

Employee Participation in Decision-Making in Dubai Companies: A Qualitative Study

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Abstract. *Decision-making is a critical managerial function that shapes organizational success and employee engagement, representing a modern direction in the scope of managerial behavior. In this regard, Dubai is the economic city in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), a city renowned for its diverse workforce and dynamic business environment, presenting a unique context where cultural, organizational, and economic factors influence managerial decision-making styles. This qualitative study explores the decision-making styles of managers across various sectors in Dubai, focusing on the impact of cultural diversity, hierarchical structures, and organizational goals on their approach. Through in-depth interviews with managers and employees, the study identifies prevalent styles such as authoritarian, participative, and consultative decision-making, while also addressing the challenges managers face in balancing efficiency and inclusivity. The study also reflects on assertions by leading theorists in management and organizational behavior, emphasizing the necessity of future research to understand the effective link between managerial attitudes and their approach to participation in decision-making style. Leaders need to make decisions in a way that suits the new culture in which they are placed. This paper aims to explore how managers in Dubai make decisions in respect to their contextual environment and to what extent do managers allow individuals or groups to participate in decision-making within organizations in Dubai.*

Keywords: *cross-cultural research, managerial attitude, interviews, Dubai, decision-making.*

Introduction

We live in a global village where decisions made by an individual in one country may have far-reaching consequences worldwide. These decisions often have personal, social, political, economic, and environmental consequences. One has only to consider the consequences of decisions around the world that have resulted in the global financial crisis, environmental catastrophe, and acts of terrorism. However decisions can also have far-reaching personal ramifications, having been widely researched, including decisions that involve personal behavior (Ariely and Loewenstein, 2006; Chambers and Rew, 2003), given the potential for influence in a wide range of spheres that many decision makers hold, it is important to study different patterns that appear to be involved when making a decision.

Parallel developments may be observed in the increased attention paid to managerial ideologies within the industrial system. Throughout the nineteenth century the power of the employers was of such an order that to develop any coherent ideologies in support of their position of dominance would have seemed superfluous. Workers were treated merely as a factor of production and their labor was bought and sold like any other commodity largely on the employers' terms. This practice, as well as the inescapable human misery it entailed, was supported so much by the social conventions of the day that it was accepted as the normal and even natural order of affairs. Nonetheless, as far as it is possible to recognize the formation of any coherent ideologies during this period, the most prominent focused firmly on ownership rights.

In the contemporary era marked by unparalleled global interconnectedness, the importance of making effective decisions across diverse cultural landscapes has become paramount. The surge

in international business ventures, collaborations, and migrations has underscored the significance of comprehending and navigating the intricacies of cross-cultural decision-making (Hofstede, 1980; Triandis, 1980; Gudykunst, 2003).

Culture, comprising shared values, norms, beliefs, and communication styles, significantly influences the decision-making processes of individuals and groups (Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 1998; Hofstede, 2001). Decision-making is not a universal, one-size-fits-all phenomenon; rather, it is deeply embedded in the cultural fabric of societies. The variations in cultural approaches to risk-taking, conflict resolution, and information processing create a rich tapestry of decision-making styles worldwide (Gelfand et al., 2007; Bond, 2004).

In conclusion, cross-cultural decision-making is a critical aspect of navigating the complexities of a globalized world (Earley & Mosakowski, 2004). The profound impact of cultural differences on decision-making processes necessitates a heightened awareness and understanding of diverse cultural dynamics (Hofstede, 1980). As businesses and societies continue to engage in cross-cultural interactions, the ability to embrace and leverage cultural diversity in decision-making will not only be a marker of success but a fundamental requirement for sustainable growth and collaboration in the global arena (Triandis, 1980; Gelfand et al., 2007).

The UAE culture derives from a combination of its traditional Arabic values and the influence of Western and Eastern cultures. Western influence has increased dramatically in the past few decades because of the surge in migration in support of the booming oil industry in the country. Dubai City is One of the world's fastest-growing economies, Dubai's gross domestic product is projected at US\$107.1 billion, with a growth rate of 6.1% in 2001. Although many core elements of Dubai's trading infrastructure were built on the back of the oil industry, revenues from oil and natural gas account for less than 5% of the emirate's revenues. It is estimated that Dubai produces 50,000 to 70,000 barrels (7,900 to 11,100 m³) of oil a day and substantial quantities of gas from offshore fields. The emirate's share of the UAE's total gas revenues is about 2%. Dubai's oil reserves have diminished significantly and are expected to be exhausted in 20 years. Real estate and construction (22.6%), trade (16%), and financial services (11%) are the largest contributors to Dubai's economy.

