# Leadership Styles in the UAE: A Theoretical Analysis

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**Abstract--**Leadership development has over the years, emerged as among the fastest growing sectors globally. The United Arab Emirates (UAE) in particular has become the focus of an increasing interest in leadership development initiated by different players from the non-profit, private, and public sectors. This has seen the emergence and increase in different leadership programs, especially towards young people in the region. As such, it can be indicated that the UAE is saturated with development programs on leadership offered by governments, both local and international institutions, the private sector, for-profit consultancies, non-governmental organizations, and other agencies. However, the nature and plurality of these actors call for the better understanding of leadership development for young people in the region so as to understand its challenges, achievements, and other related factors. This paper consists of two parts; a theoretical analysis and a pilot study of two leadership styles in a public organization in the United Arab Emirates.

**Key words--**Leadership, leadership styles, entrepreneurial mindset, participative, democratic, authoritative, UAE

## I. INTRODUCTION

Most of the providers and practitioners in the UAE employ the term leadership development because their programs mainly center on the development of skills, knowledge, abilities, and talents associated with leadership roles. In this regard, leadership development delves on honing both interpersonal effectiveness and competence. Consequently, according to Al-Dabbagh and Asaad (2010), most of the leadership development programs in the UAE are mainly centered on human development that focuses on young people (3). Leadership development for young people, according to Almohaimeed (2015), refers to inspiring adolescents, secondary, college students, and other young people into desired leadership activities, experiences, and formal and informal programs using different leadership development tools over a certain period. Regardless, the diversity in leadership programs in the UAE shows the diversity in prominent definitions of leadership in the world.

**Significance of Leadership Development in UAE**

It is imperative to highlight that increased importance is attached to leadership development in the UAE. According to WAM from the Emirates News Agency, the UAE leadership considers the youth as the region's best hope for the continuity of its accelerated development path. The establishment of different empowerment programs

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instituted by the nation's president that are intended at developing a clear path to ensure a better future for the UAE is proof of this. The Emirates New Agency also adds that young people possess the will, knowledge, as well as culture to execute the region's forward-thinking leadership vision to enable a prosperous and prominent UAE. Such emphasis only works as proof that leadership development for the young in the UAE is given increased prominence and importance with the government taking a leading position in these efforts. Moreover, the Mohamed Bin Rashid School of Government (MBRSG) Policy Council Series provides that leadership development in the UAE is regarded as a vital intervention to buttress the establishment of talent in the government and as such has been awarded significant investment (1). This significance can perhaps be evidenced by the National Staff revelation in The National, UAE's magazine, that Vice President Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid recently launched training primarily focused on young leaders. WAM from the Emirates News Agency also adds that the government finds it important for young Emiratis to engage actively in the development of the regions parliamentary process through contributing to the electoral process. The participation of the young, in this regard, is considered necessary as it allows for the desired representation of UAE nationals while strengthening the sense of national duty, patriotism, and the dedication to the public interest. According to Benchiba-Savenius and Scott-Jackson (2016), the region's leadership also believes that developing tomorrow's leaders is an important vision for the prosperity of the region. Moreover, youth leadership benefits not only the young but also positively impacts communities and the wider society. Redmond & Dolan (2016) state: "Youth leadership, as distinct from adult leadership, focuses on the methods by which leadership can be explored, taught or experienced by young people". They also give guidelines on how to develop youth leadership. First, they advise on using "a conceptual model" for youth leadership development and state: "It is argued that developing a comprehensive youth leadership program, that considers the elements outlined in the conceptual model, will enable tangible outcomes be realized for the young people involved

**Practices in Leadership Development**

Most of the leadership practices employed in the UAE are similar to those used in other countries. For instance, the UAE employs coaching almost at the same level as Scotland (Al Naqbi, 2010). Similarly, the region also employs the 360-degree practice mostly in government organizations compared to private organizations, which is also the same in the case of Scotland. Both countries also find the 360-degree practice vital because it directly recognizes the variance across sources and gifts the opportunity to see different aspects of a person's behavior and performance. Al Naqbi also mentions mentorship as the common practice employed by UAE. The author states that in this regard, leadership development is achieved by matching an individual's assignments with his/her developmental needs (Al Naqbi, 2010). Other practices the author notes are common between UAE and other countries include networking and action learning. A particular leadership style drives the leaders to behave in the most compatible way to their environment and the members for influencing them to contribute their efforts for a desired work. In the United Arab Emirates, the leaders in public as well as private sector organizations are influenced by various factors. These factors contribute to their styles of leading their members, and help them succeed. These factors may involve the position at workplace, power associated to the role, experience of the leader, expertise and knowledge, charismatic power, age, gender, an many more including various demographic factors also.

