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UNDERSTANDING ARAB MANAGER S MINDSETS

Abstract:

This research is devoted to understand Arab managers' mindsets and to conceptualize their perceived implicit theories from cultural perspective .It assumes that Arab managers have simultaneously two different mindsets, growth mindset and a fixed mindset. That is, Arab managers have different mindsets because they do belong to more than one culture; espoused Islam and Islam-in-use. This inconsistency of the mindsets constitutes a main feature of the Arab mind. The synthesizing implicit process of the Arab mind enfolded both espoused Islam and Islam-in-use integrating some basic values and principles and allowing the rest, especially, perceived capabilities and time orientation as inconsistent and even contradictory mindsets. However, the Arab managers mindsets are rarely cultivated with espoused Islam even though they would operate as the fulcrum between ideal Islamic values and traditional norms depending on which is cued in the organizational context.

Consequently, this conceptualization of the Arab mindsets is very meaningful to western partners regarding how they should cultivate and express their own preferences and do business in the Arab world. An understanding of the Arab manager mindsets is valuable for international business players from west or other cultural contexts

Keywords:

implicit theories, Mindsets, Espoused Islam, Islam-in-use, Arab manager Mindset

JEL Classification: M16

Introduction

Research on implicit theories across cultures is one of the most mature streams of cognitive psychology, social psychology, organization and management (Dweck, 2006; Dweck and Hong, 1995; Hong et al,1997; Rucker and Galinsky, 2016; Chen, 2012; Dupeyrat and Marine,2005; Dweck, 1999). However, the bulk of research pertaining to mindsets or implicit theories has been conducted in the western settings or some emerging economics such as China, India or Malaysia (Siha et al, 2009; French II, 2016). Despite the fact that Arab world is of a strategic significance to the west due to its historical, geopolitical position, cultural role, natural resources and lucrative business opportunities, the Arab culture has not received adequate attention from researcher to allow for in-depth understanding Arab managers behavior. There is a paucity of theory and research regarding attributes or mindsets (Ali, 2009; Lalonde,2013).

Mindsets are implicit beliefs people hold about the plasticity of their individual characteristics, qualities or abilities that guide their behavior, perceived skills, personality and leadership capabilities. In other words, they are implicit theories about malleability of human attributes and abilities within a specific social or business domain.

Implicit theories demonstrate that people who hold an entity implicit theory, more intuitively relabeled by Dweck (2006) as a fixed mindset view their abilities as carved in Stone and that little can be done to change it (Dweck, 2006; Heslin and Keating, 2016). Dweck (1999) theorized that people hold a growth mindsets view their abilities as malleable and able to be developed (Dweck, 2006; Yeager and Dweck, 2012). However, this research assumes that Arab managers have simultaneously two different mindsets, growth mindset, an active one, while other mindset is available even though it is hidden and implicit. It highlights the concept of two Arab mindsets which are culturally grounded either on the espoused Islam (the ideal values and principles) or Islam-in-use (traditional Arab culture and Bedouin norms). Arab managers have different mindsets because they do belong to more than one culture, Islamic culture and tribal Bedouin culture. Thus, the current research is devoted to understand Arab manager's mindsets, and to conceptualize their perceived implicit theories from holistical and contextual perspective. This conceptualization of the Arab mindsets is very meaningful to westerners of how they should cultivate and express their own preferences and do business in the Arab world.

2- Literature Review

2.1 Understanding Arab Culture

There is ample evidence that culture has a great impact on an individual's behavior (Su, 2007).It is viewed as a set of values, attributes, assumptions and shared behavior of a given group (Eszter & Heidrich, 2004). According to Hofstede, culture is the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one human group from those of others (Hofstede, 1980; Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005). Group members share common history and collective shared memory and therefore hold common values and beliefs. They have shared motives, traditions and interpretations or meanings that are transmitted across age generations (Dickson et al, 2012). Research a cross-culture is one of the most mature streams of management and

business literature (Hofstede, 1980, 1999, 2011; Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005; Trompenaars & Turner, 1998; Schwartz, 2006; Staeheli, 2003; Hall, 1976). However, most research has been directed toward western societies. Arab culture has been ignored or misunderstood in business research.

