



Administrative Leadership Styles and Demographic Differences in Government Units in the Sultanate of Oman

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Type: Full Article. Received: 6th Apr. 2025, Accepted: 18th Jul. 2025, Published: 1st Aug. 2026.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.35552/0247.40.8.2607>

Abstract: Objective: This study aims to identify the prevailing leadership style in government units within the Sultanate of Oman from the employees' perspective. It also examines whether demographic variables, including gender, age, educational qualifications, job position, and years of experience, result in statistically significant differences in employees' perceptions of these styles. **Method :** Utilizing a descriptive survey approach, data were collected through the Leadership Styles Questionnaire (LSQ), a validated 18-item instrument developed by Northouse (2012). A stratified random sample of 484 employees was drawn from 37 government units across various administrative divisions. Preliminary data examination and hypothesis testing were conducted using SPSS. **Key Findings:** The study concluded that, from the employees' perspective, the prevailing leadership style in government units in the Sultanate of Oman is the democratic style, followed by the laissez-faire style, with the autocratic style being the least prominent. Additionally, the results showed that there were no statistically significant differences between the following demographic variables (gender, age, educational qualification, job position, and years of experience) and leadership styles (democratic leadership, autocratic leadership, and laissez-faire leadership style). **Conclusions and Recommendations:** This study is significant as it provides valuable insights for decision-makers to refine their leadership styles in the public sector, ultimately contributing to improved organizational efficiency and increased employee satisfaction. It highlights the importance of democratic leadership in environments that prioritize participatory decision-making. Moreover, it offers a deeper understanding of how leadership styles are perceived across diverse employee groups, reinforcing the need for inclusive and adaptive leadership development programs in government institutions. The study recommends enhancing democratic leadership practices to develop participatory governance in government units and expanding the scope of research to include comparisons between the government and private sectors, thereby furthering the understanding of effective leadership styles.

Keywords: Leadership styles, Democratic Leadership, Autocratic Leadership, Laissez-Faire Leadership Style, Demographic Variables.

أنماط القيادة الإدارية والفروقات الديموغرافية في الوحدات الحكومية في سلطنة عُمان

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تاريخ التسليم: (2025/4/6)، تاريخ القبول: (2025/7/18)، تاريخ النشر: (2026/8/1)

المخلص: الهدف: تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى التعرف على النمط القيادي السائد في الوحدات الحكومية داخل سلطنة عُمان من وجهة نظر الموظفين، كما تسعى إلى فحص ما إذا كانت المتغيرات الديموغرافية، بما في ذلك الجنس، العمر، المؤهلات التعليمية، سنوات الخبرة، تؤدي إلى وجود فروق ذات دلالة إحصائية في تصورات الموظفين تجاه هذه الأنماط. **المنهج:** تم استخدام المنهج الوصفي المسحي، وُجمعت البيانات من خلال استبيان أساليب القيادة (LSQ)، وهي أداة مكونة من 18 بنداً طورها نورثاوس (2012) وتم التحقق من صدقها. تم اختيار عينة عشوائية طبقية مكونة من 484 موظفاً من 37 وحدة حكومية موزعة على مختلف التقسيمات الإدارية. تم تحليل البيانات الأولية واختبار الفرضيات باستخدام برنامج SPSS. **أهم النتائج:** توصلت الدراسة إلى أن أسلوب القيادة السائد في الوحدات الحكومية في سلطنة عُمان، من وجهة نظر الموظفين، هو أسلوب القيادة الديمقراطية، يليه أسلوب القيادة التيسيري، في حين جاء أسلوب القيادة الاستبدادية في المرتبة الأخيرة. كما أظهرت النتائج عدم وجود فروق ذات دلالة إحصائية بين المتغيرات الديموغرافية (الجنس، العمر، المؤهل العلمي، الوظيفة، وسنوات الخبرة) وأنماط القيادة (القيادة الديمقراطية، القيادة الاستبدادية، والقيادة التيسيرية). **الاستنتاجات والتوصيات:** تكتسب هذه الدراسة أهميتها من خلال تقديم رؤى قيمة لصناع القرار تساعد في تحسين أساليب القيادة في القطاع العام، مما يساهم في رفع كفاءة الأداء المؤسسي وزيادة رضا الموظفين. كما تسلط الضوء على أهمية القيادة الديمقراطية في البيئات التي تركز على صنع القرار التشاركي، وتوفر فهماً أعمق لكيفية إدراك الموظفين لأنماط القيادة المختلفة، مما يعزز الحاجة إلى تطوير برامج قيادية شاملة ومتكيفة في المؤسسات الحكومية. وتوصي الدراسة بتعزيز ممارسات القيادة الديمقراطية لتطوير الحوكمة التشاركية في الوحدات الحكومية، وتوسيع نطاق البحث ليشمل إجراء مقارنات بين القطاعين الحكومي والخاص، مما يساهم في تعميق الفهم لأساليب القيادة الفعالة. **الكلمات المفتاحية:** أنماط القيادة، القيادة الديمقراطية، القيادة الاستبدادية، القيادة التيسيرية، المتغيرات الديموغرافية.

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Introduction

Leadership is a dynamic and multifaceted process that plays a critical role in shaping organizational success by influencing employees' attitudes, behaviors, and performance. As Drucker (1974) aptly stated, "Leadership is lifting a person's vision to higher sights, raising a person's performance to a higher standard, and building a personality beyond its normal limitations". (p. 318) Leaders play a crucial role in aligning the efforts of individuals and teams with the organization's vision, thereby creating an environment that fosters the achievement of shared goals.

Over time, leadership theories have evolved from trait-based and behavioral models to more adaptive and inclusive frameworks. Early theories such as the Great Man Theory (Carlyle, 1840), Trait Theory (Stogdill, 1948), and Behavioral Theory (Lewin *et al.*, 1939) emphasized individual traits and observable behaviors. Modern frameworks, such as transformational leadership (Burns, 2004) and charismatic leadership (Bass, 1990), emphasize emotional influence and visionary direction. More recent studies incorporate digital and inclusive leadership models that respond to technological disruption and generational diversity in the workplace (Gao & Gao, 2024; Salamah *et al.*, 2024).

Leadership practices in public and private organizations differ significantly. Public institutions are often constrained by bureaucratic structures, regulatory limitations, and slower adoption of leadership development initiatives (O'Toole & Meier, 2011; Rainey, 2009; Alawiah & Tukiran, 2024; Al-Mutairi *et al.*, 2024). These constraints frequently result in either rigid authority or excessive leniency, both of which can lead to employee dissatisfaction and reduced productivity. Therefore, implementing adaptive leadership

practices is crucial for enhancing public sector performance and employee satisfaction.

Despite the significance of leadership in the public sector, previous studies on this topic remain limited, particularly in the context of the Sultanate of Oman. Previous studies, such as those by Hans *et al.* (2018), have examined leadership and administrative creativity among mid-level employees in eight government organizations in Oman. Other research has focused on the education sector (e.g., Gharaidih & Al-Jahwari, 2019; Al-Subhi, 2017), with limited attention given to sectors such as health, industry, and civil services.