**Challenges in Leadership Development in the UAE**

While leadership development for the young is prominent in the UAE, the MBRSG Policy Council Series reveals that developing UAE's next generation of leaders is a strategic challenge. It reveals that while the UAE has a population of about nine million, the nationals are approximated to comprise around 16%, which is around 1.4 million (MBRSG Policy Council 1). This thus presents an imbalance in ensuring all young Emiratis secure leadership positions. According to Benchiba-Savenius and Scott-Jackson (2016), the UAE is experiencing challenges in turning youths into leaders. According to the authors, there is a need for about 64% of Emiratis to be leaders if all the possible strategic and business leadership positions are to be occupied by Emiratis. This means that in order to achieve this goal, a majority of UAE nationals should be leaders, an achievement that is encumbered by the imbalance in the population.

However, Al-Dabbagh and Assaad (2010) believe that the challenges facing leadership development programs in UAE are more likely to be different as the leadership development programs. For one, the authors indicate that most of the initiated programs have a difficulty in defining leadership conceptually. For instance, while one program defined leadership as the ability to have a leadership position in an organization, the other made defining leadership a stated goal while considering collectiveness in clarifying its meaning (Al-Dabbagh and Assaad, 2010).

As such, among the main challenges of leadership development programs in the UAE is to better understand as well as conceptualize approaches to leadership development. While it is important to have individual approaches which are of course also easier to define and justify, applying them without including relational approaches does away with the affluent body of research regarding leadership as a composite interaction among people and environments.

Secondly, Al-Dabbagh and Assaad (2010) also indicate that most of the leadership programs have a difficulty in defining what they mean by public good. It is important to note that many of these programs hold it that leadership development of a client results in the development of the public good or even the overall welfare of the community. Nonetheless, not many of the programs articulate with clarity what they mean by public. For instance, some programs refer to the public as UAE citizens. However, such a definition appears to be problematic as it preempts a more composite understanding of membership as a global context's understanding of community. Consequently, this leads to difficulties in embedding individuals into global, regional, and local contexts. Another possible challenge, according to the authors is the ability to address the tension existing between prominent western perspectives regarding leadership and realities and needs of the locals (Al-Dabbagh and Assaad, 2010). In most of the programs, there were encountered difficulties in reconciling Western perspectives and the realities of the local people and programs in the UAE.

Regardless of the above, various authors see the need for better practices to enable better leadership development for the young in UAE. For instance, Al-Dabbagh and Assaad (2010) see the need for improved practices such as incorporating actual public good into leadership. On the other hand, Benchiba-Savenius and Scott-Jackson

(2016) suggest that future research initiatives should identify important motivations, aspirations, and capabilities of young Emiratis to suggest the most effective approaches to development.

Given the points above, it is clear that leadership development is a prominent subject in UAE. Furthermore, the points suggest that many authors mostly focus on the development programs targeting the young. Most importantly, they indicate the idea that various parties tackle the concept using different approaches mainly because of diversity in the definitions of the concept of leadership. Similarly, the literature indicates that challenges also emerge because of these explanations. Regardless, the points indicate that leadership development for the young is an increasingly important subject in the UAE with authors suggesting the need for better practices to ensure better leadership development. Increasingly important subject in the UAE with authors suggesting the need for better practices to insure better leadership development.

The main objective of this research is to discuss the participative, democratic, and authoritative models of leadership, including the qualities of the leaders who employ the approaches in their interaction with the people who follow them. The thesis will specify the pros and cons of the three models. Also, the thesis will determine the behavior and performance of leaders that enable them to become good leaders and create a distinction between them and non-effective leaders.