Although, Arab world is of major significance to the west due to its strategic, geopolitics, natural resources, and its lucrative investment opportunities (Berger et al, 2015), Cross-cultural researches focusing on Arab business culture are scant. Notwithstanding, recent attention paid to cross culture management, few research papers have been forthcoming on the topic of national Arab culture characteristics and values (Hall, 1976; Barakat, 1993; Patai; Trompenaars, 1996, 2000; Schwartz, 1999; Nydell, 1996; Hofstede, 1980). Drawing on the work of Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck (1961), Trompenaars identifies seven dimensions by which cultures can be distinguished from each other: universalism-particularism, collectivism-individualism, affective-neutral relationships, specificity-diffuseness, and achievement-ascription. Later Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (2000) distinguished five value orientations: universalism vs. particularism, individualism vs. communitarianism, neutral vs. emotional, specific vs. diffuse, and achievement vs. ascription. Two of them seem particularly interesting in the context of the Arab culture. The achievement means that you are judged on what you have recently accomplished. Ascription means that status is attributed by your connections (Trompenaars & Turner, 2000). In Trompenaars and Turner's results, the Arab world is ascription oriented (the question is likely to be who you know or where did you study).

Further, results on universalism versus particularism show that Arab culture represented by Egypt and Bahrain is clearly particularistic (Klein et al, 2009). Hall (1976, 1981, 1990) has proposed a model of three cultural dimensions; context, space, and time. In high context culture much of the meaning is conveyed indirectly through the context surrounding a message. While in low context culture message itself conveys its meaning. Space measures the extent to which people are comfortable sharing physical space with others. Hall classified space into center of power and center of community (Hall, 1981; Nardon and Steers, 2009). Time dimension measures the extent to which people approach one task at a time or multiple tasks simultaneously, namely, monochronic time (M-time) and polychronic time (P-time).

The Arab culture is characterized as high context, center of community and polychronic time. In (P-time) system several things happening at time. They stress involvement of people rather than adherence to the present schedules. It is in this respect Arab peoples who are almost never alone interact with several people at once, they are around in the same spaces. Polychronic time is apt to be considered a point rather than a ribbon or a road, and that point is sacred (Hall, 1976). According to Hall (1990) Arabs and Americans live in different sensory worlds and do not use the same senses. Arabs make more use of olfaction and touch than Americans. They interpret their sensory data differently and combine them in different ways.

Schwartz's framework like Hofstede and Trompenaar's models is a value based and introduces the concept of value priorities (Staeheli, 2003). Schwartz (1992) defined a value as a desirable trans situational goal which serves as a guiding principle in the life of a person or other social entity (De Groot and Steg, 2010). Based on the analysis of data from 73 countries, he identified there polar dimensions: Autonomy versus embeddedness, hierarchy versus egalitarianism and

mastery versus harmony. In autonomy cultures people are viewed as autonomous bounded entities. They should cultivate and express their ideas feelings and find meaning.

However, there are two types of autonomy, intellectual autonomy and affective autonomy. According to Schwartz intellectual autonomy encourages individuals to pursue their ideas and intellectual directions independently, whereas, affective autonomy encourages individuals to pursue affectively positive experience for themselves. In such culture as Arabic culture with an emphasis on embeddedness people are viewed as entity embedded in the group. Meaning in life comes largely identifying with the group and participating in its shared way of life. The Arab culture is especially high in embeddedness and low in affective and intellectual autonomy (Schwartz, 2006).