This study was conducted during a period of significant institutional and economic restructuring in Oman, triggered by declining oil revenues, increasing public debt, and the broader impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. These developments necessitated administrative reform and new leadership approaches to manage change, re-engage employees, and maintain the effectiveness of public service.

The novelty of this study lies in its broad and representative scope. Unlike earlier research, this study includes a diverse range of government sectors, utilizes a stratified random sample across 37 public institutions, and applies a validated leadership framework (LSQ). Additionally, it addresses an underexplored area: the extent to which demographic factors such as gender, age, education, job position, and work experience affect employees' perceptions of leadership styles. This comprehensive perspective provides empirical insights that enhance the literature on public administration in the Gulf region.

Moreover, previous studies across various sectors and regions have produced inconsistent results regarding dominant leadership styles. For example, transformational leadership is

reported as the most prevalent style in the Middle East, particularly in innovation-driven sectors such as information and communication technology, in Tunisia and the United Arab Emirates, where it fosters a climate conducive to innovation (Hassi *et al.*, 2024). Similarly, Hama *et al.* (2023) found that transformational leadership was the most influential style in enhancing organizational performance at ADNOC Company in the UAE. In contrast, democratic leadership was the least influential in that context.

In contrast, Al-Bashaireh *et al.* (2025) found that nurses in Algeria primarily used management by exception, which aligns with the structured nature of healthcare environments. Meanwhile, a study conducted in Saudi Arabia by Ur Rehman and Alorifi (2024) found that authoritarian leadership was highly practiced by women entrepreneurs in the Hail and Riyadh regions, followed by democratic leadership, highlighting how cultural and contextual factors may shape leadership practices.

These diverse findings drive home the importance of more localized and context-sensitive investigations. They demonstrate that leadership effectiveness and prevalence vary not only by sector but also by gender, culture, and organizational mission. This variation further justifies the current study's aim to examine leadership styles across government units in Oman, a setting that remains underexplored in comparative leadership literature.

The purpose of the study

The primary purpose of this study is to identify the prevailing leadership within government units in the Sultanate of Oman. Additionally, the study aims to investigate whether demographic variables, including gender, age, educational level, job position, and years of experience, have a statistically

significant impact on employees' perceptions of these leadership styles. This study attempts to answer the following two research questions:

1. What are the prevailing leadership styles in government units from the employees' perspective in the Sultanate of Oman?
2. Are there important differences in how employees view leadership styles in government units in the Sultanate of Oman based on factors like gender, age, education level, job position, and work experience at a significance level of ($\alpha = 0.05$)?

Problem Statement

Recently, the Sultanate of Oman has faced successive economic challenges, beginning with a sharp decline in oil prices since 2014. This resulted in a significant fiscal deficit that peaked in 2016 at nearly 20% of the GDP, according to reports by the International Monetary Fund (2024). The crisis deepened with the COVID-19 pandemic, which led to a contraction in non-oil GDP and a rise in public debt to around 70% of GDP by 2020. In response, the Omani government implemented several structural measures, including the merger of specific government units, the privatization of public institutions, and a reduction in the overall state budget, along with cuts in subsidies for key public services.

These measures were accompanied by substantial changes in the administrative and organizational environment within public institutions, which imposed new leadership styles and altered administrative roles and responsibilities at various levels. Despite the significance of these transformations, a clear research gap remains in understanding how such changes have influenced administrative leadership styles in Omani government units, particularly in light of demographic differences among employees, such as gender, age, educational level, and years of experience. Therefore, we need a study to explore the

relationship between different leadership styles and employee demographics in Oman's evolving economy, as this topic has not been thoroughly examined in existing research.

While leadership in the public sector plays a critical role, research in this area remains limited, particularly within the Omani context. A notable study by Hans *et al.* (2018) examined the relationship between leadership styles and administrative creativity, focusing solely on middle-level employees in eight government organizations. Furthermore, previous studies have centered on the education sector, as seen in the works of (Al-Gharaidih & Al-Jahwari, 2019; Al-Subhi, 2017). The present study aims to broaden this perspective by encompassing a wider range of government units across various sectors, including but not limited to education, healthcare, and industry.

Moreover, existing research reveals inconsistencies in the dominant leadership styles across various sectors. For example, (Sofi & Devanadhen, 2015; Al-Gharaidih & Al-Jahwari, 2019) identified transformational leadership as prevalent in the banking sector. Conversely, studies by (Chua *et al.*, 2018; Kotur & Anbazhagan, 2014) emphasized democratic leadership, while Uzunsaf Yamak and Zihni Eyupoglu (2018) found charismatic leadership to be dominant among hotel managers. In contrast, Babalola *et al.* (2019) reported authoritarian leadership as the most common style in political contexts. These varying findings indicate the value of conducting a more comprehensive and context-sensitive study, one that reflects the diverse realities within Oman's public institutions.

Literature review, proposed hypothesis, and framework

Leadership Styles

Leadership is a dynamic process that involves influencing and directing the efforts of a group toward achieving shared goals. Stogdill

(1950) defined leadership as "the process (act) of influencing the activities of an organized group in its efforts toward goal setting and goal achievement." (Hemphill & Coons, 1957, p. 36) expanded on this concept, describing leadership as "the behavior of an individual when they are directing the activities of a group toward a shared goal." Similarly, Fiedler defined leadership as "the efforts and duties carried out by the leader to achieve the planned and predetermined goals through the behaviors of individuals, aiming for success in creating change" (Fiedler, as cited in Salah *et al.*, 2024, p. 1058). Leadership styles reflect the consistent behaviors and actions of leaders as they interact with employees, shaping organizational dynamics and outcomes (Lewin *et al.*, 1939).

The three primary leadership styles—democratic, autocratic, and laissez-faire—are foundational frameworks in leadership theory. Each style has distinct characteristics, advantages, and challenges:

Democratic Leadership: Democratic leadership emphasizes participation and collaboration in decision-making processes, fostering higher employee morale and productivity (Anderson, 1959; Hackman & Johnson, 1996). Several studies have highlighted the positive impact of this leadership style on employee performance and organizational morale. Chua *et al.* (2018) and Kotur and Anbazhagan (2014) emphasized the crucial role of democratic leadership in enhancing employee performance and creating a positive work environment. Jooste and Fourie (2009) argued that this leadership style contributes to increased productivity and job satisfaction, while Daft and Lane (2018) underscored its role in empowering employees through delegation and promoting independent decision-making.

A democratic leader actively involves team members in decision-making processes, which in turn improves their morale in various organizational contexts (Anderson, 1959). According to Anderson (1991), democratic leadership is among the most effective leadership styles, as it fosters higher productivity, greater team contributions, and enhanced group morale. Iqbal *et al.* (2015) further noted that this leadership approach instills confidence in employees, enabling them to meet deadlines, achieve departmental goals, and contribute effectively to teamwork. Additionally, democratic leaders encourage employees to provide suggestions and recommendations on major issues, granting them complete control and responsibility over their tasks, which ultimately fosters leadership and professional development (Qawariq *et al.*, 2021).