The UAE culture derives from a combination of its traditional Arab values and the influence of Western and Eastern cultures. Western influence has increased dramatically in the past few decades because of the surge in migration in support of the booming oil industry in the country. Also, the UAE legal framework relating to employment tends to support large corporations and facilitate a transitory workforce (Forsten Lechner et al., 2012). As a result, it has been necessary to employ expatriate workers with qualifications, aptitude and experience that Emirati nationals may not possess to meet organizational and societal demands (Al-Khazraji, 2009).

To achieve the highest possible rate of growth while maintaining economic stability within the organization, ensuring maximum effectiveness. It is widely accepted that employee participation in decision-making processes is highly beneficial for organizations in Dubai and so one of the main objectives of this research is to determine the levels at which employees can participate in decision-making, the departments they are involved in, and number of organization size. Additionally, it seeks to explore whether managerial culture plays a role in influencing this participation.

Literature review

Cross-cultural decision-making, an integral facet of global interactions, presents unique challenges, especially in regions characterized by diverse cultural landscapes such as Dubai city. This literature

review explores the challenges associated with cross-cultural decision-making in these regions, shedding light on the complexities arising from cultural variations.

The concept of "cultural diversity" is both specific and contextual. Cultural diversity plays a critical role in organizations in the international context (Reddy, 2011) which has become a pivotal topic of concern among managers, researchers, and policy makers. Many contemporary researchers consider cultural diversity as a significant difference distinguishing one individual from another, a description that covers a wide range of obvious qualities and hidden capabilities (Ivancevich & Gilbert, 2000; Nkomo & Cox, 1996). To understand the importance of managing cultural diversity, it seems important to grasp the concept of culture. According to Adler (1994) culture is an acquired behavioral aspect assigned to a person and his group by which the individual is identified, expressed and transmitted through symbols, distinguishing mark, its values, and beliefs. Among the attributes, such as backgrounds, experiences, values and beliefs about each culture, the latter determines the perception of an individual's behavior, his ideas, and his way of thinking (Laine, 2004 in Côté, 2006).

Research consistently indicates that individual managerial styles are influenced by their organizational and national cultural attributes. For example, Galanou and Farrag (2015) suggest that cultural background is the main influencing factor in decision-making styles. Likewise, Lung-Tan (2006) and Hofstede (2010) confirm the impact of national culture on decision-making styles. In addition, research shows that values play an influential role in the decision-making process (Weber and Morris, 2010). Research on decision-making supports theories that differences in culture are affected by organizational structure (Hofstede, 2011; Javidan et al., 2006). Therefore, to manage local staff effectively, expatriate managers must be aware of the effect that national and organizational culture can have on the effectiveness of their decision-making processes. Thus, there are connections between the cultural bases of making decisions and the way organizations manage. Building on this theory, cultural variations in decision-making styles are evident around the world. Decision-making is widely distributed among people in low power distance cultures, whereas it's limited to a relatively small number of people in high power distance cultures (Harris et al., 2006). For example, US decision-making styles are grounded in a method where members at all levels of the organization participate in decision-making (Hofstede, 2010). Yet, this approach is rarely used in UAE-based US organizations, where a more dictatorial style is preferred (Randeree and Chaudhry, 2012).

It is necessary to emphasize that much like the literature on cultural values, decision-making practices vary in the Gulf region, thus mirroring the cultural discontinuity theory of cultural values. In a study conducted by Smith et al. (2007), they suggest that diversity of leadership styles is prevalent across the Arab Middle East, despite evident and overlapping cultural values. Thus, it is important for researchers and practitioners to be cautious when generalizing about Arab management. Interestingly, the extant literature on Arab management reveals competing approaches. For example, several studies have provided evidence that Arab managers typically use a consultative approach to leading and decision-making (Hammoud, 2011; Randeree and Chaudhry, 2012). This finding is supported by the collectivist nature of Arab societies (Hofstede, 2010) and the desire to preserve in-group harmony. At the same time, other studies describe Arab leaders at highly autocratic and Arab organizations to be extremely hierarchical in structure (Hammoud, 2011). The authoritative leadership approach is not for its dictatorial quality, which theoretically opposes consultation and consensus building. To illustrate, (Hammoud, 2011 explains that "the leader turns into an individual possessing a dictatorial power and authority reinforced by followers' unquestioning loyalty and trust". However, the unwavering allegiance to the leader is

supported by literature on high power distance, which is prevalent in the UAE (Hofstede, 2010). Gregg (2005) notes that attentiveness to status and face-saving are integral to decision-making in the Arab world. In a study on leadership styles in the UAE, Randeree and Chaudhry (2012) suggest that Arab leaders tend to be more authoritarian and bureaucratic, and promotions are often based on personal connections. By comparison, Western management is more consultative and decentralized, and promotion is based on individual merit and achievement. Thus, although consultation is an important element of the decision-making process among Arab leaders, in contrast to Western leaders, it is used predominantly at the uppermost levels of the organization. Thus, decision-making is rarely delegated down the hierarchy.