Furthermore, researchers have been confused Arab culture traditions with espoused Islam and Islam-in-use. Some scholars were confused between high Islam of the scholars and the low Islam of the people (Gellner, 1992; Nydell, 1996; Patai, 2002). One constraint acting upon western scholars who tried to understand Islam and Arabs was an analogical one, since Christ is the basis of Christian faith it was assumed quit incorrectly that Mohammed was to Islam as Christ to Christianity (Said, 1977). Thus, so saturated with meanings, so overdetermined by history, religion and politics are labels like Arab or Muslim (Said, 1985). Further, it was with very reluctance that what Muslims Said Muslims believed was accepted as what they did believe (said, 1977). Another type of constraints that raised questions about cultural identity for both Arab Muslims and Arab Christians was their adoption of the Arab culture (Cordoba & Coope, 1997).

The term Arab and Arab Muslim are often viewed as inseparable to represent Middle East, North Africa, Arab world or Muslim world. However, most Arabs are Muslim, not all Muslims are Arabs. Islam today is like Christianity, a religion of many nations and cultures, it has flourished in areas as diverse as the Middle East, Asia, Africa, Malaysia and Indonesia (Cordoba & Coope, 1993). Notwithstanding, despite some difference all Arabs share basic beliefs and values which cross national boundaries (Nydell, 1996). They are shared Arab culture; shared system of meaning. As its inception, the Arab cultural is identity has been seems as based primarily on the language history and Islam. Thus, the old badu- hadar (Bedouin- Sedentary) divisions in the Arab world have not disappeared (Barakat, 1993). In this context, Arabs have been influenced by both Islam and traditional Arab culture including tribal and Bedouin values.

In the literature, scholars have addressed some tribal and Bedouin values considered prevalent in the Arab culture: Solidarity, chivalry, and individuality (Barkat, 1993), dignity, loyalty, and reputation (Nydell, 1996), courage, generosity and self-respect (Patai, 2002), hospitality and honor (Sharabi, 1992). Consequently, a comprehensive examination of the Arab culture reveals conflicting value orientations in the current Arab culture (Barakat, 1993). Patriarchy and loyalty to family along with shame feeling, face saving, strong personalism associated with self-respects are main determinates of the Arab people behavior. Thus, Arab managers are often considered as more traditional than their western counterparts (Lalonde, 2013; Ali, 2009). The Arab manager primarily identified in terms of his or her network of obligations (Rosen, 2006). He is likewise expected to show personal integrity in order to be socially acceptable. Lack of guilt saving face and feeling shame the Arab manager maintains his guiltless appearance at all

costs (Tibi, 2012). Honor or face saving is more important than facts. However, contradictory value orientations still exist in the contemporary Arab culture: neopatriarchy and modernity, inner vs. outer direction, directness vs. indirectness, humanism vs. Islamism, future vs. past orientation, shame vs. guilt, collectivity vs individuality and fixed vs growth mindsets (Barakat, 1993; Tibi, 2012; Joseph, 1996; Evangellos, 2004; Said, 1977; Said, 1985; Gellner, 1992; Rosen, 2006).

2.2 The concept of Mindsets

Although, divergent conceptualizations of implicit theories reveal disparate frameworks and fluctuate between disciplines, these theories have been imperative for individuals and organizations (French II, 2016; Dweck, 2006; Heslin & Keating, 2016). Implicit or mindsets theories have a long history in the fields of cognitive psychology, social psychology and organization theory. However, from social psychology and organization theory both theories and research about mindsets vary as a predisposition to see the world, heuristic or a frame of reference (French II, 2016). People hold self-beliefs about the stability or malleability of their abilities. These self-beliefs termed mindsets can either be fixed or growth. Mindsets are considered to be a range of self-beliefs with a fixed mindset (McCutchen et al, 2016). Further, mindsets are the implicit assumptions that people hold about the plasticity of their capabilities. They are a mental framework that guide how people think, feel and act in the context (Dweck, 1999). Implicitly, mindsets affect our lives in many ways including self-regulation, self-esteem, and stereotype threats (John and Park, 2015).

