

# **LEARNING TO BE LEADERS: THE EFFECT OF BUSINESS STUDENTS' LEARNING STYLE ON THEIR WORKPLACE LEADERSHIP BEHAVIOURS IN THE ARABIAN GULF REGION**

**Ahmad Khaldi**

Australian College of Kuwait. School of Business. Department of Marketing. Kuwait  
a.khaldi@ack.edu.kw

## **Abstract**

*This research investigates the effect of four learning strategies (learning through action, thinking, feeling, and accessing others) on five transformational leadership practices (modeling the way, inspiring a shared vision, challenging the process, enabling others to act, and encouraging the heart). The current study surveyed a convenience sample of 214 undergraduate and postgraduate business students from the Gulf Region, who are currently working as full time managers. Data analysis demonstrated the predictive validity of each learning style on each of the transformational leadership practices in the workplace. However, the positive effect appeared to be stronger for certain learning styles. Respondents' gender and years of experience at work were found to have no effect on respondents' learning style and transformational leadership behaviors, with few exceptions, according to data analysis. The findings of the study lead to several implications for learners and business schools.*

*Keywords: Transformational leadership, Learning Style, Arabian Gulf, Business Education, Leadership Training, Emotional Learning, Behavioural Skills, Workplace Behaviour*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Leadership has been an exceptionally controversial concept to be defined accurately. Northouse (2007) defined leadership as "a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal" (p. 3). Some researchers have defines leadership, according to the trait theory, as a combination of special traits or characteristics that some people possess to influence others (Bommer, et al. 2004; Bono & Judge, 2004). Whereas Bass

et al. (2003), who adopted the situational perspective, defined leadership as the complex interaction among the leader, follower, and the social context.

- Transformational Leadership

Burns (1978) was the first who introduced the concept of transformational leadership, describing it not as a set of specific behaviors but rather a process by which “leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of morality and motivation” (Burns, 1978, p. 20). Building on Burns’ (1978) conceptualization of transformational leadership, Bass (1985) identified three components of transformational leadership: (a) charisma, or the power of leaders’ personality that has profound and extraordinary impact on their followers; (b) intellectual stimulation, or the leader’s ability to stimulate followers to be innovative and creative when problem solving; and (c) individual consideration, or the individual attention that transformational leaders give to each follower. A fourth component of transformational leadership was added later by Bass and Avolio (1997) which is inspirational motivation or the leader’s ability to inspire, motivate, and emotionally arouse followers to accomplish organizational goals.

The transformational leadership theory has attracted more research attention than all other leadership theories combined (Barling, et al. 2011) and many studies have provided support for the importance of transformational leadership in achieving organizational objectives as well as positive employee attitudes and health (Judge et al., 2006; Skakon et al., 2010). Although all leaders have a vision, an interesting finding was reported by Khokhar (2001) that transformational leaders had a vision with emotional appeal and inspirational effects, while non-transformational leaders had visions with strong operational orientation. This opinion was later confirmed by Reinhardt (2004) who described transformational leaders as having a higher sense of vision and more willing to initiate change by challenging the organizational “status quo”. Indeed, Jyoti and Dev (2015) have also proved that there is a positive relationship between transformational leadership and employee creativity. From an organizational perspective, transformational leadership was also linked with organizational innovation and improved organizational performance of firms (Noruzy, et al 2013). The positive result of transformational leaders’ behavior is not confined to the private sector but it extends to the public sector as well. Tafvelin (2013) confirmed that transformational leadership in the public sector is also positively associated with employee outcomes including commitment, role clarity, and well-being.

On an individual level, under transformational leadership followers are also encouraged to try new approaches to problem solving and decision making so that they are able to solve future problems effectively on their own (Bass & Avolio, 2004). Murphy (2005) reported that

transformational leadership has been associated with high levels of empowerment, morale, motivation, and commitment, as well as a decline in emotional exhaustion, burnout, and absenteeism. This is an expected outcome of transformational leaders' behavior with their subordinates because transformational leaders develop followers who are more involved, satisfied, empowered, and committed to their organizations (Walumbwa et al. 2005). Research confirmed that they treat their followers in a parental fashion, guide them in all situations, help them whenever required, deliver knowledge to them, polish their skills and treat them equally (Hall et al., 2008). According to Bass and Avolio (2004), the individual consideration component of transformational leadership that focuses on mentoring and coaching followers, is one of the main factors that distinguishes managers from leaders.

- Learning leadership skills

Knowing the positive effects of transformational leadership, companies have spent millions of dollars to train and educate their managers to acquire leadership skills. However, the location and style of learning have been one of the biggest controversies in terms of effectiveness and efficiency. With regard to location, workplace is where the real learning process takes place, according to Van Velsor (2003), who explained that, successful and effective leaders develop critical skills from experience and that the key factors in learning from experience are opportunity and willingness to undertake the challenge.

Other researchers believed that formal training and education is the most effective way to learn leadership skills as Kelloway and Barling (2000) confirmed by concluding that the existence of significant changes in transformational leadership skills among trainees is fully attributed to the amount and quality of their transformational leadership training programs. Many other researchers (DeBowski and Blake 2004, Fullan and Scott 2009) also drew the attention to the importance of investing time and resources in improving leadership development through university education. In her research about leadership development among female college students in the United Arab Emirates, Madsen (2010) also confirmed the later opinion when she proved that there is a correlation between classroom learning and the ability to develop leadership qualities. However, the researcher fell short of confirming the existence of such qualities in the workplace environment.

In terms of leadership education style, Snook, et al. (2011) concluded that effective leadership education involves adopting a holistic approach to educating leaders which necessitate moving beyond teaching knowledge and skills into incorporating approaches that emphasize being creative and innovative. Therefore, universities play a central role in creating "the organizational settings in which leadership knowledge can be grown, shared and applied as

a strategic resource” (Fullan & Scott, 2009, p. 104). In order to be able to build the right transformational skills among potential leaders university programs should challenge students to be creative, innovative and connect theory with real world application and demonstrate emotional intelligence (Flores, 2015). In line with the previous opinion, Severson and Destefano (2014) suggested that following a developmental approach in building transformational leadership capacities have helped both potential and practicing managers to demonstrate more leadership analytical qualities in their approach to workplace complex practices.