Entrepreneurial mindset refers to the thinking ability of the manager or higher authorities for taking up risks, encouraging innovative ideas, implementing new methods and having clear goals to enhance the return on investment. Entrepreneurial mindset means to explore opportunities and innovations. It is a capacity or perspective to recognize and exploit new open doors through adaptable, receptive, creative and restoration outlook. It is required by individual business visionaries and administrators. The most significant parts of the entrepreneurial mindset contain imagination, inspiration, and affinity to go and take risks. An entrepreneurial mindset develops a positive work culture and enhances collaboration among the team members towards achieving success. The entrepreneurial mindset helps employees to progress towards success through high levels of intrinsic motivation. Entrepreneurial mindset means to explore opportunities and innovations. It is a capacity or perspective to recognize and exploit new open doors through adaptable, receptive, creative and restoration outlook. It is required by individual business visionaries and administrators. Components of innovative outlook contain leadership qualities, convictions and way to deal with issues; perceive openings, sharpness, genuine choice rationale and structure; assume liability, get results, worth and riches creation, share the riches, client, and quality-driven. An entrepreneurial mindset is expected to be specific through innovativeness, development, and accepting open doors outlooks. The most significant parts of the entrepreneurial mindset contain imagination, inspiration, and affinity to go and take risks. Entrepreneurship mindset is about re-discovering out of box approaches and ideas to generate profit and reach success. Many times, the voice of employee is left unheard. It leads to low morale, and low satisfaction level among employees. Suggestions and ideas are not listened too and the entire organization works in a unidirectional approach. Entrepreneurial mindset is the mental ability of leaders to think out of the box, apply innovation, keep quality high, and to seek opportunities in the risks to attain success.

Three crucial objectives are fundamental to the ambitions of this exploratory and explanation study; firstly, to explore and investigate what contributes to the formation of young people into future leaders; secondly, to clarify and understand how young people become future leaders; and thirdly, to create a comprehensive framework for developing secondary students as future leaders. We will also look at the leadership styles of current mature professional leaders.

**Performance and leadership style**

It is worthwhile mentioning that performance may be affected by leadership style. Indeed, research has shown that leadership styles can have an impact on the performance of a given entity, organization or company. It is worth noting that leadership is a skill like any other. In as much as there are people who are always better than others, this skill needs constant sharpening and strengthening. Leadership development is highly dependent on the performance of the leader as well as the people who are around him or her (Day et al, 2014). When a leader develops, the capacity to perform his or her roles within the specific position improves. One can handle more complex issues and gets better at making decisions that affect the entire organization that one leads. One has to invest in leadership development through the performance that they adopt. Notably, performance can be improved by several actions that a leader can deliberately apply. It depends on the personal characteristics of an individual as well as the environment that they work. In as much as people can gain new and effective behavior; some leaders decline to accept change, thus affecting the way they perform in their capacities. Also, future events, including the predictable and the unpredictable ones also affect the performance of leaders. Training in leadership skills also contributes significantly to leadership performance. These factors can lead to positive or negative leadership development, depending on how one approaches them. Organization performance is a crucial element in any organization. It is defined as: "Organization performance comprises the actual output or results of an organization as measured against its intended outputs (or goals and objectives). It is a broad construct which captures what organizations do, produce, and accomplish for the various constituencies with which they interact"… "Measure of efficiency and effectiveness, with which administrators take advantage of resources to satisfy customers and achieve the goals of the organization" (IGI Global, 2019). Organization performance is determined by the performance of the employees and leadership style to a great extent. According to research, leadership style contributes to the profitability performance of the companies. Moreover, leadership style creates a positive work atmosphere based on responsibility, flexibility, standards, employee well-being, rewards, leadership training, commitment and clarity. Profit involves the positive outcome of an activity. In leadership, the actions that individual leaders use can determine the outcome of the respective groups or organizations that they lead. The effectiveness of a leader is directly related to a more profitable venture (Antonakis and House, 2013). Consistent improvement is achieved in a setting where the leadership initiatives and development are strong. To be able to realize constant growth and improved outcomes, the leadership development and model have to be linked to the immediate activities of the group that the person leads. Profit levels provide a distinction between effective and non-effective leaders. In essence, effective leadership leads to a higher value, both social and economic, for an organization. On the other hand, a leadership that is inconsistent and unreliable leads to deterioration of profit. On this note, leadership development and style play a crucial role in determining how a group progresses. Good governance involves a situation where the leadership observes the human rights of the followers (Stahl and Luque, 2015). It entails

