

Original Publication by David Noer, Christopher R. Leupold and Matthew Valle
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Managerial coaching is a concept that focuses on the use of managers within an organization to help guide employee performance and leadership development. In this article, the authors examine cultural influence on coaching behaviors, and the observed differences between two distinct management environments in the United States and Saudi Arabia.

The rationale behind the comparison of US and Saudi managerial coaching strategies is twofold. Saudi Arabia, currently in control of much of the world's oil supply, is also a close political and economic ally of the US. The study presented in the article was conducted on a Saudi organization that, following the loss of a number of western managers amidst the country's attempt at domesticating its industries, was not seen by its top management as adequately prepared for its present challenges.

According to the authors, managerial coaching is primarily focused around behavioral methods of developing self awareness, in depth role playing, practice of new skills etc., and to furthermore develop insight into, and connection with employees. While there have been few studies in the field of US-Saudi managerial coaching behaviors, previous studies of more generalized "Arab" values show an inherent tendency for collectivism and towards emotional orientation. Saudi management culture has been shown in several studies to exhibit strong family orientation, persistent traditional values and a historical basis for modern action. Many of the Saudi managerial traits date back to the Ottoman system but are nonetheless an inherent part of Saudi management. While it would appear that such culturally based differences would make international cooperation difficult, the authors of the article hypothesize that such a paternalistic relationship may in fact make Saudis more receptive to supportive coaching than their US counterparts.

The hypothesis presented by the authors of the article is threefold: Saudi managers will be more homogenous in their coaching behaviors than US managers; the Saudi sample will exhibit more supporting and challenging behaviors than the US sample; there will be no significant difference between subject group scores on the assessment dimension.

The experiment conducted by the authors took 71 US and 80 Saudi Arabian managers, all of whom had upper-middle management positions, and who participated in three day coaching workshops between 2003 and 2004. The characteristics of the groups tested were that they all came from technically oriented businesses (Saudi technical managers and US info-systems managers), the Saudi organization was significantly decentralized in nature, and US group was gender diverse whereas the Saudi group was all male. According to the authors, prior testing of this latter effect revealed it to be negligible. In

addition, the Saudi group was western educated, a unique characteristic of a Saudi organization. The test utilized by the authors was a 30-item self assessment test based on the Triangle Coaching Model (Noer, 2005), which focuses on three sets of behaviors: assessing, challenging, and supporting.

The results of the experiment revealed a higher variance in managerial coaching strategies in the US sample than in the Saudi sample. The authors speculate that Saudi homogeneity in management coaching strategy is perhaps due to stronger historical ties, and collectivist and hierarchical orientations. Finally, the authors found that the Saudi group would in fact exhibit more supportive and challenging behaviors than their US counterparts.

The authors' discussion of these results reveals that a greater unwillingness to depart from the norm, in terms of coaching strategies, is likely the result of heavy Islamic cultural influence. The authors also found Saudi managerial strategy to be significantly more feminine than that of the US sample, in that Saudi managers try to establish personal relationships between manager and subordinate. In concluding their discussion, the authors point out that despite the difference in coaching behavior between the Saudi Arabian and US samples, Saudi and US managers are equally focused when it comes to gauging employees' performance.

The authors conclude the article with a suggestion for further research. The Saudi sample, which was predominately Western educated and from a highly decentralized organization, may have caused potential bias due to limiting non-cultural influence. Additionally, the authors note, the inclusion of multiple US and Saudi Arabian organizations would be desirable. Also noted is the apparent lack of gender diversity in the Saudi sample, as well as the potential bias of self-report tests.

Applications of the study's findings, note the authors, may be useful for US managers to better understand their relationships with Saudi colleagues, and to ground relationships on a personal level and with collective outcomes in mind. Furthermore, note the authors, Islamic values of participation, equality and respect are compatible with US coaching approaches.