Another interesting factor for learner to be able to actually acquire leadership skills was demonstrated by Haghghi (2014) who concluded that learners were able to embrace and gain valuable information from the leadership development programs because it was meaningful to them and they were able to actualize what they learned in their own workplace immediately. According to Dalton (1999) some people fail to learn because they avoid learning opportunities or they use bad learning strategies. So, the real question here is not only how to educate leadership skills, but also how potential leaders are going to learn or what their style of learning is. People who use a variety of learning strategies appropriate to the situation are likely to be able to engage in a wide variety of challenging situations because they have learned to extract the lessons that those situations teach. According to Cone (2001), educators should provide an educational paradigm that encourages an environment conducive to effective learning. Pritchard (2009) pointed out that learning styles are not fixed traits which an individual will always display. Learners are able to adopt different styles in different contexts. For most of us, one or two styles are preferred above the others.

- Leadership Practices Inventory

Kouzes and Posner (1997) extended Bass and Avolio’s (1997) conceptualization of transformational leadership by developing the Leadership Practices Inventory or LPI. The LPI describes five practices of leadership:

1. Challenge the process: seeking challenging opportunities that test skills and abilities change the status quo.
2. Inspire a shared vision: to describe a compelling image of what the future could be like to guide people’s behavior.
3. Enable others to act: developing cooperative relationships among people who work together by building trust and teamwork.
4. Model the way: fulfilling promises and commitments and setting a personal example by behaviors that demonstrate leader’s values and philosophy.
5. Encourage the heart: to praise people for a job well done and show appreciation.

- Learning Styles

It has been proven that students' learning styles affect their real life attitudes, practices and opinions on the job (El-faragy 2010, Zwolsman et al 2011). According to Van Velsor (2003), there are at least four ways in which people approach a challenge, or four kinds of learning behavior. The four sets of behaviors or learning strategies are called action, thinking, feeling, and accessing others. Action learning is learning through trial and error. This includes learning from direct experience. People who use this approach do not feel compelled to begin learning by gathering extensive data, and they do not feel obligated to solicit acceptance from everyone involved. Misra & Ballard (2003) concluded that active learning creates an environment in which people could actively solve real-life problems. This opinion was further confirmed by Fleming, J. (2015) who noted that action learning as a method of inquiry offers a tool that allows students to act as change agents within the workplace which can provide lasting benefits for their learning as well as creating change for the organization.

The second learning style is learning through thinking which refers to reflecting on an experience. People who use this approach reflect on the past and imagine possible outcomes for the future. They draw on their own inner resources. Hovelynck (2003) noted that action learning often overlaps with learning by thinking when adult students work on solving real life problems with discussion. Learning by feeling is the third learning style, which refers to dealing with the emotions of trying something new, such as fear. People who use this approach recognize when they are anxious or uncertain about a new challenge and employ strategies to manage the psychological discomfort. To explain the link between emotions and learning, Immordino-Yang and Damasio (2007) demonstrated that neuroscience research highlights the connections between emotions and learning through conceptualizing the term "emotional thoughts" which can revolutionize our understanding of the role of affect in learning. This connection has significant implications for knowledge, because the aspects of cognition that we recruit most heavily in schools, namely learning and attention abilities, are profoundly affected by emotional processing. Indeed, the ability to recognize, understand, manage, and express emotions appropriately is a fundamental component of learning (Carnell & Baker, 2007).

Immordino-Yang and Damasio (2007) also explained that feeling and thinking dimensions may be distinguished but are never separable in human action. In the process of evaluating any given situation, a person functions affectively and cognitively because, as Mahn & John-Steiner (2002) and Damasio (2003) have demonstrated before, cognition involves emotional processing that is associated with belief and attitude. The affective domain includes ways in which people perceive, experience, and process the emotional aspects of social interaction. In a later study, Immordino-Yang (2011) concluded that both affect and cognition are

involved in learning by demonstrating the crucial role of affect in regulating human action and linking cognition with decision-making.

Blomberg (2013) explained that emotional functioning unconsciously affects analytical functioning in learning. He noted that, empathy and feelings interact with cognition to create reasons for behavior. Empathy requires an intellectual and imaginative identification with others. This interaction of feelings and cognition will lead us to decide what we most value and what gives the deepest meanings to our lives; therefore, it directs our behavior to achieve what is highly valued as a priority in our lives (Blomberg, 2013). Learning by feelings will lead students to willfully choose, in their workplace, to act and think in ways that are faithful to the situations they have previously encountered in the classroom that shaped their own convictions about what is of high value in life and ultimately, comprised their source of order and meaning or their heart orientation (Wolterstorff, 2006).

The fourth style of learning is through accessing others which includes getting advice from others. This can be helpful when faced with a novel situation, as one seeks advice, support, or instruction from others who may have been in a similar situation. According to Bandura (2004), individuals learn through role models and a stronger sense of personal efficacy can be developed by observing the behaviors of others. Tomasello (2004) argued that, for humans, an especially important form of learning is social learning which involves observing the activities of others and learning about the world from or through them which would eventually enable individuals to acquire information with less effort and risk than if they were forced to learn on their own.

- Transformational leadership and learning styles

Many researchers have argued that there is a close link between the existence of transformational leadership skills and the ability to learn (Brown and Posner, 2001). Vaill (1996) drew the attention to the fact that, without continual learning from a broad range of experiences, transformational leaders risk becoming less responsive and effective over time and lose touch with the ongoing feedback cycles that are essential to transformational leader-follower relationships.