The research conducted by Badawy in 1980 in the Arab Gulf Area indicates that Arab managers tend to utilize their power to ensure that work is completed and generally dislike any form of participation in decision-making. Additionally, Dr. Khushali Fusial in his 1994 studies in Iraq, highlights that Iraqi managers prefer indirect participation in decision-making through trade unions, particularly in the public organizations sector due to its socialist system supported by law. Furthermore, he notes that private organizations in the sector are averse to any form of participation in decision-making. This inclination may be attributed to the strong social-cultural influence that shapes managerial attitudes and behaviors, as stated by him.

Power Distance, Collectivism, and Religion: The Middle East, characterized by a rich tapestry of cultures, exhibits specific cultural dimensions that significantly impact decision-making. One crucial aspect is the high-power distance, indicating the acceptance of hierarchical order and centralized decision-making (Hofstede, 1984). Collectivism is another prominent feature, emphasizing strong familial and societal bonds that influence group-oriented decision-making processes (Alon, 2006). Additionally, the pervasive influence of religion, primarily Islam, plays a vital role in shaping ethical considerations and moral frameworks within decision-making contexts (Alon, 2006).

However, in as much as modern managers have internalized an ideology which defends their decision-making authority on the basis of expertise, they will be unwilling to threaten this by encouraging participative and democratic practices: indeed, we would predict that the more a given manager approximates or considers himself to approximate to the stereotype encapsulated by the managerialist thesis, the more vehemently will be his opposition to workers' participation and control, and that conversely it will be the profit-oriented managers who will be most supportive of limited experiments along these lines.

But, at all events, what is important to note as far as managerial attitudes to workers' participation in decision-making is concerned, is that the main managerial ideology of the twentieth century has worked strongly against developments in this direction.

There are several forms of participation in decision-making and their relationship to managerial ideologies is crucial for analyzing organizational dynamics. Several elements, such as governmental support, the nature and importance of decisions, cultural and educational diversity, and managerial attitudes toward worker participation, influence the styles through which managers and employees engage in decision-making.

Collective bargaining is one of the most frequently used and common mechanisms through which employees and their representatives participate in decision-making. Collective bargaining is a process that shows all negotiations between employers or trade unions and organizations to determine the terms and conditions of the employees and or regulating relations and or resolving the conflicts between them.

Joint consultation and workers' councils, like collective bargaining, are joint consultations between workers or managers and the organization. Consultative mechanisms are established as an outcome of collective bargaining. One of the difficulties with joint consultation is assessing the extent to which the workers can participate is real or illusory, not so much because the employee representative does not take it seriously, though there are undoubtedly instances in which they do simply go through the motions of formulating do not take any notice or account of the views expressed.

Worker directors and problem-solving groups often cited as examples of employee participation tending towards democracy. This form is effective if it takes some elements into account such as the motivation of workers, believes the worker director in the participation process, the knowledge and experience of, and training received, by employee representatives, etc. Not all behaviors are appropriate in all situations for all managers. The participation style is primarily explained by organizational climate. The individual manager's propensity for authoritarian versus democratic management style is tempered by how the organizations prefer to be led.

It is important to recognize that participation is not a one-dimensional construct. Rather, it has several distinct facets. For example, participation can be either forced or voluntary or in some cases could be legally mandated. Participation can also be direct or indirect. The more representatives are used, the more direct the participation as decision-making representatives from unions. In general, the more the decision-making process is legally specified, the more formal and indirect participation is likely to be. The subsequent sections of this research outline the methodology and results, providing insights into participation dynamics and their implications for managerial practice.

Methodology

This study adopts mixed-methods research design, combining qualitative interviews with managers and case studies to provide a comprehensive exploration of decision-making styles in Dubai City. The integration of these methodologies allows for triangulation of findings and a more nuanced understanding of the cultural nuances influencing decision-making.

The sample for this study was selected using an exploratory, non-probability sampling approach. The aim was to gather data through interviews with individuals holding leadership positions in private sector companies, primarily within trading and contracting organizations based in Dubai with more than 10,000.00 employees in all selected companies.