Participation is a fundamental characteristic of democratic leadership, as democratic leaders tend to be friendly and supportive, actively encouraging employee involvement in decision-making (Luthar, 1996). Daft and Lane (2018) highlighted that democratic leaders empower employees by delegating authority, fostering independent decision-making, and leveraging their knowledge and expertise to accomplish organizational goals effectively. Although the final decision ultimately rests with the leader, democratic leadership ensures that employees actively contribute to the decision-making process. This approach enhances job satisfaction and instills a sense of control over career progression, motivating employees beyond financial rewards.

Recent findings further reinforce the strengths of this leadership style. According to Ahmed Genedy and Shehab El-Din (2025), democratic leadership is considered one of the most effective styles, as it empowers individuals to express their views, participate in various processes, and trust that their input will

be genuinely acknowledged and valued. This inclusive atmosphere contributes to a culture of openness, collaboration, and mutual respect.

While this approach may require more time due to its participatory nature, it often yields higher-quality outcomes. Therefore, environments that prioritize teamwork and quality over speed in achieving sustainable productivity are particularly suitable for democratic leadership.

Autocratic Leadership: Autocratic leadership is characterized by centralized decision-making, strict task definitions, and limited employee involvement in the decision-making process (Lewin *et al.*, 1939). Leaders who adopt this style often withhold specific information, creating uncertainty among employees and maintaining a distant or detached demeanor toward their subordinates. While staff input may be solicited occasionally, it is rarely incorporated into final decisions.

This leadership style emphasizes discipline, authority, and control over followers (Pizzolitto *et al.*, 2023). To maintain authority, autocratic leaders often exhibit high self-confidence and carefully strategize their actions to prevent challenges to their control (Chua *et al.*, 2018). According to Hassnain (2022), autocratic leadership is marked by strong centralized authority, where decisions are made independently, and subordinates are motivated through a combination of threats, punishments, and rewards. Leaders employing this approach advocate for unilateral decision-making, independent planning, and strict task execution guidelines, ensuring subordinates adhere precisely to instructions (Sanchez-Manzanares *et al.*, 2020).

A key characteristic of autocratic leadership is its emphasis on productivity over employee well-being, operating on the assumption that individuals require strict oversight to remain productive (Fiaz, 2017). Dubrin *et al.* (2006)

argue that autocratic leaders are primarily task-oriented, prioritizing task completion over employee engagement or satisfaction. Recent research by Cusa *et al.* (2024) reinforces these concerns, revealing that while distributive justice significantly enhances employee satisfaction, autocratic leadership is associated with decreased motivation and elevated stress levels. However, this leadership style can be particularly effective in crises, high-risk environments, or when tasks are highly structured and require swift decision-making (Chishty-Mujahid, 2016).

Research has demonstrated the prevalence of autocratic leadership in various organizational and political settings. Studies by (Mtimkulu *et al.*, 2014; Parveen *et al.*, 2022) found this leadership style dominant in environments requiring strict control and direction. Similarly, Babalola *et al.* (2019) highlighted its prevalence among political leaders, where maintaining authority and ensuring compliance are critical to governance and organizational stability. While effective in specific contexts, autocratic leadership often results in lower employee satisfaction and engagement, making it a less favorable approach in dynamic and participatory workplace cultures (Pizzolitto *et al.*, 2023; Chishty-Mujahid, 2016).

Laissez-faire leadership: The term *laissez-faire*, originally derived from French, is widely recognized in economics and political science to describe a policy of minimal government intervention in economic affairs (Encyclopædia Britannica, n.d.). In the context of leadership, Bass and Avolio (1990) define *laissez-faire* leadership as "the absence of leadership" and "the avoidance of intervention," signifying a hands-off approach to managing subordinates.

This leadership style is characterized by minimal direct supervision, where leaders grant employees significant autonomy in decision-

making and allow them to take ownership of their work. It operates on the assumption that individuals are inherently motivated and competent to manage their responsibilities without continuous oversight (Chhom *et al.*, 2024; Song *et al.*, 2021). Northouse (2018) describes this approach as a "hands-off, let things ride" style, reflecting a leader's reluctance to influence workplace dynamics actively. (p. 154)

Robbins *et al.* (2007) further explains that *laissez-faire* leadership involves "abdicating responsibilities and avoiding decision-making" (p. 475). Leaders who adopt this style, despite holding formal positions of authority, often neglect their responsibilities and fail to provide clear guidance. According to Hundie (2024), such leaders demonstrate limited confidence in their leadership abilities, avoid setting goals for their teams, and reduce opportunities for group interaction, which can hinder team cohesion and performance.

Research on *laissez-faire* leadership presents mixed findings regarding its effectiveness. While Houlihan (2020) identified it as a predominant leadership style in some settings, its success largely depends on the competency and self-sufficiency of employees. Studies by Chhom *et al.* (2024) have highlighted its effectiveness in creative industries, where autonomy fosters innovation. However, overreliance on this approach can lead to inefficiencies, reduced accountability, and a lack of direction when proper oversight is absent (Bass & Avolio, 1990; Houlihan, 2020).

In a recent study conducted in Pakistan, Alam *et al.* (2024) found that *laissez-faire* leadership was positively associated with organizational politics, including the absence of active leadership, which may encourage informal power dynamics within organizations. Furthermore, the study revealed a negative relationship between *laissez-faire* leadership

and esprit de corps (team spirit), suggesting that minimal involvement from leaders can weaken group cohesion. The findings also indicated that esprit de corps itself negatively correlates with organizational politics, reinforcing the detrimental cycle triggered by passive leadership.

Digital Leadership: Digital leadership is increasingly recognized as a transformative force in modern organizations, particularly within the context of digital transformation. It is broadly defined as a process of social influence mediated by technology, aimed at inducing changes in individuals' attitudes, emotions, thinking, behaviors, and performance across various organizational levels. This influence can take the form of one-to-one or one-to-many interactions, and it may occur across both formal and informal hierarchies (Stana *et al.*, 2024).

The use of the term 'digital leadership' rather than 'e-leadership' is intentional. While e-leadership typically focuses on Adaptive Information Technology (AIT) frameworks, the concept of digital leadership discussed here is based on Sørensen's view of Information Systems (IS), which emphasizes how technology is integrated and evolves within organizations (Stana *et al.*, 2024).

Empirical studies have demonstrated the value of digital leadership in shaping employee behavior, particularly in promoting innovation. For instance, Gao and Gao (2024) found that digital leadership has a positive influence on employees' innovative behavior, primarily by enhancing their sense of psychological empowerment. However, their findings indicate that this leadership style does not significantly influence affective commitment, suggesting a selective impact on employee attitudes.

Despite the growing relevance of digital leadership, most existing research has been

concentrated in developed countries, such as Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, Portugal, Australia, China, and Switzerland. In contrast, developing countries continue to be underrepresented in this area of research. Alawiah and Tukiran (2024) note that only a limited number of studies, such as one conducted in India, have explored digital leadership in these contexts, identifying this gap as a promising avenue for future research.