Transformational leaders view most situations as a learning experience with the opportunity to improve skills (Brown & Posner 2001). These leaders use inner experiences to create multiple perspectives and question their own assumptions to understand their environment. In order to consider the process of this understanding, Tomasello (2004) highlighted the crucial role of culture in the ability of individuals to imagine themselves in the 'mental shoes' of other people and to perceive them as beings like themselves who have

intentional and mental lives like themselves, which will eventually enable these types of cultural learning. Apart from the role of culture, Dormann et al. (2013) have spotted the light on the role of affect in learning leadership skills. They explained that transformational leadership skills are significantly linked to the component of affective learning wherein someone enrolls the support of others to accomplish a common goal. They explained that taking leadership roles and learning to manage groups of people to overcome challenges can empower people to apply the team maintenance, friendship building, and social management practices.

Selkrig (2011) explored the cumulative impact on leaders who work on community-based arts projects, and documented what transformations and learning occurred for them as a result of working on these projects, and how those experiences contributed to their identities. The findings showed that leaders attempted to understand aspects of their individual, social and cultural identities by challenging their own as well as the community's perceptions of artists. The cumulative effect of being involved in community-based arts practice also provided the leaders with ongoing identity capital in that they came to realize that they learnt about themselves by connecting with others. In line with this view, Breen (2014) concluded that the classroom dynamics of action learning create the critical learning environment for tomorrow's critical managers to emerge. Simpson & Nowacki (2015) have also reached a similar conclusion that the use of case studies, as a learning through others tool, deepens potential leaders' experience of practical work conditions.

Pounder (2008) examined the effect of transformational leadership style in the classroom on undergraduate business students. Results indicated that transformational classroom leadership was significantly and positively associated with desirable classroom leadership outcomes such as extra effort. Teixeira-Poit et al (2011) investigated the use of experiential learning strategies to enhance student understanding of research ethics and responsible research conduct in MBA programs. Research findings revealed that experiential learning increased students' knowledge about ethical guidelines and broadened their understandings of ethical behavior. Walia and Marks-Maran (2014) examined the use of action learning sets in a leadership module delivered by a university in south east England. An evaluation research study was conducted using survey method to evaluate student engagement with action learning sets, and their value, impact and sustainability. Findings showed that engagement in the action learning sets was very high. Action learning sets also had a positive impact on the development of leadership knowledge and skills and were highly valued by participants. It is likely that they would be sustainable as the majority would recommend action learning to colleagues and would consider taking another module that used action learning sets. The previous literature review

leads to the compelling conclusion that transformational leadership skills are positively linked to the learning styles of individuals. Therefore, this research adopts the following hypothesis:

*H1: there is a significant positive effect of each of the four learning strategies (learning through action, thinking, feeling, and accessing others) on each of the five transformational leadership practices (modeling the way, inspiring a shared vision, challenging the process, enabling others to act, and encouraging the heart) in the workplace.*

- The role of work experience and gender

As mentioned before, many researchers have drawn the attention to the role of experience in enhancing the link between leadership skills and the ability to learn. According to Kouzes & Posner (1995) and Van Velsor (2003), successful and effective leaders develop critical skills from experience. Therefore, it sound only logical to assume that those with more management experience may have stronger leadership skills because they have had an opportunity to experience a greater variety of learning situations and have had the advantage of developing skills over a longer period of time.

*H2: There are significant differences in respondents' leadership skills and learning styles according to their level of work experience.*

Researchers have also demonstrated the existence of differences between men and women as leaders (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Cleveland et al. 2005). Many earlier studies indicated that people perceived an inconsistency between the characteristics of women and the requirements of leadership roles (Eagly & Johnson 1990; Eagly & Karau 1991; Eagly et al. 1992). However, more recent research indicated different results arguing that women may be higher on some transformational leadership dimensions than men (Yukl, 2002; Eagly et al. 2003; Vecchio 2003). Such differences might be attributed to demonstrated differences in the learning styles between genders (Philbin, et al. 1995; Ames, 2003; Slater, et al. 2007). Therefore, the following hypothesis can be concluded:

*H3: There are significant differences in respondents' leadership skills and learning styles according to their gender.*

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The aim of this study is to investigate the effect of learning styles on transformational leadership behaviors. A self-reported questionnaire was used as a data collection instrument for the collection of quantitative data. The current study surveyed a convenience sample of 214 undergraduate and postgraduate business students from the Gulf Region (including Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, UAE, Qatar, Bahrain and Oman). Only students who were also business



managers in their workplace and currently in management positions were included in the study. For the purpose of this study, a business manager was defined as a person who is employed by an organization in a management position of authority with direct subordinates who report to her/him as their manager. The distribution of the questionnaires took place inside the classroom and under the supervision of experienced moderators to explain any queries to respondents. The initial amount of distributed questionnaires reached 600. Only 227 questionnaires were retrieved out of which 13 were excluded due to incomplete answers. The survey was conducted in English as all respondents were studying in English speaking universities and presumed to be able to understand the intended questions.

The survey included nominal questions about gender and years of experience in management roles, as well as 5-point likert type questions to measure respondents' learning style and transformational leadership behaviors. The learning style scale was adopted from Dalton (1999). The scale consisted of 32 items measuring the use of four distinct learning styles including: action, thinking, feeling, and accessing others. Each learning style subscale contained 8 items, rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = I have never used this approach to 5 = I have always used this approach. Previous studies have demonstrated the reliability and validity of this scale (Dalton, 1999; Brown & Posner, 2001). The transformational leadership behaviors scale was adopted from (Kouzes & Posner, 1997) which consisted of 30 items comprising five subscales, each measuring a unique leadership practice: modeling the way, inspiring a shared vision, challenging the process, enabling others to act, and encouraging the heart. Each subscale contained 6 items employing a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = I never engage in this behavior to 5 = I always engage in this behavior. This scale was proved to be reliable and valid by many researchers (Brown & Posner, 2001; Kouzes & Posner, 2003; Abutineh, et al. 2009). Data analysis was done using the SPSS.

## ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

### Demographic Profile

Gender distribution of respondents consisted of 192 males and 22 females as table1 indicates.

Table 1. Gender Distribution of Respondents

		Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Male	192	89.7	89.7
	Female	22	10.3	100.0
	Total	214	100.0	

The majority of respondents had a year to less than 2 years of work experience as table 2 indicates.

Table 2. Distribution of Respondents' Years of Experience at Work

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Less than 1 year	22	10.3	10.3	10.3
	1 to less than 2 years	91	42.5	42.5	52.8
	2 to less than 3 years	56	26.2	26.2	79.0
	3 to less than 4 years	33	15.4	15.4	94.4
	4 years or more	12	5.6	5.6	100.0
	Total	214	100.0	100.0	

### Reliability coefficients

The internal consistency test for the learning style scale and four sub-scales produced a high Cronbach Alpha indexes which reflects a high reliability of the scale and the subscales included, as table 3 indicates.

Table 3. Reliability test for the learning style scale and subscales

Number of Items	Learning style scale and sub-scales	Cronbach Alpha Value
8	learning through action	0.769
8	learning through thinking	0.878
8	learning through feeling	0.813
8	learning through accessing others	0.820
32	Mixed learning style	0.882

The internal consistency test for the transformational leadership behavior scale and the five sub-scales produced a high Cronbach Alpha indexes which reflects a high reliability of the scale and the subscales included, as table 4 indicates.

Table 4. Reliability test for the Transformational Leadership behaviors scale and subscales

Number of Items	Transformational Leadership behaviors scale and sub-scales	Cronbach Alpha Value
6	Modeling the way	0.873
6	Inspiring a shared vision	0.896
6	Challenging the process	0.814

6	Enabling others to act	0.764
6	Encouraging the heart	0.855
30	Mixed transformational leadership behaviors	0.872

### Hypotheses testing

In order to test the first hypothesis of this study that proposed the existence of a significant positive effect of each of the four learning strategies (learning through action, thinking, feeling, and accessing others) on each of the five transformational leadership practices (modeling the way, inspiring a shared vision, challenging the process, enabling others to act, and encouraging the heart) simple regression analysis is used for each of the above proposed causal relation. Regression analysis revealed a significant positive effect of learning through action on each of the five behaviors of transformational leadership (modeling the way, inspiring a shared vision, challenging the process, enabling others to act, and encouraging the heart) as table 5 indicates.

Table 5. Regression analysis of learning through action effect on each of the five behaviors of transformational leadership

Dependent Variable:	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	R Square	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
Modelling the way					
(Constant)	1.965	.275		0.079	.000
learning through action	.332	.078	.282		
Inspiring a shared vision					
(Constant)	1.791	.280		0.121	.000
learning through action	.426	.079	.347		
Challenging the process					
(Constant)	2.102	.183		0.183	.000
learning through action	.356	.052	.427		
Enabling others to act					
(Constant)	1.634	.201		0.276	.000
learning through action	.510	.057	.525		
Encouraging the heart					
(Constant)	1.202	.277		0.255	.000
learning through action	.665	.078	.505		

Table 5 shows that the strongest positive effect of learning through action is on the transformational leadership behaviour of enabling others to act (Beta = 0.525) which explains around 28% of its total variance (R Square = 0.276). Regression analysis also revealed a significant positive effect of learning through thinking on each of the five behaviors of transformational leadership (modeling the way, inspiring a shared vision, challenging the process, enabling others to act, and encouraging the heart) as table 6 indicates.

Table 6: Table 6. Regression analysis of learning through thinking effect on each of the five behaviors of transformational leadership

Dependent Variable:	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	R Square	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
Modelling the way					
(Constant)	.974	.141		0.540	.000
learning through thinking	.699	.044	.735		.000
Inspiring a shared vision					
(Constant)	1.542	.179		0.323	.000
learning through thinking	.563	.056	.568		.000
Challenging the process					
(Constant)	1.620	.081		0.693	.000
learning through thinking	.560	.026	.833		.000
Enabling others to act					
(Constant)	2.980	.169		0.031	.000
learning through thinking	.139	.053	.177		.049
Encouraging the heart					
(Constant)	2.510	.222		0.094	.000
learning through thinking	.326	.070	.306		.000

Table 6 shows that the strongest positive effect of learning through thinking is on the transformational leadership behaviour of challenging the process (Beta = 0.833) which explains

around 69% of its total variance (R Square = 0.693). Regarding the effect of learning through feeling, regression analysis revealed a significant positive effect of learning through feeling on each of the five behaviors of transformational leadership (modeling the way, inspiring a shared vision, challenging the process, enabling others to act, and encouraging the heart) as table 7 indicates.

Table 7. Regression analysis of learning through feeling effect on each of the five behaviors of transformational leadership

Dependent Variable:	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	R Square	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
Modelling the way					
(Constant)	1.331	.274		0.172	.000
learning through feeling	.510	.077	.415		.000
Inspiring a shared vision					
(Constant)	1.141	.276		0.227	.000
learning through feeling	.607	.077	.476		.000
Challenging the process					
(Constant)	1.320	.159		0.439	.000
learning through feeling	.576	.045	.663		.000
Enabling others to act					
(Constant)	2.411	.238		0.079	.000
learning through feeling	.284	.067	.280		.000
Encouraging the heart					
(Constant)	1.945	.318		0.106	.000
learning through feeling	.446	.089	.326		.000

Table 7 shows that the strongest positive effect of learning through feeling is on the transformational leadership behaviour of challenging the process (Beta = 0.663) which explains around 44% of its total variance (R Square = 0.439).Regression analysis was also used to

investigate the effect of learning through accessing others. It revealed a significant positive effect of learning through accessing others on each of the five behaviors of transformational leadership (modeling the way, inspiring a shared vision, challenging the process, enabling others to act, and encouraging the heart) as table 8 indicates.