Ethical Considerations

Before interviews, participants were fully informed about the study's purpose, procedures, and their right to withdraw at any time. Identifying information will be kept confidential, and participants will be anonymized in reporting, upon their request. The research will be conducted with a deep respect for the cultural nuances of each region, ensuring that the research process aligns with local norms and values.

Participants selected using purposive judgment sampling across organizations in private sectors. structured interviews conducted with managers from a range of organizations, job roles, and industries across Dubai. The types of organizations included general trading firms, contracting companies, and logistics providers. All interviews were recorded on video for documentation and analysis purposes per the table below.

Table I: Distribution of interviews

Industries	No. of interviews given	No. of interviews completed
Contracting Companies	12	4
General Trading Companies	5	3
Logistic Companies	3	1
		N=8

The qualitative procedure of gathering data included face-to-face interviews. The most senior managers from each organization provided a participation form and were contacted later to confirm their participation. This is done via telephone. Participants advised the researcher's intention to voice record the interviews to assist with transcription of the responses. Each interview would take between 15 and 25 min to complete.

Table II: Gender, nationality, and education distribution of sample

Gender	No. of interviews	Nationality	No. of interviews
Male	8	Jordanian	4
Female	0	Palestinian	2
Total	N=08	Indians	1
		Germany	1
		Total	N=08

Methodology approach and Model

The model formulated under gird that there is a relationship between organizational dimensions and managerial attitudes towards participation in decision-making and organizational effectiveness to achieve their objectives. Figure 1.1 assumes that a strong correlation between the organization's size (number of employees), levels of management, and managerial function with participation and managerial attitudes differ from one dimension to another.

Employee participation in decision-making is influenced and constrained by factors such as company size, levels of management, and managerial functions. These factors, in turn, affect the firm's effectiveness. Participation is considered a complex variable because it has the potential to produce various outcomes.

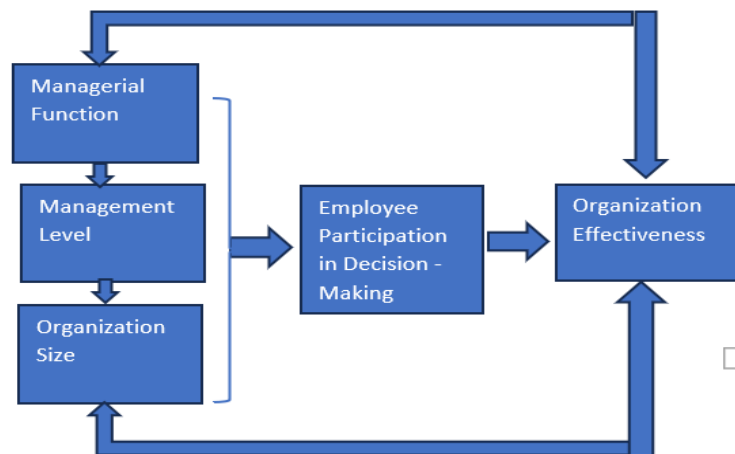


Figure 1. An alternative model for understanding the organizational dimensions and their relationships with participation in decision-making

Positive effects: It can enhance productivity, improve the quality of decisions, foster esprit de corps, increase job satisfaction, boost performance, and promote overall well-being.

The Importance of Employee Involvement



Figure 2. The importance of employees' involvement in participation in Decision-making

Neutral or negative effects: In some cases, participation may have no effect or even a negative impact, particularly when the wrong types of participation are implemented in each situation.

The effectiveness of participation depends on context. Certain types of participation are more effective in some situations than in others. If the wrong approach is adopted, the outcome may be neutral or counterproductive. Additionally, organizational effectiveness provides feedback that influences three key dimensions and so this study aims to investigate key questions regarding employee participation in managerial functions such as marketing, purchasing, and finance. At which levels of management can participation occur, and to what degree, top, middle management, first-line management? What is the size of organizations that encourage employees to participate in decision-making? The study also considers the social and cultural context of managers in Dubai, recognizing that their attitudes toward participation in decision-making differ from those in other cultures.

The hypothesis is based on an alternative model concerning previous studies. The following hypothesis could be tested:

Hypothesis 1:

The influence of organizational size, levels of management, and managerial function on participation in decision-making. The following sub-hypotheses are proposed:

There is a positive correlation between higher management levels and decision-making participation. Top managers in large organizations are more likely to involve their workers and employees in decision-making to drive organizational success.

Functional correlation: In certain functional areas like marketing, along with creative and development activities, managers prefer to engage workers and employees in decision-making as compared to other functions such as production, finance, and personnel functions.