In the Arab region, efforts to conceptualize and apply digital leadership have begun to emerge. Al-Rajhi (2021) proposed a plan for utilizing digital leadership to enable Saudi universities to gain a competitive advantage by aligning leadership methods with the innovative concepts of a successful and dynamic university model (Salamah *et al.*, 2024).

Based on the reviewed literature, it is evident that leadership styles—democratic, autocratic, and laissez-faire—significantly influence organizational dynamics and employee performance. Given the diversity of findings in previous studies and the contextual specificity of leadership behavior, it becomes imperative to examine empirically which style predominates in Omani government units. Therefore, we propose the following hypothesis:

H1: The prevailing leadership style in government units, from the employees' perspective in the Sultanate of Oman, is the democratic style.

Demographic Variables and Leadership Behavior

Understanding how demographic factors influence leadership is key to creating effective management strategies. Factors such as age, gender, ethnicity, and educational background can significantly shape a leader's approach and effectiveness in different organizational contexts.

Leadership capabilities exhibit significant variability among individuals, with demographic characteristics having a significant impact on leadership styles (Mushtaq *et al.*, 2019). Key demographic traits, including age, gender, race, tenure, and education, are foundational variables that have been extensively examined in psychological and organizational research (Tsui & O'Reilly, 1989).

Among these traits, age and gender have been independently identified as influential factors affecting leadership styles. For instance, Kotur and Anbazhagan (2014) found that as individuals age, their tendency to assert authority decreases. Similarly, gender has a significant influence on leadership approaches. However, contrasting findings by Mushtaq (2014) suggest that age and experience do not markedly impact leadership styles overall. Notably, managers with advanced age and extensive experience are more likely to adopt a transformational leadership style.

The interplay between demographic variables and leadership styles has been further investigated in several studies. Gunawan & Cahayani (2022) reported no significant relationship between leadership styles and demographic factors such as age, education level, or marital status, except for gender. On the other hand, Bell *et al.* (2015) identified a significant positive correlation between leadership effectiveness and demographic variables, including gender, age, and education. Similarly, Waris *et al.* (2024) observed a negative correlation between age and leadership effectiveness, while gender, qualifications, and experience had a positive influence on leadership outcomes.

Other studies have shown mixed or context-specific findings. In Bahrain, Almass *et al.* (2024) reported that while gender did not significantly influence employees' perceptions

of leadership styles, significant differences were observed based on age, educational level, experience, and job position. In the Saudi context, AlMutairi *et al.* (2024) found a specific association between years of work experience and a tendency toward democratic leadership, indicating that experience may play a more defined role in shaping participatory leadership behaviors.

Moreover, Mohammed *et al.* (2012) investigated the influence of sociodemographic factors on transformational leadership styles among top management in Malaysian organizations. The study employed the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) to assess leadership styles and analyzed demographic factors, including gender, race, marital status, and educational level. The results indicated no significant differences between these demographic factors and transformational leadership styles, suggesting that leadership behavior in the studied organizations does not depend on demographic characteristics.

Similarly, Thakur *et al.* (2020) found in a study on ethical leadership and employee performance in the Indian pharmaceutical sector that gender, qualification, and marital status had no significant influence, whereas age and experience had notable effects.

Earlier research by Larson *et al.* (1974) also explored how supervisors' and employees' background characteristics affect leadership outcomes. While they identified certain relationships between age, experience, and satisfaction or performance, these correlations were neither strong nor consistent across institutions. Education level exhibited mixed effects on performance, and experience was found to be unrelated to performance outcomes.

These findings highlight the complex and varied impact of demographic characteristics on leadership styles and effectiveness,

indicating the importance of factors such as education, tenure, and occupational categories in shaping leadership behavior. Given the mixed results from earlier studies about how factors like gender, age, education, job position, and work experience affect views on leadership, it's important to not only identify the main leadership style but also to see if employees' backgrounds affect how they view leadership in Omani government institutions. Consequently, we formulate the following hypothesis:

H2: There are important differences at the significance level ($\alpha = 0.05$) in how the study participants view leadership styles in government units in the Sultanate of Oman based on factors like gender, age, education level, job position, and work experience.

Conceptual Framework

This study is grounded in Lewin's Behavioral Leadership Theory (Lewin *et al.*, 1939), which classifies leadership into three primary styles: democratic, autocratic, and laissez-faire. Lewin's model suggests that leadership is not a fixed trait but rather a behavioral approach that adapts to the nature of the task, the organizational structure, and the characteristics of team members. Leadership effectiveness, therefore, depends on situational variables and the organizational context in which it operates.

In this study, Lewin's theory is operationalized through the use of the Leadership Styles Questionnaire (LSQ), which measures the three leadership styles across 18 items. The framework examines how employees in Omani government units perceive these leadership styles and whether key demographic variables, including gender, age, educational level, job position, and years of experience, influence these perceptions.

Some previous studies have relied on this theory, such as (Houlihan, 2020), which

explored the prevailing leadership styles in small, medium, and large organizations, emphasizing the importance of leadership flexibility in improving interactions between leaders and employees. The current study examines the relationship between various leadership styles and factors such as gender, age, educational level, job position, and work experience in Omani government units, thereby enhancing our understanding of how these factors influence leadership practices in Oman.

As illustrated in Figure 1, the conceptual framework positions the three leadership styles (democratic, autocratic, and laissez-faire) as independent variables, with employees' perceptions serving as the primary dependent variable. Demographic factors function as potential moderators, influencing how leadership styles are perceived and interpreted within public institutions. This structure is designed to reflect the reality of leadership dynamics in Oman's public sector, which is currently shaped by institutional reform, demographic change, and a growing emphasis on employee engagement.

This study provides several contributions to the academic and practical understanding of leadership in government institutions. Theoretically, it expands on Lewin's leadership theory by applying it to government units in Oman, a context that has received limited scholarly attention, and bridges gaps in the literature by exploring the interplay between leadership styles and demographic variables, offering new insights into their impact on leadership effectiveness. Methodologically, the study utilizes a validated leadership assessment tool (LSQ) in the context of Omani government institutions, ensuring reliability and accuracy in measuring leadership styles. Additionally, a stratified random sampling approach is employed to enhance the generalizability of the findings across different administrative divisions. This study offers important

perspectives on the primary leadership styles in Omani government units, confirming or challenging findings from other cultures and organizations. It also examines whether factors such as age and gender influence perceptions of leadership, thereby helping to clarify inconsistencies in past research. From a practical perspective, the study provides policymakers with valuable insights to enhance leadership training in government organizations, suggesting programs that foster democratic leadership, involve more stakeholders in decision-making, and promote

employee engagement. In terms of policy contributions, the study supports evidence-based decision-making by providing data-driven recommendations for leadership training and development programs. It highlights the importance of inclusive leadership practices that consider demographic diversity within public sector organizations. By incorporating these contributions, this study enhances both theoretical and applied knowledge of leadership dynamics in government settings, aiding in the formulation of more effective leadership strategies.