Table 8. Regression analysis of the effect of learning through accessing others on each of the five behaviors of transformational leadership

Dependent Variable: Modelling the way	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	R Square	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	1.396	.302		0.137	.000
learning through accessing others	.461	.080	.370		.000
Dependent Variable: Inspiring a shared vision	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	R Square	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	1.830	.322		0.089	.000
learning through accessing others	.386	.085	.298		.000
Dependent Variable: Challenging the process	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	R Square	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	1.488	.190		0.318	.000
learning through accessing others	.496	.050	.563		.000
Dependent Variable: Enabling others to act	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	R Square	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	2.648	.262		0.039	.000
learning through accessing others	.203	.069	.198		.004
Dependent Variable: Encouraging the heart	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	R Square	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	1.356	.330		0.173	.000
learning through accessing others	.577	.087	.416		.000

Table 8 shows that the strongest positive effect of learning through action is on the transformational leadership behaviour of challenging the process (Beta = 0.563) which explains around 32% of its total variance (R Square = 0.318). In order to investigate the effect of the

mixed learning style, regression analysis was also used. It revealed a significant positive effect of the mixed learning style on each of the five behaviors of transformational leadership (modeling the way, inspiring a shared vision, challenging the process, enabling others to act, and encouraging the heart) as table 9 indicates.

Table 9. Regression analysis of the effect of the mixed learning style on each of the five behaviors of transformational leadership

Dependent Variable:	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	R Square	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
Modelling the way					
(Constant)	-.579	.289		0.441	.046
mixed learning style	1.074	.083	.664		.000
Inspiring a shared vision					
(Constant)	-.295	.318		0.378	.356
mixed learning style	1.034	.091	.615		.000
Challenging the process					
(Constant)	-.209	.118		0.813	.078
mixed learning style	1.030	.034	.902		.000
Enabling others to act					
(Constant)	1.516	.290		0.170	.000
mixed learning style	.549	.083	.412		.000
Encouraging the heart					
(Constant)	.110	.363		0.298	.763
mixed learning style	.987	.104	.546		.000
Mixed Leadership behaviors					
(Constant)	.115	.140		0.717	.415
mixed learning style	.933	.040	.847		.000

Dependent Variable:	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized	R Square	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Coefficients Beta		
Modelling the way					
(Constant)	-.579	.289		0.441	.046
mixed learning style	1.074	.083	.664		.000
Dependent Variable:	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized	R Square	Sig.
Inspiring a shared vision	B	Std. Error	Coefficients Beta		
(Constant)	-.295	.318		0.378	.356
mixed learning style	1.034	.091	.615		.000
Dependent Variable:	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized	R Square	Sig.
Challenging the process	B	Std. Error	Coefficients Beta		
(Constant)	-.209	.118		0.813	.078
mixed learning style	1.030	.034	.902		.000
Dependent Variable:	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized	R Square	Sig.
Enabling others to act	B	Std. Error	Coefficients Beta		
(Constant)	1.516	.290		0.170	.000
mixed learning style	.549	.083	.412		.000
Dependent Variable:	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized	R Square	Sig.
Encouraging the heart	B	Std. Error	Coefficients Beta		
(Constant)	.110	.363		0.298	.763
mixed learning style	.987	.104	.546		.000
Dependent Variable:	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized	R Square	Sig.
Mixed Leadership behaviors	B	Std. Error	Coefficients Beta		
(Constant)	.115	.140		0.717	.415
mixed learning style	.933	.040	.847		.000

Table 9 shows that the strongest positive effect of the mixed learning style is on the transformational leadership behaviour of challenging the process (Beta = 0.902) which explains around 81% of its total variance (R Square = 0.813). In light of the regression analysis results for the mixed learning style as well as its four component strategies (learning through action, thinking, feeling, and accessing others), it can be concluded that H1 is true and there is a



significant positive effect of each of the four learning strategies (learning through action, thinking, feeling, and accessing others) on each of the five transformational leadership practices (modeling the way, inspiring a shared vision, challenging the process, enabling others to act, and encouraging the heart) in the workplace.

The second hypothesis of the study proposed that there are significant differences in respondents' leadership skills and learning styles according to their level of work experience. An independent samples T test was applied to examine the differences in mean values between high vs. low years of work experience groups for the variables of the study. In an independent sample T test, when a grouping variable has more than two values, it is usually recommended to use the median as a cut point to split the sample into two independent groups (Norušis, 2000; Field, 2006). The median value for respondents' years of experience at work equaled 2, which was the category of 1 to less than 2 years that included 42.5 % of the respondents and about 52.8% of the respondents were confined below this category, as table 2 indicated before. The independent samples T test showed that there are no significant differences in mean values between high vs. low years of work experience groups for the transformational leadership behaviors as table 10 indicates.

Table 10. The independent samples T test between high vs. low years of work experience groups for the transformational leadership behaviors.

leadership Behaviors	Years of experience	N	Mean	Mean	T test Sig. (2-
				Difference	tailed)
Modeling the way	less than 2 years	101	3.0944	-.04639	.676
	2 years or more	113	3.1408		
Inspiring a shared vision	less than 2 years	100	3.2955	.04712	.684
	2 years or more	113	3.2484		
Challenging the process	less than 2 years	101	3.3439	.00955	.903
	2 years or more	113	3.3343		
Enabling others to act	less than 2 years	101	3.4307	.04779	.602
	2 years or more	113	3.3829		
Encouraging the heart	less than 2 years	100	3.4060	-.19754	.111
	2 years or more	113	3.6035		

The independent samples T test also showed that there are no significant differences in mean values between high vs. low years of work experience groups for respondents' learning styles as table 11 indicates. Therefore, the second hypothesis was proved to be false as no significant

differences were found in respondents' leadership skills and learning styles according to their level of work experience.

