

A Hope Impact in MENA: Business Leadership and Job Performance

Caroline Akhras and A.S.A. Ferdous Alam

Abstract--- *Research has shown that hope is a critical element in the business environment. This exploratory research study explores the role of hope focusing on leadership and job performance given that hope has established its conceptual independence and measurement discriminate validity. Even though research studies may have explored the role of hope for leaders and followers in the developed nations, research studies on the role of hope are new in the Middle East and North African Area. An essential component in the competitive business context, millennial leaders shape job performance, especially in the Middle East and North African Area (MENA). This case study focuses on the role of hope and job performance inside the business work units. As a research study, the aim of this paper is threefold: (1) whether the leader is perceived as implementing hope in the work life; (2) whether the followers perceive themselves as implementing hope in the work life (3) whether the level of hope is correlated to the level of job performance irrespective of gender. In line with this, three research questions were generated and belong to the faculty of business administration and economics. Sixty-one participants were employed in domestic or foreign companies in the Middle East and North African Area (MENA). Data was gathered using a survey. Based on the results, further research is recommended to better understand the nature of hope found in the local business context and its impact on job performance in the MENA workplace.*

Keywords--- *Leadership, Hope, Middle East and North Africa, Business Organizations, Job Performance, Work Units.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Hope is an intentionally sustained process that can help make peoples' life powerful, positively directed, and more productive. Research studies in the developed world have shown how hope plays an instrumental role in shaping job performance and re-generating a positive productive perception in relation to economic health and well-being. Moreover, most individualized or collective job performance does not necessarily have to be centered on or related to the leader's or the follower's level of hope; Performance may be evaluated in terms of return on investment or functional outcome (Pope Francis in Krames 2015; Michelli 2014; Paulson 2010).

This case study explores the role of hope on participants working together in small directed business work units to see whether hope is positively correlated to job performance in the Middle East and North African Region (MENA). The purpose of this study is to determine whether business personnel perceive their leader as hopeful; whether they perceive themselves as hopeful; and whether hope influences job performance.

The research paper is organized into four parts: first, the paper briefly reviews the literature on the role of hope and job performance in the business field reviewing research work conducted in both the developed and developing

Caroline Akhras, Department of Management and Marketing, Faculty of Business Administration and Economics, Notre Dame University, Lebanon. E-mail: cakhuras@ndu.edu.lb

*A.S.A. Ferdous Alam, School of International Studies, Universiti Utara Malaysia, UUM Sintok, Kedah, Malaysia.
E-mail: ferdous@uum.edu.my*

world. Second, the paper then shows the methodology employed in evaluating hope and job performance on participants employed in the Middle East and North African Region: third, the three research questions were evaluated and the results were discussed; fourth, and to conclude, implications and recommendations are made.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Hope is each person's referential belief that s/he will initiate and continue the requisite action (Hernandez 2017; Dzurainin, Toppe-Shortridge, and Smith 2013). The need to understand hope and implement its use is as important today as it was during the corporate scandal of the 2000, especially in the Middle East and North Africa. This paper proposes a positive organizational behavior approach, one that explores the MENA business framework, leadership, and job performance through the lens of hope.

Hope as a concept has been researched in the positive psychology movement and positive organizational behavior. Moreover, given that hope meets the positive organizational behavior level criteria of being state-like, hope theory has been integrated in human resource development. Furthermore, concepts related to hope and hope theory place hope in the business management work context (Schlender and Tetzeli 2015; Luthans, Avolio, Avey, and Norman 2007).

Research studies have shown that hope is personalized and is a learned thinking pattern (Deresky 2017; Nguyen, Basuray, Smith, Kopka, and McCulloh 2008). Research studies have perceived hope as a set of beliefs and thoughts that involve two cognitive goal-directed processes: agentic thinking and pathways. Agentic thinking is a cognitive process about one's ability to motivate oneself to pursue goals--I think I can-- whereas pathways are cognitive strategies, plans to achieve those goals; Researchers hold that people whether they are leaders or followers in the business environment engage in pathways thinking when they plan to reach their goals (Certo and Certo 2016; Snyder 2005). Pathways clarify the objective as they clarify how to arrive at that objective in an achievable, step-by-step approach. These two cognitive goal directed processes consistently play an integral role in business management.

Studies have shown that hope theory has made peoples' life more productive. Researchers have shown that hope may be seen as both the will-power and way-power directed to make goals attainable at "the speed of thought" (Michelli 2014; Hall and Janman 2007, p. 22; Gates, 2008). Although these two dimensions of the will and the way are related and complementary, they are distinct. It follows that people are hopeful when they have both will-power and way-power and not either one.

