *what do you mean by police leadership?* All answered this question. The conceptualization focused on the following two aspects;

Six participants defined leadership by influencing others. For example, participant (3) defined leadership as *'The leaders ability to influence others behaviour, particularly their followers'*. While four participants defined leadership as process. For example, participant (10) defined the concept as *'The ability to manage followers to perform their job responsibilities and requested tasks based on their job designations'*.

The use of multiple definitions for leadership was supported in leadership literature in general (Hunt and Fedynich, 2019; Afrianty, 2020) and the police leadership literature (Schafer, 2010). Indeed, most literature found a common theme in many definitions of leadership is influencing others (Schafer, 2010; Afrianty, 2020). According to Afrianty (2020:p.17) leadership is *'skills or abilities to influence others in order to reach a shared goal by making some changes'*.

While according to Alsuwaidi and Mansor (2022) police leadership is related to the managerial process. That's why some scholars believed that leadership is about process (Njoku and Nwosu, 2020). Njoku and Nwosu (2020:p.69) stated leadership *'is about directing other people to do complete tasks'*.

The findings supported two of four leadership conceptualization dimensions presented by Ronald (2014) who defines leadership as influencing others and it is a process. As a direction for future research, there is a need for additional police studies to examine the following two dimensions of leadership conceptualization; it requires a group environment and it targets achieving a specified goal.

4.2 Are Police Leaders Born or Made?

Participants were asked: *are police leaders born or made?*. Nine participants believed that police leaders are born and made. For example, participant (1) said (both, leaders are born and made. Leaders are born with some qualities and at the same time there are leadership skills such as innovation which can be learned). While only participant (2) clarified that police leaders are made, as he said *'leadership is related to the situation, as a leader in one situation might be a follower in another due to the presence of someone who is more capable than him)*.

The majority of participants believed that police leaders are born and made. This result is aligned with those existing in leadership literature (Shrestha, 2015; Afrianty, 2020). An explanation for this result may be found in evidence provided by Conger (2004), who clarified there are several biographic and social factors that help people to become leaders.

While limited participants argued that leaders are made, which is aligned with the behavioural theory that states that leaders are made not born (Shrestha, 2015), and Zaccaro, Kemp and Bader (2004) who clarified that some people can be productive as leaders in some circumstances but not in others.

This study is considered to be among one of the first studies that have investigated this question in a police context in non-western countries, which lead to generalize the achieved results.

4.3 The Most Significant Police Leaders Traits

Participants were asked: *what are the most significant traits required for police leaders?* This section has focused on the top three traits that were agreed among all participants as follows;

First, participants clarified that strong communication skills are one of the main traits for police leaders. For instance, participant (9) mentioned 'police leaders must have strong communication skills to help in dealing with clients complaints and be able to manage followers problems and direct them effectively'.

Second, participants stated that decision making is a vital trait for police leaders, as participants (10) said 'police leaders must be able to make the right decisions based on the available information'.

Third, participants agreed that integrity is amongst the compulsory traits of police leaders. For instance, respondent (3) stated 'integrity is a necessary trait for police leaders, in all departments and police stations'.

Njoku and Nwosu (2020) mentioned that police leaders' jobs requires some personnel skills to be effective. The findings showed the three most significant police leaders traits are as follows;

First, strong communication skills. Pearson-Goff and Herrington (2014) argued that communication is one of the major traits that police leaders should have, as the police leader needs to communicate with both the police force and their followers. Thus, the achieved results are aligned with some police studies (Oliver, 2013; Garner, 2018) that considered strong communication skills as a vital trait that help police leaders to perform their tasks effectively.

Second, decision making. Garner (2018) justified the significance of decision making as a trait for police leaders, since they have potential for affecting the force and the community. The findings supported several empirical studies that have concluded that decision making was among the police leaders' traits (Pearson-Goff and Herrington, 2014; Garner, 2018).

Third, integrity. Oliver (2013) clarified that a police force is an integrity-based occupation for leaders, which justifies considering integrity as a required trait for police leaders. The achieved result is supported in studies that target police leaders (Schafer, 2010; Oliver, 2013) which found that integrity is one of the key traits for police leaders.

Oliver (2013) argued that there is lack of studies with regards to the most significant required traits for police leaders. Thus, the findings filled this gap in literature, and showed that strong communication skills, decision making and integrity are among the most significant police leaders traits in a non-western context like the Dubai police which has never been examined. So, it answered Oliver (2013)'s call for further research about police leaders' traits. Moreover, the results were aligned with police leaders' studies that have been conducted in western countries such as the United States of America (Garner, 2018), United States of America, United Kingdom, Canada, New Zealand and Australia (Pearson-Goff and Herrington, 2014).

4.4 Police Leadership Development Strategies

Participants were asked: *what are leadership development strategies used in Dubai Police?* The participants mentioned four strategies as follows;

First, all participants agreed that joining formal education programs is an effective means for leadership development. For instance, participant (10) said 'Dubai Police enhances leadership by encouraging the leaders to join education programs like Master's degree to improve their knowledge'.

Second, all participants clarified that participating in training courses improve leaderships in the police context. For example participant (3) said 'Dubai police conduct leadership training courses to enhance leaders capabilities by attending internal and external training courses'.