Table 11. The independent samples T test between high vs. low years of work experience groups for respondents' learning styles

Learning Styles	Years of experience	N	Mean	Mean Difference	T test Sig. (2-tailed)
learning through action	less than 2 years	101	3.3950	-.14374	.126
	2 years or more	113	3.5387		
learning through thinking	less than 2 years	100	3.0446	-.04521	.699
	2 years or more	113	3.0898		
learning through feeling	less than 2 years	101	3.5791	.13640	.127
	2 years or more	113	3.4427		
learning through accessing others	less than 2 years	100	3.7150	-.03500	.696
	2 years or more	113	3.7500		

The third hypothesis of the study proposed that there are significant differences in respondents' leadership skills and learning styles according to their gender. Independent samples T test results showed that there are no significant differences in mean values between high vs. low years of work experience groups for all the transformational leadership behaviors with the exception of "Inspiring a shared vision" and "Enabling others to act" where male respondents were demonstrating these behaviors more frequently than females, as table 12 indicates.

Table 12. The independent samples T test between male and female respondents for the transformational leadership behaviors

leadership Behaviors	Gender	N	Mean	Mean Difference	T test Sig. (2-tailed)
Modeling the way	Male	192	3.1399	.20400	.263
	Female	22	2.9359		
Inspiring a shared vision	Male	192	3.3141	.42209	.026
	Female	22	2.8920		
Challenging the process	Male	192	3.3606	.21187	.100
	Female	22	3.1488		
Enabling others to act	Male	192	3.4467	.40125	.007
	Female	22	3.0455		
Encouraging the heart	Male	192	3.5141	.03232	.874
	Female	22	3.4818		

The independent samples T test also showed that there are no significant differences in mean values between male and female groups for respondents' learning styles as table 13 indicates. The results of the data analysis for the third hypothesis are inconclusive. Therefore, we cannot accept or reject the hypothesis that assumes the existence of significant differences in respondents' leadership skills and learning styles according to their gender.

Table 13. The independent samples T test between high vs. low years of work experience groups for respondents' learning styles

Learning Styles	Gender	N	Mean	Mean Difference	T test Sig. (2-tailed)
learning through action	Male	192	3.4929	.21452	.165
	Female	22	3.2784		
learning through thinking	Male	192	3.0841	.15226	.427
	Female	22	2.9318		
learning through feeling	Male	192	3.5265	.18942	.202
	Female	22	3.3371		
learning through accessing others	Male	191	3.7435	.09663	.511
	Female	22	3.6469		

## CONCLUSION

The main findings of the study supported the first hypothesis and rejected the second one but were inconclusive regarding the third hypothesis. Each learning strategy significantly and positively affected each transformational leadership behavior. It was also noted that, some causal effects were stronger than others which might indicate that mastering certain leadership skills may require different approaches to learning. Therefore, potential leaders should expand their range of learning strategies because each strategy can lead to the acquisition of different leadership practices in the process of developing future transformational leaders.

The use of multiple learning strategies was also positively affecting each of the transformational leadership practices and the frequency of transformational leadership behaviors as a whole. These findings are in line with the previous literature and in support of the general causality that was found in earlier studies. The findings of the study revealed that the strongest positive effect of learning through action was on the transformational leadership behaviour of enabling others to act. It was also found that the strongest positive effect of learning through thinking, learning through feeling, and learning through action is on the transformational leadership behaviour of challenging the process which means that leaders with

effective learning styles will engage in behaviors that challenges the status quo of the organization more frequently as one of the most obviously learning-induced leadership practices. This conclusion was also supported by data analysis indication that the strongest positive effect of the mixed learning style was also on the transformational leadership behaviour of challenging the process. It can also be concluded from this study that people who always use the same basic learning strategies are less likely to achieve their goals, share a vision with others, or change their status quo.

Furthermore, data analysis revealed that managers with different levels of work experience did not differed significantly in their use of learning strategies or their demonstration of transformational leadership behaviors. This conclusion is not in line with most of the previous research findings and might be reached due to the small sample size limitation or due to the fact that managers typically need an extended range of years of work experience (more than 5 years) to start enjoying the enhanced effect of their learning style on leadership behaviors. Few gender differences were found in the display of transformational leadership behaviors, particularly in “Inspiring a shared vision” and “Enabling others to act” where male respondents were demonstrating these behaviors more frequently than females, but no differences were found in their learning strategies. Again, such inconclusive finding might be due to the same limitation mentioned above. That is the small sample size. Nevertheless, the main findings of the study supported the notion that all four individual learning strategies were effective for learning leadership practices and transformational leadership. The cosmopolitan nature of markets and the collectivistic culture of the gulf region constitute a very fertile environment for individuals and business schools to adopt a variety of learning styles. In particular, action learning and learning through accessing others approaches are in line with the overall cultural values of this region. It is the responsibility of business schools and educators to encourage multiple learning styles throughout the curriculum in order to help future leaders to adapt to the workplace of tomorrow as distinguished changers.

### **LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

As mentioned before, the sample size is considered one of the main limitations of the study as most respondents were relatively young which led to inconclusive results in relation to the effect of work experience. Furthermore, convenient samples are not accurately representative of the population, especially in terms of gender distribution, which led to inconclusive results in relation to gender differences of investigated variables. The study is conducted within the cultural context of the Arabian Gulf region and the results might differ if the scope of the sample is widened to include other countries or regions. However, such limitations are expected in light of

the inevitable constraints of academic research and they are in no way undermining the credibility of the results of this study.