promotion of gender equality and equitable distribution of resources among all the people under the particular leadership. Good governance is mostly used in international affairs to ensure that governments observe all the fundamental human rights of their respective citizens. It focuses on the responsibility of national leadership in meeting the needs of the people. In essence, good governance focuses on the democratic style that is used in the western nations.  The concept of good governance focuses on some essential qualities of leadership that promote the equal distribution of resources in an entity. For instance, participation is a characteristic that involves getting all the people to take part in decision-making. Participation of all individuals promotes the freedom of speech that is fundamental. Apart from that, transparency entails adopting accessibility between the leader and the followers. The leader should be accountable to all the people that one leads.

Strategic vision is another quality of good governance that involves focusing on the development of the people in the short-term as well as the long-term. Leadership needs to ensure that it sets a clear path for the followers. Further, leadership under good governance adopts consensus orientation of all the followers. The leader can bring all the people on board and make them feel part of the group. Achievement in leadership development involves attaining the results that a leader sets for the followers and organization at large. Effective leaders influence positive performance among the followers. Therefore, they attain a collective achievement. They know how to balance the various talents that the people have and tuning them to work on achieving a common goal. It is worth noting that motivating all the followers is not an easy task. Leaders who achieve this are resilient and know the exact needs of the people they lead. They inspire the followers through their behavior and how they interact with them.  Achieving the targets is a deliberate effort that leadership undertakes by focusing resources on the results. The leader develops a suitable culture that all the followers can observe. The culture is centered towards the vision that guides the attainment of the targets that are set. The leader also observes the strengths and weaknesses of the people and takes appropriate action.

The participative model of leadership involves a situation where the leader takes part in the daily operations of the group that one leads (Nanjundeswaraswamy and Swamy, 2014). The leader invites the subordinates in decision-making and setting of goals for the organization. However, the final decision rests with the leader. He or she acts as the facilitator during the interactions with the followers. Every person is given an equal opportunity to express his or her views and concerns. A person who practices participative leadership has certain qualities that enable them to achieve it. Notably, the leader is a team builder. He or she knows how to engage the subordinates amid their differences and unique capabilities and weaknesses. Apart from that, the leader can empower the followers and enable them to achieve their full potentials (Yunus et al, 2015). They are willing to give the subordinates a chance to express their skills, giving them confidence and motivation. Also, the leader is always there to help the employees when they make mistakes. She observes the growth of all the followers and guides them accordingly. Chawla and Sharma (2017) defines the participative leadership as: "The leader shares the decision-making ability with the group members. It is also often called democratic leadership style. Ideas move freely amongst the group. The discussion is free-flowing. This style is required in rapid and dynamic changing environment where very little can be taken as a constant" (Chawla & Sharma, 2017).

Yukl (2013) defines this type of leadership as: "Participative leadership involves the use of various *decision procedures* that allow other people some influence over the leader's decisions. Other terms commonly used to refer to aspects of participative leadership include *consultation, joint decision making, power sharing, decentralization, empowerment,* and *democratic management*. Participative leadership can take many forms and includes several specific decision procedures. Although primarily a relation- oriented behavior, participative leadership also has implications for achieving task objectives and implementing change". One advantage of the participative style of leadership is that the leader boosts the morale of the followers, making them function at their optimal levels. Further, the subordinates can easily accept the changes that a leader introduces because they trust the leader. Despite these, the style also has disadvantages. For instance, the leader may lose the authority over the subordinates. It could lead to poor performance in the organization. Democratic style of leadership entails the flow of ideas within a group. It is similar to the participative model because they both focus on enabling subordinates to contribute ideas over important matters (Nanjundeswaraswamy and Swamy, 2014). The model applies more effectively in environments that experience rapid change. The leaders who adopt this model are flexible and can adapt to change faster and guide the followers to do the same effectively. Democratic leadership looks at the unique skills and abilities of individual followers and lets them bond to form a strong force that can propel the group to grow. The leader distributes responsibilities and encourages the group members to work hard and achieve the targets. Democratic leadership style keeps the employees and other members motivated, increases their productivity and performance with guidance, facilities, and support to improve the overall organizational performance. The democratic leadership style has an advantage in that the leader encourages the followers to come up with creative ideas and solutions for problems. Further, the leadership helps in creating satisfaction among the followers. Since the leader earns the trust of the subordinates, he or she can easily make them look at issues from his or her point of view. However, a setback of this model entails lack of clarity at times, especially when there is little time to accomplish a specific task. Pares et al define democratic leadership as: "Even though democratic leadership could be understood as leaderless – there is no need for a leader – it cannot be devoid of leadership. Rather than leaderless, democratic leadership is a form of collective and concurrent leadership…does not need single leaders but it can produce organizations or groups full of leadership, as it requires full participation in leadership and decision-making at all levels of an organization…" (Pares, Ospina, & Subirats, 2017, p. 42). The authoritative style of leadership entails a situation where a leader can create a vision and guide the people in understanding it (Nanjundeswaraswamy and Swamy, 2014). It involves motivating the followers and showing them the benefits of following on the vision. The leader can also influence the people into full commitment. This style is most effective where a vision is needed or when a particular vision is not clear enough.