An entity implicit theory more intuitively relabeled by Dweck (2006) as a fixed mindsets represents the assumption that such personal characteristics are essentially carved in stone and that little can be done to change them (Dweck, 1999). In contrast, an incremental implicit theory more readily known as a growth mindset (Dweck, 1986) addresses the assumption that individual characteristics can be cultivated through concerned effort to do so (Heslin and Keating, 2016). When people hold growth mindsets they tend to embrace challenges and construe effort for mastering tasks.

However, according fixed mindsets or entity theory people with more fixed mindsets view their capabilities fixed, unchangeable amount. On the other end of the measurement scale, those with more growth mindsets view their abilities as something can be grown or developed overtime. Thus, people can vary in their implicit theories from more of a fixed mindsets or entity theory to more a malleable, incremental implicit theory or a growth mindset (Yeager and Dweck, 2012).

While mindsets occur on a continuum between the fixed mindset and growth mindset, most people typically hold either a primarily fixed mindset or growth mindset about their personal qualities and attributes (Keating and Heslin, 2015; Dweck et al, 1995)

In conclusion, the core of mindsets theories point to more than one rare mental state that captures either fixed implicit theory (fixed mindset) or incremental theory (growth mind). However, these two distinct mindsets are hidden and rarely made explicit within a specific

cultural context. Implicit theories as Dweck argues are the proximal determinants of people behavior without invoking goals orientation or other mediating variables (Dupeyrat and Marine, 2005). Notwithstanding, research should examine the relationship between an individual fixed mindset or a growth mindset and culture value orientations about activity, capability and performance.

2.3 The Arab Manager Mindsets

Arab managers have been conceptualized as a combination of idealistic-pragmatic, conservative-progressive, traditionalist-modernist or individualist-collectivist (Ali, 1998; Barakat, 1993; Sharabi, 1992). However, this research argues that Arab manager have relatively two different mindsets, growth mindset associated with espoused Islam and a fixed mindset associated with Islam-in-use. Espoused Islam theory refers to ideal Islamic values and beliefs, Islam-in-use has deeply roots in the traditional Arab culture including the tribal and old Bedouin culture. The synthesizing implicit process of the Arab mind enfolded both espoused Islam and Islam-in-use integrating some basic values and principles and allowing the rest, especially perceived capabilities and time orientations as inconsistent and even contradictory mindsets. In literature (Dweck et al;1995, Dweck, 2005) claimed that their model consists of two exclusive choices, growth mindset and a fixed mindset. Namely, there is one possible choice. However, they did agree that people can potentially hold both mindsets (Likoum, 2015). In other words, they can hold two mindsets simultaneously or they hold one determinant mindset, an active one, while other mindsets still available even though it is hidden or implicit. We assume that people in the Arab world hold two different mindsets (growth and fixed). That Arab managers do not always fit the Islamic norms, thinking and values However, there is individual heterogeneity in thinking, logic mentality and behavior among them (Fatehi et al; 2015). In this regard, if one assumes that multiple or different mindsets exist, a vital question that arises is how all of the different mindsets relate to one another (Rucker & Galinsky, 2016). One possibility is that a one dominant mindsets exists among two or more mindsets. Thus, some Arab managers may believe that their organizational capabilities are relatively stable entity because they are under mentality of the Islam-in-use.

While some others believe that their abilities are a malleable or the same person view ability differently in other domain as implicit theories can also be domain specific (Chen, 2012). Different mindsets might be more relevant to organizational domain in particular or they may operate in the same domain (Rucker & Galinsky, 2016). Nevertheless, given the essential role of the Arab cultural traditions which are associated with Islam-in-use, Arab managers can vary from more of a fixed or entity theory to more of a malleable or incremental theory or a growth mindset. Managers who hold a growth mindset are mainly focused on improving their efficiency and effectiveness (Dupeyrat, and Marine, 2005). They are positively oriented toward learning, knowledge creating and mastery innovation. In contrast, a fixed mindset inclines abilities as fixed and unchangeable quality. It involves assuming that the personal attributes that influence human behavior in an organizational domain are largely fixed and thus not likely to change much over time (Vandewalle Don, 2012). Consequently, two different mindsets have been resulted in the practice. That is, Arab managers hold two contradicted mindsets means one holding fixed

mindset and a growth mindset belief simultaneously, the growth mindset associated with espoused Islam and fixed associated with Islam-in-use (traditional Arab culture). This inconsistency and contradictions constitute a core feature of the Arab manager mindset.