## REFERENCES

- Abutineh, A; Khasawneh, S; and Omary, A (2009). Kouzes and Posner's Transformational Leadership Model in Practice: The Case of Jordanian Schools. *Journal of Leadership Education* Volume 7, Issue 3, 265-283
- Ames, P. (2003). Gender and Learning Style Interactions in Students' Computer Attitudes. *Journal of Educational Computing Research*. vol. 28 no. 3, 231-244
- Bandura, A. (2004). Social cognitive theory for personal and social change by enabling media. In A. Singhal, M. J. Cody, E. M. Rogers & M. Sabido (Eds.), *Entertainment-education and social change: History, research, and practice* (pp. 75–96). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Barling, J., Christie, A., & Hopton, A. (2011). Leadership. In S. Zedeck (Ed.), *Handbook of industrial and organizational psychology*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Bass, B. M. (1985). *Leadership and performance beyond expectations*. New York, NY: Free Press.
- Bass, B. M., & Avolio, B. J. (1997). *Full range leadership development: Manual for The Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire*. Redwood City, CA: Mind Garden, Inc.
- Bass, B. M., & Avolio, B. J. (2004). *Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire, Third Edition: Manual and sampler set*. Redwood City, CA: Mind Garden.
- Bass, B. M., Avolio, B. J., Jung, D. I., & Berson, Y. (2003). Predicting unit performance by assessing transformational and transactional leadership. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 88, 207-218.
- Blomberg, D (2013) The Heart Has Reasons That Reason Cannot Know: Thinking, Feeling, and Willing in Learning. *Journal of Education and Christian Belief*, (17) 1, pp 61–77
- Bommer, W. H., Rubin, R. S., & Baldwin, T. T. (2004). Setting the stage for effective leadership: Antecedents of transformational leadership behavior. *Leadership Quarterly*, 15, 195-210.
- Bono, J. E., & Judge, T. A. (2004). Personality and transformational and transactional leadership: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 89, 901-910.
- Breen, J. (2014) Exploring criticality in management education through action learning, *Action Learning: Research and Practice*, 11:1, 4-24,
- Brown, L. & Posner, B. (2001). Exploring the relationship between learning and leadership. *Organizational Development Journal*. 22(6), 274-280
- Burns, J. M. (1978). *Leadership*. New York, NY: Harper & Row.
- Carnell, R., & Baker, S. A. (2007). A qualitative evaluation of a project to enhance pupils' emotional literacy through a student assistance program. *Pastoral Care*, (25) 1, 33–41.
- Cleveland, J. N., Vescio, T. K., & Barnes-Farrell, J. L. (2005). Gender discrimination in organizations. In R. L. Dipboye & A. Colella (Eds.), *Discrimination at work* (pp. 149-176). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Cone, D. (2001). Active learning: The key to our future. *Journal of Family and Consumer Sciences*, 93(4), 19-21.
- Dalton, M. (1999). *The Learning Tactics Inventory: Facilitator's guide*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass/Pfeiffer.
- Damasio, A. (2003). *Looking for Spinoza: Joy, sorrow, and the feeling brain*. Orlando, FL: Harcourt.
- Debowski, S., & Blake, V. (2004). The developmental needs of higher education academic leaders in encouraging effective teaching and learning. In *Seeking Educational Excellence, Teaching and Learning Forum*, 9-10. Retrieved in February 2015 from <http://lsn.curtin.edu.au/tiftf2004/debowski.html>

- Dormann, C.; Whitson, J.; and Neuvians M. (2013) Once More With Feeling: Game Design Patterns for Learning in the Affective Domain. *Journal of Games and Culture*. 8(4), pp 215-237
- Eagly, A. H., & Johnson, B. T. (1990). Gender and leadership style: A meta-analysis. *Psychological Bulletin*, 108, 223-256.
- Eagly, A. H., & Karau, S. J. (1991). Gender and the emergence of leaders: A meta analysis. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 60, 685-710.
- Eagly, A. H., & Karau, S. J. (2002). Role congruity theory of prejudice toward female leaders. *Psychological Review*, 109, 573-598.
- Eagly, A. H., & Makhijani, M. G., & Klonsky, B. G. (1992). Gender and the evaluation of leaders: A meta-analysis. *Psychological Bulletin*, 111, 3-22.
- Eagly, A. H., Johannesen-Schmidt, M. C., & van Engen, M. L. (2003). Transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire leadership styles: A meta-analysis comparing women and men. *Psychological Bulletin*, 95, 569-591.
- El-Farargy, N. (2010) The views, attitudes and learning style preferences of Higher National Chemical Engineering students. *Education For Chemical Engineers*, 5, pp 55–71
- Field, A. (2006). *Discovering statistics using SPSS 2nd ed*. California: Sage Publications.
- Fleming, J. (2015) Enhancing Cooperative Education Through Action Learning Projects. In M. Li and Y. Zhao (eds.), *Exploring Learning & Teaching in Higher Education, New Frontiers of Educational Research*, Springer-Verlag Berlin Heidelberg.
- Flores, A. (2015) *Developing Transformational Leaders: An Ethnographic Look at Best Practices by Cohort Mentors in the Brandman University Doctoral Program*. Unpublished Doctoral Thesis, Brandman University. USA.
- Fullan, M., & Scott, G. (2009). *Turnaround leadership for higher education*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Graeme Simpson & Katja Nowacki (2015) Learning about ourselves through considering others: an examination of German students' cross-national learning, *European Journal of Social Work*, 18:5, 770-784
- Haghighi, S. (2014) *Transformational Learning Toward Transformative Leadership*. Unpublished Doctoral Thesis. Lewis & Clark College. USA.
- Hall, J., Johnson, S., Wysocki, A. and Kepner, K. (2008), *Transformational Leadership: The Transformation of Managers and Associates*, University of Florida, FL.
- Hovelynck, J. (2003). Moving active learning forward. *Journal of Experiential Education*, 26(1), 1.
- Immordino-Yang, M. H. (2011). Implications of affective and social neuroscience for educational theory. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 43(1), 98–103.
- Immordino-Yang, M. H. and Damasio, A. (2007), *We Feel, Therefore We Learn: The Relevance of Affective and Social Neuroscience to Education*. *Mind, Brain, and Education*, 1(1), pp 3–10.
- Judge, T., Woolf, E. F., Hurst, C., & Livingston, B. (2006). Charismatic and Transformational Leadership. *Zeitschrift für Arbeits- und Organisations psychologie*, 50(4), 203–214.
- Jyoti, J and Dev, M (2015), "The impact of transformational leadership on employee creativity: the role of learning orientation", *Journal of Asia Business Studies*, Vol. 9 Iss 1 pp. 78 – 98
- Kelloway, E. K., & Barling, J. (2000). What we have learned about developing transformational leaders. *Leadership & Organization Development Journal*, 21(7), 355-362.
- Khokhar, F. (2001) *Transformational and Transactional Leadership: An Exploratory Study in a Developing Country*. Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Manchester, UK.
- Kouzes, J. M., & Posner, B. Z. (1995). *The leadership challenge: How to keep getting extraordinary things done in organizations (2nd ed.)*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey- Bass.