Third, eight participants stated that developing leadership through experiences is a vital strategy that is used frequently in the Dubai police force. For example, participant (4) said 'Exchanging experiences with peers and former leaders helps a lot to develop police leadership'.

Finally, seven participants illustrated that learning in practice is an effective tool to boost police leadership progress. For example participant (7) mentioned 'working in teams, discussing with subordinates and working in different projects help to develop leadership and to find solutions for work challenges'.

Police forces allocate time and resources for leadership development to improve leaders duties and responsibilities (Boshears, 2020). This study indicated that the following four strategies are effective for leadership development ;

First, Nilsen, Aaserud and Filstad (2018) demonstrated that formal education promotes a leadership role and helps to gain more self-confidence on how they function as leaders. The findings confirmed the previous studies which concluded that formal education is a tool to develop police leadership (Schafer, 2010; Murphy, 2022).Second, Boshears (2020) clarified that police forces must run training courses to help police officers to become leaders. Indeed the result is consistent with those studies (Schafer, 2010; Shrestha, 2015) that provided evidence that training is one of the strategies utilized in police leadership development strategies. Third, according to Conger (2004) experience is one of the factors that shape the degree to which a human resource becomes a leader. Therefore, some studies have revealed that experience is among some leadership development strategies (Nilsen, Aaserud and Filstad, 2018; Murphy, 2022) in the police context. Fourth , Nilsen, Aaserud and Filstad, (2018) clarified that learning in practice is one of the successful strategies in leadership development. Therefore, the findings help to generalize the prior studies that showed that learning in practice (Nilsen, Aaserud and Filstad, 2018) and some examples such as feedback that enhances learning by doing (Schafer, 2010; Durić and Šumi, 2018) and networking with leaders from other police forces (Schafer, 2010) are considered as an adequate strategy for leadership development.

Murphy, (2022) discussed that there is lack of studies with regards to police leadership development strategies. That's why, this research has helped to fill in this gap and clarified that formal education, training programs, experience and learning in practice are among effective leadership development strategies in police forces.

Moreover, police leadership development strategies conducted in the Dubai Police supported the classification of leadership development strategies in a police context (Nilsen, Aaserud and Filstad, 2018; Durić and Šumi, 2018) and at the same time, are aligned with studies examined in western countries like in Canada (Murphy, 2022) and Sweden (Österlind and Haake, 2010). Finally, the result confirmed the argument by Boshear (2020) concerning the necessity of the integration of both formal (i.e. education) and informal (i.e. experience) learning into leadership development strategies.

5. Conclusion

This qualitative study aimed to explore leadership in a military context in non-western countries. Semi-structured interviews were used to collect the data. NVivo Software (version 14) was utilized to analyze the data from ten Dubai Police leaders.

This study was able to fulfill its aim and answer the research questions. The major findings were: 1) Police leadership is conceptualized as influencing others and it is a process, 2)Police leaders are born and made, 3)Main traits required for police leaders are strong communication skills, decision making and integrity, and 4) Police leadership development strategies included formal education, training courses, experience and learning in practice.

The findings have contributed to police leadership literature in several ways. First, one of the gaps identified is that only limited studies investigated police leadership (Schafer, 2010) and these limited studies were in western countries (Pearson-Goff and Herrington, 2014). Thus, this is among the first study to have investigated police leadership in non-western regions such as the Dubai Police. Second, evidence regarding whether leaders are born or made is mixed, as leadership theories have categorized leaders as either born or made (Shrestha, 2015) and at the same time others agree that leadership is much wider and several gene and environmental factors help in formalizing leadership (Conger, 2004). Thus, the results provided a better understanding of the holistic nature of leadership.

In terms of contextual contributions, the findings revealed that although the Dubai Police operates in a non-western country, the results showed the generalizability of police studies that have been examined in western countries. The justification might be that the Dubai Police applies best practices at work (Dubai Police, 2023), which includes leadership issues. Moreover, the findings provided empirical justifications for Dubai which is considered among the safest cities in the world (Alsuwaidi and Mansor, 2022) and Dubai Police as one of best security forces at a global level (Dubai Police, 2023). The lesson is that the investment in police leaders could be one of the reasons for the resulting high international level of safety and security. Thus, police forces should consider police leadership expenditure as a long-term investment that will benefit the forces.

This study provided useful implications for police forces who prioritise leadership at the workplace. The findings suggested that police forces must realise that it is not sufficient to rely on employing leaders who own required traits, as there is a need also for a mechanism that clarifies- in parallel- used leadership development strategies. Furthermore, the obtained results help the police forces to identify the significance link between organizational strategic goals such as enhancing human capital – including leaders- and used policies such as leadership development strategies in order to fulfill those strategic goals.

6. Limitations and Direction for Future Research

There are several limitations related to the current study. First, this study was conducted only in one police force. There is a need for other empirical studies to be conducted in different non- western countries to generalise the results. Second, there is a need for other studies that consider other factors such as gender and rank (Njoku and Nwosu, 2020). Finally, there is a need for additional studies to examine police leaders inefficacy in order to generalize the achieved results from Schafer (2010) in a new context.

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