In the business field, hope is seen as being positively creative and reactive towards the perceived future; a future-directed affective condition; wishes for events and some expectation of the likelihood that these events will occur. Thus, in the business workplace, agency and pathways are reciprocally related and influence one another. For leaders and followers, hope consists of beliefs in one's ability to plan for and motivate oneself to pursue one's goals. Moreover, this is reflected in one's job performance (Martocchio 2015; Obama 2008b; Luthans, Avolio, Walumbwa, and Li 2005).

Therefore, hope is contextualized: it is work-related. Inside business enterprises, hope may be seen as a positive motivational state that is based on an interactively derived sense of successful goal-directed energy and planning to meet goals; Moreover, hope-related notions tend to confirm a personal idiosyncratic tendency towards hope as a result of the interaction between exploration and environment: it is part of a nurtured circumstance (Robbins and Judge 2019; Pope Francis in Krames 2015; Voegtlin, Patzer, and Scherer 2012).

Furthermore, hope may be seen in terms of relationships and interaction with superiors and colleagues in day-to-day job performance: In the work environment, hope may be seen in how personnel handle authority whereby authority may be seen as flowing upward and/or downward on the organizational hierarchy along its chain of command: from the chief executive officer to middle level through first line managers to blue-collar labor who spends each day behind the assembly line (Dzurainin, Toppe-Shortridge, and Smith 2013 ; Ferrel and Ferrel 2012; Luthans, Van Wyk, and Walumba 2004).

Research studies have provided direct and indirect evidence of hope related to leadership effectiveness and employee performance. While business research is still limited, emerging research indicates that leaders with high hope levels have corresponding higher performing work units domestically, regionally, and globally as is evidenced by corporations that are multinational (Myers and Sadaghiani 2010; Paulson 2010).

Studies have shown how leaders design organizational structure to create order and routine that builds healthy relationship with followers (Wheelan and Hunger 2015; Hill and Hernandez-Requejo 2012; Obama 2008a). Within business organizational structures, business leaders strive to generate clear and concise job description and job specification through valid and reliable job analysis. These structures ensure efficient and effective job performance. Successful job performance leads to goal attainment (Levy and McKiernan 2009; Bass and Bass 2008).

Furthermore, research in job design suggests the way the elements in a job are organized and communicated may also increase or decrease job performance. Studies have shown that leaders strive to bridge people and interconnect units to create partnership. Higher performing business work-units may be seen as the outcome of well-designed structure and the impact of hope. Employee awareness of others hopeful behaviour may involve them in similar behaviour--exposing others to theories and increasing their understanding of the linkages between their personal beliefs and action has been proven to have positive impact (Nguyen, Basuray, Smith, Kopka, and McCulloh 2008; Hersey, Blanchard, and Johnson 2008).

In addition, even though the manner in which business managers lead is critical, whom they lead is equally relevant. At present, many researchers hold that millennials are perceived as entitled (Twenge 2014; Akhras 2013; Howe and Straus 2007). Born between 1980-2005, millennials are said to be information technology adept yet difficult to lead (U.S. Department of Commerce; U.S. Department of Education; Tapscott 2009).

It should be noted that business management research has posited that business leaders work upwards and outwards (Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky 2010; Middleton 2007, pp.24-25). Research studies have noted that prominent successful forward looking leaders at the corporate, national and local level of management have used principles of hope as their culture as they connect with employees, product/service, and customers (Michelli 2014; Paulson 2010). These leaders engendered an able and willing work-related community taking on challenges.

This study explores hope inside the business context by descriptively evaluating work-related criteria: It strives to determine whether Middle East and North African leaders use hope and whether their followers perceive this; It strives to determine whether MENA business leaders influence followers to increase agency thinking and pathways - the strategic process whereby one individual influences other group members towards the attainment of defined group or organizational goals; In addition it strives to determine whether there is a correlation in the level of hope and job performance irrespective of gender.

III. METHOD

This section covers the purpose of the study, the research questions, the participants, the procedures used in the study, the research design, rubrics, and analysis of data used.

3.1 Purpose

The purpose of this study is to determine whether participants perceive the leader as hopeful; whether participants perceive themselves as hopeful; and whether hope influences job performance.

3.2 Research Questions

- Research Question One: Within business units' organizational interactions, are business leaders perceived of as implementing hope in the work life?
- Research Question Two: Within business units' organizational interactions, do business unit members perceive themselves as implementing hope in the work life?
- Research Question Three: Within business units' organizational interaction, is there a strong correlation between the level of hope and the level of job performance irrespective of gender?

3.3 Participants

The participants belonged to the faculty of business administration and economics at a private English speaking university in the Middle East and North African Area (MENA). There were 61 participants, and 17 were employed in domestic or foreign companies. Of the 61 participants, 14 were females and 47 were males.