**Authoritative Leadership**

"The leader makes all the decisions alone without the effort of the others. The leader possesses all the authority and can enforce his or her decisions on team members. The judgment of autocratic leader cannot be challenged. This leadership style benefits the team members who need close supervision" (Chawla & Sharma, 2017, p. 201). One aspect of an authoritative leader is that they can control the people that they lead. The leader has total influence on the followers. Apart from that, the leader has little concern for the needs of the followers and ensures that all efforts are geared towards understanding the vision. At times the leader could use coercion or punishment to enforce

the desired behavior among the followers. Another aspect of authoritative leadership is that in situations that are urgent, the leader can make quick and effective decisions that lead to success. Also, in a situation where the people lack a clear focus, authoritative leadership helps in providing the focus. However, one setback of the model is that it could lead to negative outcomes among the followers. They could have a negative mentality on the leader and drop their performance levels. The style of leadership also reduces the morale of the subordinates and decreases their willingness to cooperate with the leader. Authoritative leadership style involves leaders having control over every activity and directs members to act as per instructions. This style doesn't allow participation of members in decision making, and it is adapted to manage scarce resources and to meet deadlines for some projects or activities, considering financial stability.

**Preliminary study**

I conducted a pilot study to by comparing two leadership styles in a public organization (Municipality of Al-Ain) in the UAE. This pilot study showcased results and highlighted the leadership style of a small number of leaders in this organization. The participants consisted of 20 leaders. There were 8 female leaders and 12 male leaders.
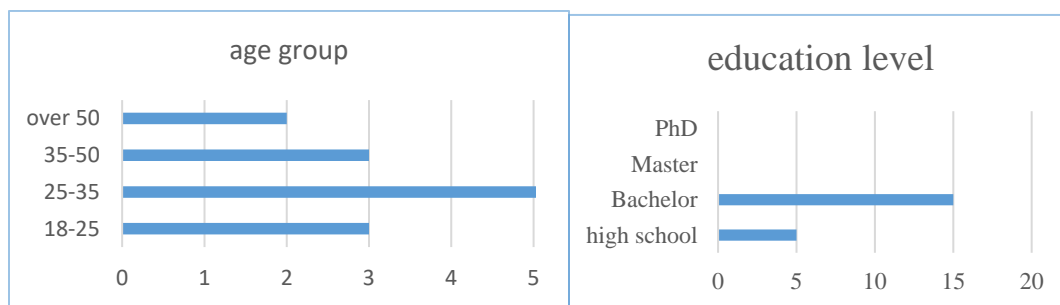


**Fig: 1**

The above table shows the demographic information about the informants who were part of this pilot study. We notice that the majority are in the 25 to 35 age group. Moreover, most of them have a Bachelor's degree but none has a Master or PhD degree.