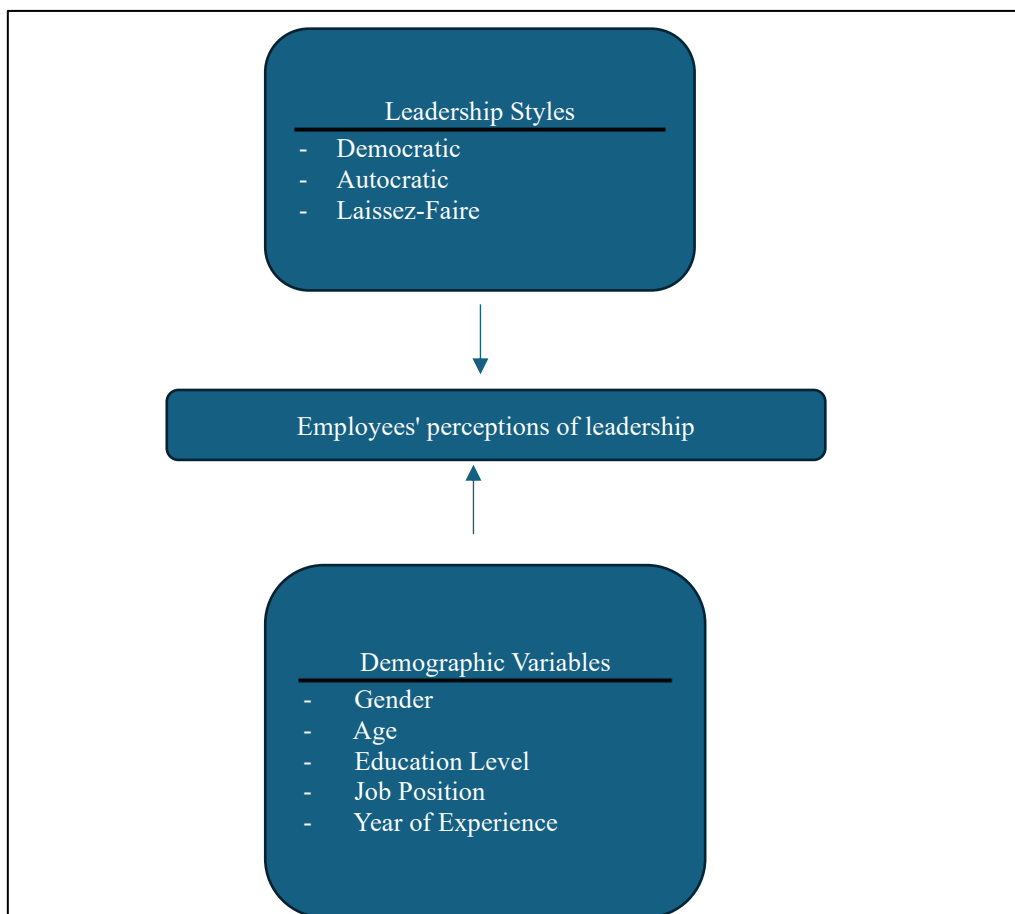


Figure (1): Conceptual Framework of the Study.

Research Methodology

Research Design

This research was conducted using a descriptive survey approach. A quantitative self-administered survey questionnaire was employed to align with the research design and approach, enabling the collection of data from

the workforce within government units in Oman.

The descriptive survey approach was selected due to its effectiveness in capturing and analyzing perceptions, attitudes, and behavioral patterns across a large and diverse population. Given the study's aim to identify prevailing leadership styles and assess differences based on demographic variables,

this approach is particularly suitable for obtaining standardized responses from a broad sample. It enables systematic data collection without manipulating variables, making it ideal for examining leadership dynamics as they occur in real-world government contexts.

Population and Sample

The study population comprises all employees working in government units across the Sultanate of Oman, totaling 142,669 employees distributed across 37 government units. Of this population of 66,861 employees, 46.9% are male, while 75,808 employees, or 53.1%, are female. The majority of the workforce holds permanent positions in specific ministries, with 50.8% employed by the Ministry of Education, 20.2% by the Ministry of Health, and the remaining 29% distributed across other government units.

In terms of age distribution, the majority of employees fall within the 25-39 age group, comprising 53.6% of the workforce. The 40-59 age group follows closely at 45%. Employees under 25 constitute only 1.3%, mainly due to hiring restrictions on new graduates resulting from global economic challenges. Those aged 60 and above represent just 0.1% of the workforce, as most employees retire at the age of 60, except in exceptional cases.

Regarding educational attainment, most Omani employees hold university degrees, with 63.2% of the total workforce possessing higher education qualifications. This concentration is a result of the standard university degree requirement for government positions.

To determine the sample size for this study, Krejcie and Morgan's Table (1970) was used, resulting in a minimum sample size of 384 employees from government units, which is adequate to represent the overall study population. This sample was distributed using a stratified random sampling method across the various administrative divisions within the 37

government units. The study employed a stratified random sampling method to ensure proportional and inclusive representation. The stratification was based on the type of ministry, encompassing key government sectors such as education, health, and civil services. This approach enabled balanced sampling across various functional domains within the government, thereby enhancing the generalizability of the findings to the broader public sector in Oman. The demographic details of the sample (N = 484) are summarized in the following table:

Table (1): Presents the demographic characteristics of the sample.

Data	Variable	Frequency	Percent (%)
Gender	Male	262	54.1
	Female	222	45.9
Age	Less than 30 years	24	5
	30-39	224	46.3
	40-49	201	41.5
	50-59	35	7.2
Education	Secondary School	39	8.1
	Higher Diploma	67	13.8
	Bachelor's Degree	262	54.1
	Master's Degree	85	17.6
	Doctorate Degree	31	6.4
Job Position	Executive Management	299	61.8
	Supervisory Management	171	35.3
	Senior Management	14	2.9
Experience	Less than 5 years	47	9.7
	5 & less than 10 years	50	10.3
	10 & less than 20 years	245	50.6
	20 & less than 30 years	115	23.8
	30 years or more	27	5.6
Total		484	100

Instrument Development

The study employed one of the most widely recognized instruments in managerial leadership assessment, known as the

Leadership Style Questionnaire (LSQ). Originally developed by Lewin, Lippitt, and White (1939) and later refined by Northouse (2012) in *Leadership: Theory and Practice*, the LSQ is designed to measure three distinct leadership styles: autocratic, democratic, and laissez-faire. The scale consists of 18 items, with six questions dedicated to each of the leadership styles.

The selection of the LSQ over widely used leadership instruments, such as the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) or the Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI), was based on both theoretical and contextual alignment with the objectives of this study. Unlike the MLQ, which looks at transformational and transactional leadership, or the LPI, which focuses on behaviors, the LSQ specifically examines traditional leadership styles that fit better with the organized and formal structure of government organizations in Oman. Given that the study aimed to evaluate leadership in bureaucratic and culturally conservative environments, the LSQ offered a more focused, culturally relevant, and theoretically coherent framework.