3.4 Procedure

The participants were divided into twelve business work units. As members in the business work units, each of which was composed of five members, they were assigned a business project across six weeks. The project required that all members participate.

- The participants were asked to respond to an open-ended summative question).
- The participants were placed in formal business units with an assigned business leader. The unit leader was told to ensure a specific job was accomplished; the business unit was told to meet regularly to develop the project.
- The twelve business unit performance was monitored across six weeks.
- Once the independent jobs were performed, the participants were asked to collaborate on site to finalize the research project within six weeks.

- After the project was completed, all the participants were asked to fill out the self-directed business unit survey.

3.5 The Research Design, Rubrics, and Analysis of Data

The research was designed to explore three main areas. The three main areas probed leadership style, participants' level of hope and the correlation of hope to job performance using different qualitative tools of assessment. Data was analyzed using percentages and Chi Square. Because only a few measures were used to measure the dependent variables, Feldman exact score is used. Monte Carlo Significance and Asymptotic Significance are also used to ensure that the results are reliable and valid.

3.5.1 Rubric to Assess Perception of Hope

- Furthermore, two rubrics were paired with Research Question Three. The first rubric was paired with one part of Research Question Three: Within business unit organizational interactions, is there a strong correlation between the levels of hope to the level of job performance irrespective of gender? The rubric evaluated members' perception of hope on the 5 point scale (1 is non existence and 5 is regularly applied) (see Figure 1 below).

<u>1.0 point</u> When participants do not perceive any hope.	<u>2.0 points</u> When participants perceive a little hope.	<u>3.0 points</u> When participants perceive a medium level of hope.	<u>4.0 points</u> When participants perceive more than an average level of hope	<u>5.0 points</u> When participants are full of hope.
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Figure 1: Rubric to Assess Perception of Hope

3.5.2 Rubric to Assess Perception of Job Performance

- The second rubric was paired with Research Question Three: Within business unit organizational interactions, is there a strong correlation between the levels of hope to the level of job performance irrespective of gender? The rubric evaluates members' perception of job performance on the 5 point scale (1 is non existence and 5 is regularly applied) (see Figure 2 below).

<u>1.0 point</u> When participants do not perceive job performance.	<u>2.0 points</u> When participants perceive some job performance.	<u>3.0 points</u> When participants perceive an average level of job performance.	<u>4.0 points</u> When participants perceive more than an average level of job performance.	<u>5.0 points</u> When participants are full of job performance.
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Figure 2: Rubric to Assess the Perception of Job Performance

IV. DISCUSSION

Based on the data analyzed and in line with the literature reviewed, the section below discusses the results of the analysis of research questions.

With respect to the first research question which asked, "Within the business units, are business leaders perceived of as implementing hope in the work life?" it was found that leaders were perceived of as implementing hope (53%). Forward looking leaders who are hopeful are those who lead using competitive dynamics and strategic

tactics. Those business leaders were perceived of as “innovative”, “collaborative”, and “productive”. They impacted their “work context”. They impacted “the world” as was noted by other researchers (Hernandez 2017; Schlender and Tetzeli 2015; Paulsen 2010).

Within the twelve independent business units, the results of those who found the leader implementing hope in the work life wrote descriptions of their business leader as “full of positive vibrations”, “visionary”, “problem-solvers”, “helpful”, “optimistic”, “futuristic”, and “competent”. The terminology employed showed that the unit leader was seen as a leader “who set objectives”, “mentored”, and “guided” the followers to reach their business unit goal in a manner that clearly reflected hope.

The leader was seen as a “business leader”, a “functional manager”, a leader who “implemented hope”. The participants/followers perceived the organizational goal they worked towards as attainable because their “boss” designed the “pathway” as “one easy to follow”. The results also reflected that the participants/followers in the unit perceived work-related structure that “represented order” and “routine”. Moreover, the participants reported that the “boss stayed on task”; s/he “kept the business unit on task”. These results are in line with the literature on leaders who implement hope (Luthans, Avolio, Avey, and Norman 2007; Snyder 2005).

Furthermore, it should be noted that the participants were millennials whose perceptions may be high expectations of how to be led, potentially higher than were actualized by the leader. Thus, for 47 % of the participants, the leader was not seen as implementing hope nor seen as a disseminator of knowledge and wisdom; not as a facilitator, a liason, or a counselor; the leader was not their “coach” nor their “mentor”; the leader simply was their superior, the individual who issued directives (Twenge and Campbell 2010; Kets De Vries, Korotov, and Florent-Treacy 2007). Their leaders may have focused on other factors. Research has shown that some business leaders tend to focus on failure rather than victory (Voegtlin, Patzer, and Schere 2012). Such leaders seem to concentrate on what is “wrong” with employees inside their company or department. These business leaders may have micro-managed strategizing sequences of steps to “make right all that they perceived of as wrong”: a “plethora” of remedies directed at the human and social capital the company had already invested in rather than focusing on how to praise and reward personnel strengths. Therefore, the evidence shows that the participants assessed their leaders carefully, weighing the advantages and disadvantages of the leader’s “influence on their performance” (Hernandez 2017; Cheavens, Feldman, Gum, Michael, and Snyder 2006).