The following charts show the preliminary results from some questions that were asked in the questionnaire for the leaders.
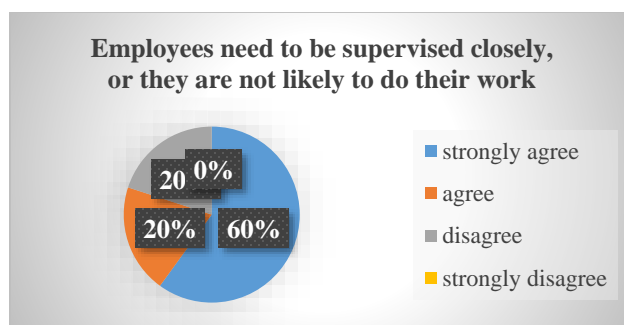


**Fig: 2**

Leaders seem to favor an authoritative leadership style as we can see from Table 2. Indeed, these leaders have negative assumptions about their employees and tend to believe that these employees need to be told and reminded of what they need to do. This is quite revealing since it seems to contrast with these leaders' statements during the informal interview that followed answering the survey questions. Indeed, some of them claimed they used a very informal way of interacting with their employees and when probed to give more details about their answer, it was clear that they meant a sort of "democratic" or "participative" style of leadership.
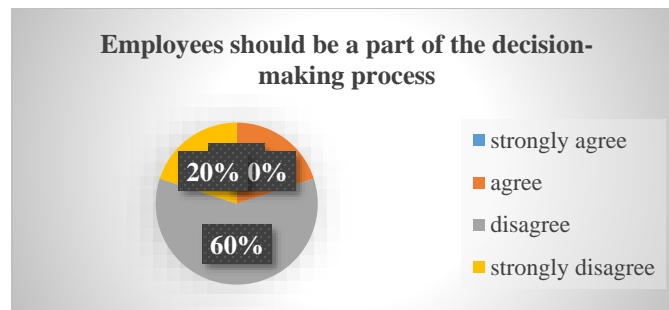


**Fig: 3**

However, the answers to question, "Employees should be a part of the decision-making process" as shown in Table 3 contrast with the previous question. Indeed, we notice that these very same leaders have a different attitude and seem to favor giving more empowerment to their employees.
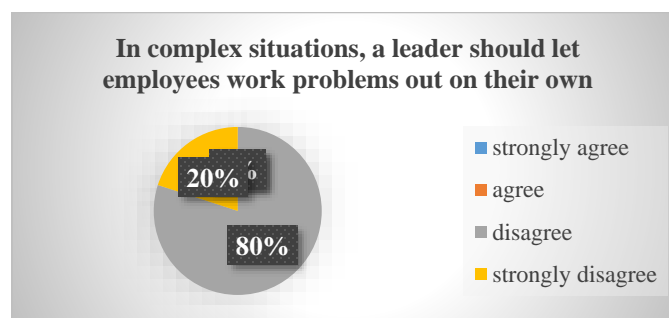


**Fig: 4**

The results illustrated in Table 4 reveal that leaders tend to prefer to find solutions to complex problems themselves without leaning on their employees or staff. In a way, they fear that their employees may not be experienced enough in the matter.
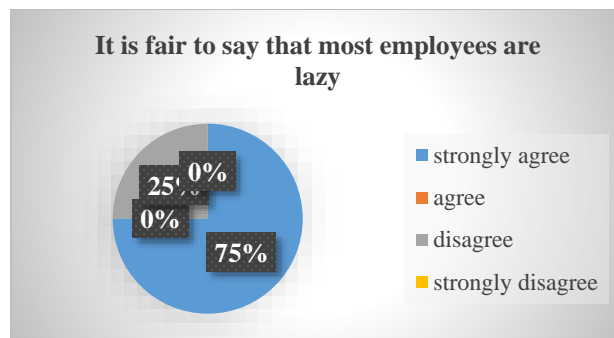
**Fig: 5**

Once again, we remark that leaders do not trust their employees and seem to think that they have no initiative and do not really want to work unless they are told to do so.



**Fig: 6**

But then, opinions change for these leaders who, as illustrated in Table 6, agree that employees should be given room to maneuver and act freely when it comes to work. But we can also interpret this as being that exemplary employees should be professional and knowledgeable of their work tasks without receiving a lot of guidance from their leaders.
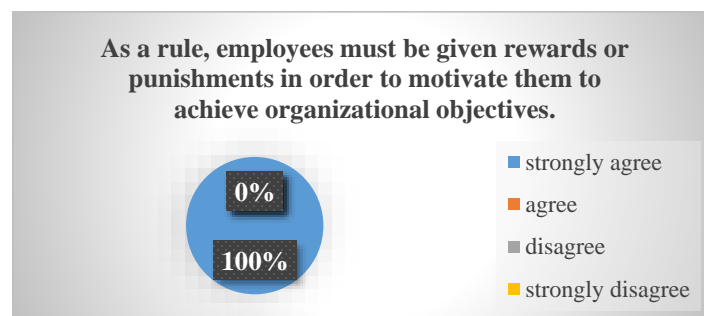