To adapt the questionnaire for assessing leadership styles among political officeholders, factor analysis was performed to validate the instrument, and reliability was confirmed with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.82. This value reflects a high level of reliability for studies in the humanities, indicating strong internal consistency. Consequently, the instrument was deemed valid for the purposes of the study.

To ensure cultural appropriateness, the LSQ was carefully adapted to align with the Omani governmental environment, and its components were reviewed to ensure clarity and alignment with local administrative terminology and values. A panel of bilingual experts in public administration and organizational psychology

reviewed the instrument for semantic accuracy and cultural sensitivity.

The questionnaire employs a Likert scale that ranges from "Strongly Agree" (5) to "Strongly Disagree" (1). Examples of items include "Employees need to be supervised closely, or they are not likely to do their work," "Leadership requires staying out of the way of subordinates as they do their work," and "In general, it is best to leave subordinates alone."

The scoring method is organized as follows, with each leadership style represented by six items:

- **Autocratic Leadership:** Sum responses for items 1, 4, 7, 10, 13, and 16.
- **Democratic Leadership:** Sum responses for items 2, 5, 8, 11, 14, and 17.
- **Laissez-Faire Leadership:** Sum responses for items 3, 6, 9, 12, 15, and 18.

This structured approach allows for a comprehensive assessment of each leadership style based on participants' responses.

Scoring Interpretation

The questionnaire provides a range of scores to determine the dominance of each leadership style:

Score Rate	Interpretation
26–30	very high range
21–25	high range
16–20	moderate range
11–15	low range
6–10	very low range

By comparing scores, participants can identify their most and least dominant leadership tendencies.

Data Collection

During the data analysis phase of the study, we examined the information gathered through a questionnaire. The survey was divided into two sections: the first focused on demographic variables, including gender, age, education level, job position, and work experience. The second section assessed leadership across three

dimensions: autocratic, democratic, and laissez-faire leadership.

Data Analysis

The field data were processed by the study's nature using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) through the following statistical procedures:

Frequency Distributions and Percentages: These were employed to identify the frequency of responses among the study sample.

Means and Standard Deviations: These were utilized to determine and rank the importance level of each requirement.

T-Tests: This test was applied to reveal differences, providing accuracy in evaluating the sections of the study tool by determining their statistical significance.

One-Way ANOVA: This analysis was used to examine the differences between the means of responses among the study population.

RESULTS

Prevailing Leadership Style

The findings related to the first hypothesis (H1), which posited that **"The prevailing leadership style in government units, from the employees' perspective in the Sultanate of Oman, is the democratic style,"** are summarized below. We employed scores and interpretation ranges to examine this hypothesis, identifying the most dominant leadership styles as measured by the Leadership Style Questionnaire (LSQ). The analysis aimed to determine the most prevalent of the three styles (democratic, autocratic, or laissez-faire) among employees working in government units.

Table (2): Total Scores for Leadership Styles.

Styles	Total Scores	Range
Authoritarian Leadership	19	Moderate
Democratic Leadership	25	High
Laissez-Faire Leadership	21	High

The study results, as shown in Table 2, indicate that the democratic leadership style is the most prevalent among employees in Omani government units, followed by laissez-faire leadership, while autocratic leadership is the least practiced.

Cultural expectations, institutional reforms, and strategic policy orientations all contribute to this result. Omani society traditionally values shura (consultation), mutual respect, and collective responsibility, which align with the principles of democratic leadership. Moreover, policy directives under Oman Vision 2040 explicitly encourage leadership practices grounded in collaboration, innovation, and human capital development.

The findings strongly align with Lewin's Behavioral Leadership Theory, which emphasizes the effectiveness of democratic leadership in participatory environments. Within the context of Oman's public sector, which is undergoing administrative restructuring and placing greater emphasis on employee engagement, this result indicates a shift toward leadership styles that promote collaboration and shared decision-making. The strong presence of democratic leadership is backed by research in similar settings (like Chua *et al.*, 2018; Kotur & Anbazhagan, 2014), which matches recent studies showing that inclusive leadership boosts morale and productivity (Ahmed Genedy & Shehab El-Din, 2025).

On the other hand, the relatively lower presence of autocratic leadership suggests a move away from top-down control models. While Lewin acknowledged that autocratic leadership can be effective in crises or highly structured environments, its limited prominence in this study indicates a cultural and organizational preference for more participatory leadership approaches in Oman's public administration.

The second-highest leadership style, laissez-faire, also received a high score. This style grants employee's autonomy and reflects trust in their competence, which can be particularly beneficial in highly professionalized or decentralized work units. However, according to Lewin's framework, excessive reliance on this approach may lead to role ambiguity or reduced accountability. The presence of laissez-faire leadership in the Omani context may signal emerging flexibility, particularly in sectors that encourage innovation, yet it also warrants attention to avoid managerial disengagement (Alam *et al.*, 2024; Houlihan, 2020).

Accordingly, based on the findings, we accept hypothesis H1, which states that "the prevailing leadership style in government units, from the employees' perspective in the Sultanate of Oman, is the democratic style."

Gender

Table (3): Independent Samples Test for Leadership Styles and Gender.

Leadership Styles	Gender	N	Mean	SD	t-value	Sig.	Decision
Authoritarian Leadership	Male	262	19.1947	4.03959	0.588	0.557	Not Significant
	Female	222	18.973	4.20506			
Democratic Leadership	Male	262	24.2901	4.43771	-1.732	0.084	Not Significant
	Female	222	24.9369	3.77843			
Laissez-Faire Leadership	Male	262	20.7099	4.20087	-0.759	0.448	Not Significant
	Female	222	21	4.17924			

The results presented in Table 3 indicate that there are no statistically significant differences in employees' perceptions of democratic, autocratic, or laissez-faire leadership based on gender. This suggests that gender does not influence the experience or evaluation of leadership in Omani government institutions.

This result may be attributed to the standardized administrative structures and formalized leadership behaviors applied

Leadership Styles and Demographic Variables

Results related to the second hypothesis (H2), which stated, **"There are important differences at the significance level ($\alpha = 0.05$) in how the study participants view leadership styles in government units in the Sultanate of Oman based on factors like gender, age, education level, job position, and work experience,"**

To test this hypothesis, the data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) to examine how participants perceived the prevailing leadership styles across different demographic groups. To determine if the differences were meaningful, we employed statistical methods such as the independent samples t-test for two groups (e.g., gender, age, education level, job position, and work experience) and one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) to assess the significance of the differences we observed.

uniformly across departments. Leaders may not tailor their styles to the gender of their subordinates, resulting in similar perceptions among them. These findings are consistent with (Gunawan & Cahayani, 2022; Mohammed *et al.*, 2012), who also reported no gender-based differences in leadership perception. However, they differ from Waris *et al.* (2024), who found that gender had a modest impact on leadership effectiveness in educational institutions.