Second of all, the results also show that with respect to the second research question that asked the participants whether they perceived themselves as implementing hope in the work life as they worked within the business unit, it was found that based on a frequency count, 58 of the 61 participants posited that they were hopeful.

Given that hope in this research-based article is defined as “a cognitive set that is based on a reciprocally derived sense of successful agency and pathways: (1) agency--goal directed determination; and (2) pathways-- planning ways to meet goals, it can be held that 58 of the 61 participants were hopeful. Hope for each of these participant might be seen as a positive motivational state that was based on an interactively derived sense of successful agency and sequence of path.

The participants belonged to five-member work-related unit in which each participant was driven by her/his personal motivation plan. Inside these units, 95% of the participants perceived themselves as hopeful whereby this perception of hope may be seen as a reflection of each of the participants' agency thinking and pathways. As a result, in terms of agency thinking, hope was about the participants' expectations and desire to start working; in terms of pathway, hope was about following procedure and remaining committed to the task. As such, in the research project, participants' level of hope stemmed from their will-power and way-power whereby willpower might be seen as understanding the business unit objective and way-power might be understood as understanding the procedure, both of which matured positively (Snyder 2005; Norman, Luthans, and Luthans 2005).

Third of all, the results of the third research question were in response to the question of whether "Within the business units, is there a strong correlation between the level of hope and the level of job performance irrespective of gender?" The results show that inside business unit organizational interaction, there was a strong correlation between the level of hope and the level of job performance irrespective of gender (Chi Square=1.850: df=4; Asymptotic Significance= 0.763) (See Figure 1 and Figure 2).

The participants' level of hope was high as was their perception about their job performance. Furthermore, the participants' orientation to their job performance was correlated to their self-assessment: both were high. It seems that the participants understood the work-related objective well. Moreover, they also seem to have understood the pathways that would help them move from where they were to where they were headed. Hope was an intentionally sustained response and appeared to have been malleable (Gates 2008; Cheavens, Feldman, Gum, Michael, and Snyder 2006) serving each participant differently in line with them being millennial, entitled, and narcissistic as was probably the issue in research question two (Twenge 2014; Howe and Strauss 2007).

It may be said that having grown up in the Middle East and North African Area, the participants were socialized in a culture which may have impacted their work life: study hard and work hard. In addition, their perception of job performance may also have been influenced by their understanding of the job description and specification. All these may have combined to create a high perception of hope.

It might also be noted that not only do millennials search for frequent positive open communication, but they also believe they deserve it anywhere at any time. Studies have shown that millennials thrive well in work-related-contexts that are supported by immediate and frequent positive feedback (U.S. Department of Commerce; U.S. Department of Education). As this research showed, millennials are purveyors of hope, innovative and driven, leading contemporary human capital in the Middle East and North Africa as they do in the west. Entitled and narcissistic, the participants had determination and motivation to accomplish their objective through business units' job performance that were well- orchestrated.

V. CONCLUSION, LIMITATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATION

In conclusion, this small scale exploratory study was fruitful. The results show that there is a significant hope impact in Middle East and North Africa. This exploratory research study examined the role of hope in the MENA focusing on perceptions of leadership, followers, and the impact of hope on job performance.

The results point to a brighter future: the participants were optimistic. Not only did they evaluate leadership but also themselves on a continuum of hope. Moreover, they saw a positive correlation between job performance and hope. As practitioner-researcher in the MENA, these qualitative measures are all positive indicators. The evidence reflects a human and social capital that adds value and authentic value because it remains hopeful, at times filled with audacious hope despite the dire times.

This exploratory study met a number of limitations. Gender is a moderating factor that ought to have been taken into account in studying leadership but was not. Second, the age factor is another important limitation as it played an important moderating factor: given that the sample was millennials, age may have played a role in shaping perceptions of leadership as was noted in the discussion. Third, another limitation found in the research conducted may have stemmed from the sample size which was relatively small as the sample selected was a convenience sample drawn from one faculty in one campus. Consequently, the generalizability of the findings is limited given the absence of random sampling (Bass and Bass 2008; Fraenkel and Wallen 2006).

As a practitioner-researcher, I hold the area of hope theory in the business field as promising. Based on the results, it is recommended that further research be conducted to enrich awareness of hope and the hope impact on job performance in contemporary MENA business practices in different industries. Business leaders need to take advantage of a powerful resource they may have not yet have explored.

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