- Kouzes, J. M., & Posner, B. Z. (1997). *The leadership practice inventory: Facilitator's guide*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Kouzes, J. M., & Posner, B. Z. (2003). *The leadership practice inventory: Participant's workbook* (2nd ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Kouzes, J. M., & Posner, B. Z. (2007). *Leadership challenges* (4th ed.). New York, NY: Wiley.
- Madsen, S. (2010) Leadership Development in the United Arab Emirates: The Transformational Learning Experiences of Women. *Journal of Leadership & Organizational Studies* 17(1) 100– 110
- Mahn, H., & John-Steiner, V. (2002). The gift of confidence: A Vygotskyan view of emotions. In G. Wells & G. Claxton (Eds.), *Learning for life in the 21st century: Sociocultural perspectives on the future of education* (pp. 201–224). Oxford, England: Blackwell.
- Mark Selkrig (2011) Learning about ourselves from others: transformation of artists' identities through community-based arts practice, *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 30:5, 577-589
- Misra, R., & Ballard, D. (2003). Community needs and strengths assessments as an active learning project. *Journal of School Health*, 73(7), 269-271.
- Murphy, L. (2005). Transformational leadership: A cascading chain reaction. *Journal of Nursing Management*, 13, 128-136.
- Northouse, P. (2007). *Leadership: Theory and practice* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Norušis, M. (2000). *SPSS® 10.0: Guide to Data Analysis*. Prentice-Hall.
- Noruzi, A.; Dalfard, V.; Azhdari, B.; Shirkouhi, S.; Rezazadeh, A. (2013) Relations between transformational leadership, organizational learning, knowledge management, organizational innovation, and organizational performance: an empirical investigation of manufacturing firms. *International Journal of Advanced Manufacturing Technology*. 64:1073–1085
- Philbin, M; Meier, E; Huffman, S; and Boverie, P. (1995) A Survey Of Gender And Learning Styles *Journal of Sex Roles*. Volume 32, Issue 7, pp 485-494
- Pounder, J. S. (2008). Transformational leadership: Practicing what we teach in the management classroom. *Journal of Education for Business*, 84(1), 2-6.
- Pritchard, A. (2009) *Ways of Learning: Learning theories and learning styles in the classroom*. 2nd edition, Routledge, UK.
- Reinhardt, A. C. (2004). Discourse on the transformational leader meta-narrative or finding the right person to do the job. *Advances in Nursing Sciences*, 27(1), 21-31.
- Selkrig, M. (2011). Learning about ourselves from others: Transformation of artists' identities through community-based arts practice. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 30 (5), 573-585.
- Severson, E. and Destefano, J. (2014) Leadership for Transformational Learning: A Developmental Approach to Supporting Leaders' Thinking and Practice. *Journal of Research on Leadership Education*. Vol. 9(2) 113–141
- Simpson, G. & Nowacki, K. (2015) Learning about ourselves through considering others: an examination of German students' cross-national learning, *European Journal of Social Work*, 18:5, 770-784
- Skakon, J., Nielsen, K., Borg, V., & Guzman, J. (2010). Are leaders' well-being, behaviours and style associated with the affective well-being of their employees? A systematic review of three decades of research. *Work & Stress*, 24(2), 107–139.
- Slater, J; Lujan, H; and Dicarlo, S. (2007) Does gender influence learning style preferences of first-year medical students?. *Advances in Physiology Education* Published 1 December 2007 Vol. 31 no. 4, 336-342
- Snook, S., Nohria, N., & Khurana, R. (Eds.). (2011). *The handbook for teaching leadership: Knowing, doing, and being*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

- Tafvelin, S. (2013) *The Transformational Leadership Process: Antecedents, Mechanisms, and Outcomes in the Social Services*. Unpublished PhD Thesis, Umeå University, Sweden.
- Teixeira-Poit, M.; Cameron, A.; and Schulman, M. (2011) *Experiential Learning and Research Ethics: Enhancing Knowledge through Action*. *Teaching Sociology*, 39(3), 244– 258
- Tomasello, M. (2004) *Learning Through Others*. *Daedalus*, The American Academy of Art & Sciences, 133(1), 51-58.
- Vaill, P. (1996). *Learning as a way of being: Strategies for survival in a world of permanent white water*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Van Velsor, E. (Ed.). (2003). *The Center for Creative Leadership handbook of leadership development*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Vecchio, R. P. (2003). *In search of gender advantage*. *Leadership Quarterly*, 14, 835-850.
- Walia, S. and Marks-Maran D. (2014) *Leadership Development Through Action Learning Sets: An Evaluation Study*. *Nurse Education in Practice*, 14 , pp 612-619
- Walumbwa, F. O., Orwa, B., Wang, P., & Lawler, J. J. (2005). *Transformational leadership, organizational commitment, and job satisfaction: A comparative study of Kenyan and U.S. financial firms*. *Human Resource Quarterly*, 16, 235-256.
- Wolterstorff, N. P. (2006). *Teaching Justly For Justice*. *Journal of Education and Christian Belief*, 10(2), 23–37.
- Yukl, G. (2002). *Leadership in organizations*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Zwolsman, S.; Dijk, N.; Verhoeven, A.; Ruijter, W.; and Waard, M.; (2011) *How learning style affects evidence-based medicine: a survey study*. *BMC Medical Education*, 11, 81