The Arab manager mindset is rarely cultivated with espoused Islam but can operate as the fulcrum between Islamic values and the traditional and Bedouin norms depending on which is cued in the organizations context.

3. Conclusion Implications and Future Research

Research on implicit theories across cultures is one of the most mature streams of cognitive and social psychology, organization and management. However, the bulk of research pertaining to implicit theories has been conducted in the western settings or some emerging economies. Despite the fact that Arab world is of a strategic significance to the west, the Arab culture within organizational context has not received adequate attention from researchers for in-depth understanding Arab manager's mindsets, value orientations, communication patterns, roles and behaviors. Cross culture researches focusing on Arab business culture are scant. However, researchers have been confused Arab traditions with espoused Islam and Islam-in-use. Some scholars were confused between high Islam of the scholars and the low Islam of the people. Thus, so saturated with meanings so overdermined by history, religion and politics are labels like Arab or Muslim. Another type of constraints that raised questions about cultural identity for both Arab Muslims and Arab Christians was their adoption of the Arab culture. The term Arab and Muslim are often viewed as inseparable to represent Middle East, North Africa, Arab world, or Muslim World. Notwithstanding, despite some difference all Arabs share basic beliefs and values which cross national boundaries. They are shared Arab culture; a shared system of meaning. As its inception, the Arab cultural identity has been seen as based primarily on the language, history, and Islam. Thus, the old badu-hadar (Bedouin- Sedentary) divisions in the Arab world have not disappeared. In this context, Arabs have been influenced by both Islam and traditional Arab culture including tribal and Bedouin norms. The Arab culture is high context, ascription oriented, clearly particularistic, characterized as center of community, polychronic in time, high in embeddedness and low in affective and intellectual autonomy.

Consequently, a comprehensive examination of the Arab culture reveals conflicting value orientations, patriarchy and loyalty to family along with shame feeling, face saving strong personalism and self-respects. Thus, Arab manager primarily identified in terms of his social networks. If lack of guilt saving face and feeling shame, the Arab manager maintains his guiltiness appearance at all cost. Honor or face saving is more important than facts. Furthermore, contradictory value orientations still exist in the contemporary Arab culture: neopatriarchy and modernity, Inner vs. outer direction, directness vs. indirectness, humanism vs. Islamism, future vs. past orientation, shame vs. guilt, collectivity vs. individuality, and fixed mindsets vs. growth mindsets. However, there is a paucity of theory and research regarding attributes of the Arab managers associated with their perceived implicit theories or mindsets.

This research is devoted to understand Arab manager and to conceptualize their perceived implicit theories from holistical and cultural perspective. It assumes that Arab managers have simultaneously two different mindsets, a growth mindset and a fixed mindset. That is, Arab managers have different mindsets because they do belong to more than one culture, espoused Islam and Islam-in-use (The Arab culture norms). However, this inconsistency of the mindsets constitutes a main feature of the Arab mind. Moreover, the Arab manager mindsets are rarely cultivated with espoused Islam but can operate as the fulcrum between ideal Islamic values and traditional tribal and Bedouin norms. Consequently, this conceptualization is very meaningful to western partners of how they should cultivate, communicate, and express their preferences and do business in the Arab world. An understanding of the Arab mind and more specifically, the Arab manger mindsets is valuable for international business players from west or other cultural context. Needless to say that inconsistency and contradictory of the Arab manager's mindsets can in no way do valid without empirical investigations. Thus, regarding future research it is essential to investigate empirically the Arab mindsets in terms of their cultural background, espoused Islam and Islam-in-use within organization's context.

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