**Fig: 7**

Finally, in Table 7, we notice that leaders strongly believe in the power of reinforcement and punishment when it comes to rewarding or reprimanding their employees.
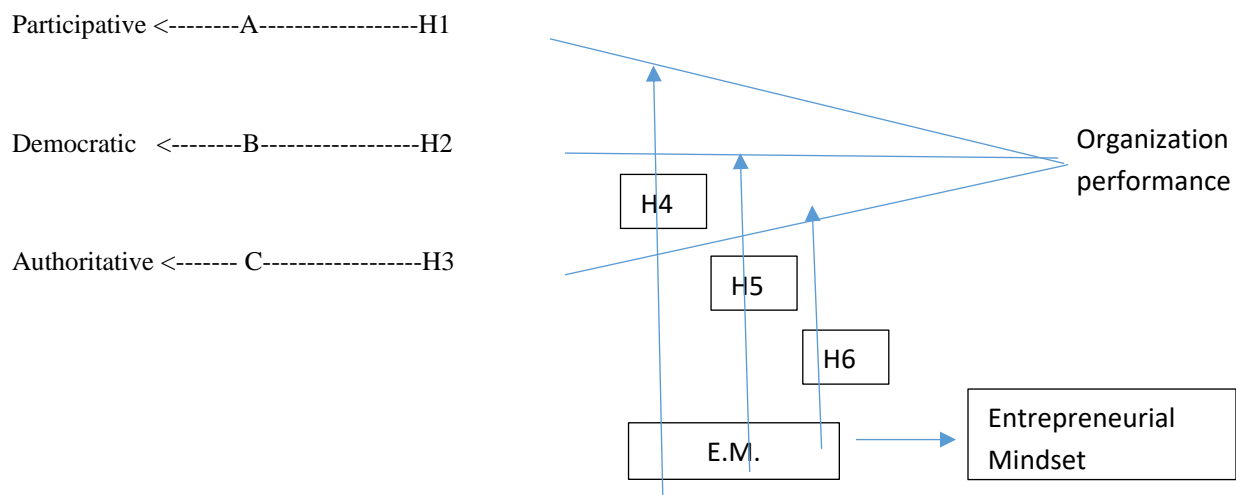
## II. DISCUSSION

The participative leadership style was considered as a good style by the leaders of the Al-Ain Municipality. This goes well in line with the opinion of Tahir and Naeem (2017) Within this leadership, the leaders encourage their subordinates to take part in the decision-making activities as well as the other business activities (Tahir, & Naeem, 2017; Musa et al, 2016) When asked about the authoritative style, all five leaders said they do not use it in their leadership style. However, the results of the questionnaires showed that 60% of these leaders feel they need to supervise their employees very closely. After having obtained some results through the pilot study, I have decided to apply the following research framework for my research work:

**Proposed Research Framework**

Refers to the finding in the preliminary study and literature laid earlier, the following is the proposed research framework.

**Leadership Style and Organization Performance**

Participative <--------A------------------H1

Democrat    <--------B------------------H2

H4

Organization performance

Authoritative <------- C------------------H3

H5

H6

E.M.

Entrepreneurial Mindset

In this present research work, the researcher has put forward a research framework based on the interactivity between on the one hand, the three main leadership styles, namely the participative style, the democratic style and the authoritative style and on the other hand, the organization performance and how it may be impacted by the entrepreneurial mindset moderator in combination with each of the three leadership styles.

The researcher expects to see a significant relationship between participative leadership style and organization performance: we believe that there will be a vital relationship between this particular leadership style; participative, and the organization performance. The relationship will be a positive one whereby the outcome of the organization performance will reflect the participation of all employees in the organization since they will be encouraged and expected to take part in the day to day business as well as the major decisions taken by the upper management. Similarly, researcher would expect to see a significant relationship between a democratic style of leadership and organization performance with once again the effect or influence of the moderator used in this research; entrepreneurial mindset.

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