Age

Table (4): One-Way ANOVA Test of Leadership Styles by Age.

Leadership Styles	Type of difference	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Decision
Autocratic Leadership	Between Groups	29.291	3	9.764	0.575	0.631	Not Significant
	Within Groups	8143.525	480	16.966			
	Total	8172.816	483				
Democratic Leadership	Between Groups	77.681	3	25.894	1.503	0.213	Not Significant
	Within Groups	8267.674	480	17.224			
	Total	8345.355	483				
Laissez-Faire Leadership	Between Groups	55.045	3	18.348	1.046	0.372	Not Significant
	Within Groups	8421.022	480	17.544			
	Total	8476.066	483				

As shown in Table 4, the results of the one-way ANOVA test reveal no statistically significant differences in employees' perceptions of leadership styles based on age across government units in the Sultanate of Oman. Whether employees were under 30 or over 50, their views on democratic, autocratic, and laissez-faire leadership remained consistent.

This finding may be explained by the relatively homogeneous work culture in the Omani public sector, where employees,

Education Level

Table (5): One-Way ANOVA Test of Leadership Styles by Education.

Leadership Styles	Type of difference	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Decision
Autocratic Leadership	Between Groups	37.858	4	9.465	0.557	0.694	Not Significant
	Within Groups	8134.958	479	16.983			
	Total	8172.816	483				
Democratic Leadership	Between Groups	24.647	4	6.162	0.355	0.841	Not Significant
	Within Groups	8320.708	479	17.371			
	Total	8345.355	483				
Laissez-Faire Leadership	Between Groups	31.187	4	7.797	0.442	0.778	Not Significant
	Within Groups	8444.88	479	17.63			
	Total	8476.066	483				

The ONE-WAY ANOVA results in Table 5 show no statistically significant differences in leadership styles (autocratic, democratic, and laissez-faire) based on education levels. Employees with varying educational qualifications, ranging from secondary diplomas to doctoral degrees, have reported similar experiences.

This uniformity may be attributed to the top-down nature of leadership in government

regardless of age, are exposed to similar leadership approaches. Additionally, the dominance of democratic leadership, which emphasizes inclusion and shared input, may resonate similarly across age groups.

This result aligns with the findings of (Mushtaq *et al.*, 2019; Mohammed *et al.*, 2012). This contrasts with the findings of Kotur and Anbazhagan (2014), who found that younger individuals tend to prefer dynamic and participatory leadership styles.

institutions, where formal education plays a limited role in shaping interpersonal relationships. Leaders may interact with subordinates in a consistent manner, irrespective of the subordinates' academic credentials. This observation aligns with the findings of (Thakur *et al.*, 2020; Mohammed *et al.*, 2012), who also found that educational qualifications have minimal impact on leadership perceptions. However, it contrasts

with Bell *et al.* (2015), who identified a positive association between education and leadership effectiveness in local government settings.

Job Position

Table (6): One-Way ANOVA Test of Leadership Styles by Job Position.

Leadership Styles	Type of difference	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Decision
Autocratic Leadership	Between Groups	30.372	2	15.186	0.897	0.408	Not Significant
	Within Groups	8142.444	481	16.928			
	Total	8172.816	483				
Democratic Leadership	Between Groups	62.791	2	31.395	1.823	0.163	Not Significant
	Within Groups	8282.565	481	17.219			
	Total	8345.355	483				
Laissez-Faire Leadership	Between Groups	41.076	2	20.538	1.171	0.311	Not Significant
	Within Groups	8434.99	481	17.536			
	Total	8476.066	483				

There are no statistically significant variations in the perceptions of leadership styles among employees in executive, supervisory, or senior management roles, as indicated by the one-way ANOVA results in Table 6.

This outcome might be the consequence of governance institutions' hierarchical yet standardized management structure, which

Experience

Table (7): One-Way ANOVA Test of Leadership Styles by Experience.

Leadership Styles	Type of difference	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Decision
Autocratic Leadership	Between Groups	55.627	4	13.907	0.821	0.512	Not Significant
	Within Groups	8117.19	479	16.946			
	Total	8172.816	483				
Democratic Leadership	Between Groups	57.268	4	14.317	0.827	0.508	Not Significant
	Within Groups	8288.087	479	17.303			
	Total	8345.355	483				
Laissez-Faire Leadership	Between Groups	23.477	4	5.869	0.333	0.856	Not Significant
	Within Groups	8452.589	479	17.646			
	Total	8476.066	483				

According to the one-way ANOVA test results in Table 7, there was no statistically significant difference in leadership perceptions based on the number of years of work experience. Employees with less than five years of service had similar evaluations to those with over 20 years of experience.

Institutionalized leadership practices in government units may be less sensitive to employee tenure, which could explain this

applies comparable leadership procedures and standards to all tiers of authority. Depending on the status of their subordinates, leaders may not significantly alter their behavior. The results confirm Lewin's theory, which prioritizes leadership characteristics over role-specific dynamics and aligns with (Almass *et al.*, 2024), who also found that job level had no bearing in certain situations.

outcome. Regardless of their length of service, employees encounter the same leadership approaches. These results align with those of (Mushtaq *et al.*, 2019; Mohammed *et al.*, 2012) but differ from Al-Mutairi *et al.* (2024), who found a relationship between increased experience and a preference for democratic leadership among healthcare workers in Saudi Arabia.

Based on the statistical analysis, no significant differences were found in employees' perceptions of leadership styles across the demographic variables examined.

Therefore, the second hypothesis (H2) is rejected, indicating that demographic variables such as gender, age, education level, job position, and work experience do not significantly influence perceptions of leadership styles in the studied government units.

Discussion

Prevailing Leadership Style

Research Question 1: What are the prevailing leadership styles in the government units from the employees' perspective in the Sultanate of Oman? The findings indicate that democratic leadership is the most prevalent style in Omani government units, followed by laissez-faire, while autocratic leadership was the least observed.

This result supports the foundational principles of Lewin's Behavioral Leadership Theory, which suggests that democratic leadership is most effective in participative environments. The prominence of this style may reflect recent shifts in Oman's administrative strategy, particularly in response to post-2014 economic reforms and the Vision 2040 development agenda, both of which promote accountability, transparency, and employee engagement in public institutions.

Cultural and institutional factors also help explain this trend in Oman. Omani culture places substantial value on consultation (*shura*) and consensus, which aligns with democratic leadership principles. In addition, public institutions in Oman are increasingly adopting participatory governance models in line with international best practices, further reinforcing the relevance of democratic approaches.

Policy-related factors may also contribute. Government reforms that decentralize

decision-making and emphasize performance-based leadership likely encourage managers to involve employees in planning and implementation. Leadership training and civil service development programs may now implicitly or explicitly favor democratic behaviors such as collaboration, team orientation, and open communication.

From a critical standpoint, however, employees may idealize the prevalence of democratic leadership in their perceptions. In some institutions, leadership may seem democratic in appearance (e.g., through meetings or open channels), but the actual decision-making process remains centralized. Therefore, further qualitative investigation is needed to understand whether perceived democracy aligns with actual practices.

The moderate ranking of laissez-faire leadership is also notable. While this style can foster autonomy and creativity, it may also reflect a lack of oversight or passive leadership. Excessive reliance on this style can undermine accountability in the public sector, where bureaucratic clarity and compliance are critical. However, in specific units where professional independence is expected (e.g., education or healthcare), a hands-off approach may be perceived positively.

Lastly, the low prevalence of autocratic leadership suggests a shift away from rigid, command-driven models. This may reflect both the influence of modernization policies and an evolving workforce that favors inclusion over hierarchy. It also diverges from findings in other Middle Eastern or political contexts where autocratic leadership remains prevalent (e.g., Babalola *et al.*, 2019).

Demographic Variables and Leadership Behavior

Research Question 2: Are there important differences at the significance level ($\alpha = 0.05$) in how the study participants view leadership

styles in government units in the Sultanate of Oman based on factors like gender, age, education level, job position, and work experience? The analysis revealed no statistically significant differences between the three leadership styles (democratic, autocratic, and laissez-faire) and demographic variables, including gender, age, education, job title, and years of experience.

This outcome may be understood in light of three key factors:

Institutional Uniformity: Omani government units operate under standardized policies, job structures, and performance expectations. Such uniformity likely results in relatively homogeneous leadership experiences, regardless of employee age, gender, education, or rank.

Centralized Leadership Development: Typically, leadership training programs, if present, do not cater to demographic differences in perception or interaction. As a result, leadership behaviors tend to be applied similarly across teams, reducing variation in how employees interpret those behaviors.

Cultural Context and Social Norms: Omani society places a strong emphasis on respect for authority and maintaining organizational harmony. This cultural orientation may discourage employees from expressing opinions that differ from those of their colleagues based on personal characteristics. Moreover, hierarchical norms may influence employees to evaluate leadership behavior consistently, regardless of their background or seniority.

From a critical standpoint, the lack of demographic variation suggests a limitation in leadership adaptability. Effective leadership should be flexible and responsive to the diverse needs and preferences of employees. Therefore, uniformity in perception could reflect a missed opportunity for leaders to tailor their

approaches to demographic dynamics, especially in a diverse workforce.

Conclusions

In conclusion, the study found that the democratic leadership style is the most prevalent among government units within the Sultanate of Oman, as perceived by employees. This indicates a positive shift toward greater employee involvement and participatory decision-making, which contributes to a more dynamic and productive work environment. However, the findings also reveal no statistically significant differences between the three leadership styles (autocratic, democratic, and laissez-faire) and demographic variables, including gender, age, education level, job position, and work experience.

Limitations of the Study

The study faced several limitations, including a slow response from the study sample, as many respondents exhibited limited engagement with the questionnaire, which led to delays in the data collection process and reduced its efficiency. Additionally, obtaining official approval from the Ministry of Higher Education to conduct the study was a time-consuming process that further delayed the initiation of data collection. These challenges impacted the overall timeline of the study.

Contribution of the Study

This study contributes to the limited body of research on leadership in the Omani public sector by employing a stratified sample across diverse ministries and applying Lewin's Behavioral Theory to identify prevailing trends in leadership development and organizational reform. Further research could expand this contribution by comparing public and private sectors and incorporating qualitative methods to enrich understanding and enhance the explanatory power of leadership studies in Oman.

Recommendations and Future Research Directions

We propose several integrated recommendations to foster a more dynamic and efficient work environment within Omani government units. First, enhancing democratic leadership practices is essential, as is institutionalizing participatory decision-making mechanisms and organizing workshops to develop communication and teamwork skills. These efforts should be complemented by comprehensive leadership training programs focusing on task delegation, conflict resolution, and effective communication, engaging both local and international experts to enrich the learning experience. Furthermore, adopting transparent and effective evaluation systems can provide constructive feedback, enabling continuous leadership improvement and fostering a culture of accountability.

Given the absence of significant demographic influences on leadership styles, promoting inclusive and diverse leadership practices becomes crucial, as it empowers women and young professionals while encouraging cultural diversity. Additionally, future research could utilize qualitative or mixed-methods approaches, such as interviews or focus groups, to explore leadership dynamics in greater depth and validate the relationship between perceived and actual leadership behavior. Comparative studies between the public and private sectors, as well as across different regions within Oman, could offer greater clarity about the contextual factors that shape leadership effectiveness. Investigating emerging models such as transformational, servant, or digital leadership may further enrich the understanding of leadership in modern administrative settings. By integrating these recommendations, government units can strengthen their leadership frameworks and contribute more effectively to national development objectives.

Disclosure Statement

The authors declare that they have no relevant or material financial interests that relate to the research described in this paper.

Ethical Statement

- **Informed Consent:** Prior to participation, all participants or their legal guardians were provided with detailed information about the study's purpose, procedures, risks, and benefits. Informed consent forms were obtained from all participants or their guardians, ensuring that they understood their rights and could make an informed decision about participation.
- **Confidentiality and Anonymity:** Measures were taken to protect the confidentiality and anonymity of participants. Data collected were coded to ensure that individual responses could not be linked to specific participants. Only authorized research personnel had access to the data, and identifying information was kept separate from research data.
- **Voluntary Participation:** Participation in the study was entirely voluntary, and participants were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. No incentives were offered for participation to avoid coercion.
- **Minimization of Harm:** Steps were taken to minimize any potential harm to participants. This included providing access to counseling services for participants who may have been distressed by the research topic and ensuring that sensitive information was handled with care.
- **Respect for Participants:** Throughout the research process, respect for the dignity, privacy, and rights of participants was maintained. Researchers conducted themselves in a professional manner and treated all participants with respect and sensitivity.

- **Data Security:** All data collected were stored securely and in accordance with data protection regulations. Measures were implemented to prevent unauthorized access, loss, or misuse of data.
- **Availability of data and materials:** The datasets used and/or analyzed during the current study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.
- **Author contribution:** All authors listed have contributed to the work and approved it for publication. The authors have worked in an organized manner. Ouazzani Touhami, Zineb, supervised the work. Al Ubaidabi, Amira Hamed Said, designed the study, communicated with the key people, and wrote the manuscript. Al Hudaifi, Mohammed Salim Mohammed, collected the data and did the statistical analysis. Ouazzani Touhami, Zineb, and Al Hudaifi, Mohammed Salim Mohammed, have reviewed the data and the final manuscript for approval. The authors read and approved the final manuscript.
- **Conflict of interest:** The authors declare no conflict of interests.
- **Funding Acknowledgment:** This research received no external funding or financial support.
- **Acknowledgments:** The authors would like to express sincere gratitude to the editorial team of An-Najah University Journal for Research - B (Humanities) for their valuable support, constructive feedback, and professional guidance throughout the review and publication process. Special thanks are extended to the editor for their dedicated efforts in maintaining the academic quality of the journal and for their thoughtful comments, which significantly contributed to the improvement of this article.

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