Organizational size correlation: As there is a higher organizational size, there is also elevated decision-making participation. With the increased size of an organization, there is an overall preference to involve more people in the decision-making processes.

Hypothesis 2:

Relation with managerial attitude: There is a positive relationship between organizational effectiveness and the attitude of management regarding the level of participation in decision-making.

Relation with organizational effectiveness: There is a positive relationship between organizational effectiveness and the level of participation in decision making leading to improved performance, higher job satisfaction, higher employee morale, and other benefits.

Explanation of face-to-face interview questions:

The main dependent variable in our analysis is participation in decision-making. Thematic analysis will be employed to identify patterns and themes within the interview transcripts. The study will focus on key factors influencing decision-making, cultural dimensions, and communication challenges.

To measure an organization's size by using the number of workers and employers' organizations.

Managerial functions are categorized into six common functions: production, marketing, finance, Research and development, and personal function.

To measure the variable "levels of management" underlying people's position in the organization as top management includes the president, members of the board directors, and general managers. Middle management includes operating personnel, administrative assistants, production managers, finance managers, etc. whereas, first-line management includes people responsible for work operations. During the audio-recorded interview, specific questions were asked as per Appendix A to achieve the objective of this research.

Results and discussions

The analysis of case studies involves a qualitative examination of decision-making structures, communication dynamics, and the impact of cultural factors. Cross-case comparisons will be made to identify commonalities and differences.

This research aimed to measure the degree of participation in management and managerial attitudes toward participation in decision-making by analyzing the responses to interview questionnaires. The interpretation of the data is presented below:

Results of Hypothesis 1 (H1):

By employing a mixed-methods approach, this research aims to provide a holistic understanding of employee's participation in decision-making in Dubai. The triangulation of interview data and case studies will enhance the validity and reliability of the study's findings, contributing valuable insights to cross-cultural decision-making literature.

Hypothesis 1 assumed a positive relationship between organizational size, levels of management, and managerial function. The findings are as follows:

At the management level, top executives from various sectors prefer to involve employees directly in the decision-making process. They typically adopt a direct style of participation, which is evident from the first three questions per appendix A provided asked during interviews with managers. Middle and first-line managers tend to prefer indirect participation. This may reflect their attitude toward ensuring tasks are completed and their concern about questioning from senior managers.

In managerial functions, employees in sales and design are often more directly involved in conducting tasks. With increasing external functions, there is a need to be more direct. This corresponds to Badawi's (1980) finding where asserted employees are purposely involved by sales managers for revenue enhancement. The interviews showed that site meetings were more valued in comparison to the other scope of activities, especially within contracting firms. Emphasis on finance and accounting functions yields little or no participation by employees. This 'non-involvement' may be due to the nature of these activities that border on being confidential.

Organizational Size, it is apparent that as the organization expands, active participation tends to increase. Elaborate organizations demand greater skills from employees, but the tendency is stronger to bend the existing rules and standard procedures.

Results of the Hypothesis 2(H2):

H2 in the previous study postulated that organizational effectiveness could be achieved through decreased employee turnover rates, high satisfaction, and performance levels, as well as conflict resolution mechanisms. According to the findings, we can point out that the Private manufacturing industries also tend to be more effective than the industries mentioned above.

These might be due to the established effective interpersonal relations between employees and managers as well as the presence of a positive social culture that is inclined towards active management decision-making.

Conclusions

Managing across cultures is vital for international business success, and managers need to make decisions in a way that accommodates the local culture in which they are posted. This paper explored how managers in the UAE make decisions with respect to their contextual environment. By the equation $P = F(L, V)$, where P represents participation, L represents latent power, and V represents values, we deduced that employees' participation is a function of latent power and values. Throughout this research, we have frequently emphasized the conditioning role of social factors, particularly the importance of the values held by the parties involved. These values certainly helped explain the otherwise erratic and inconsistent variations in types of participation that arose despite roughly similar balances of latent power.

Moreover, we viewed these values not merely as individual responses to specific social situations but as having broader origins. Many of these values emanated from comprehensive ideologies or political actions, while others arose directly from the practice of participation itself and from increases in the level of latent power among workers.

The analysis indicates a prevalent inclination towards hierarchical decision-making structures in Dubai. Participants frequently emphasized the acceptance of authority and centralized decision-making, aligning with Javidan et al.'s (2006) observations on the prevalence of hierarchical leadership in the region. This correlation is also supported by Badawy's studies in the Arab Gulf Area in 1980. The hierarchical approach was seen as fostering efficiency, quick decision implementation, and organizational stability.

The insights and contributions of ordinary people, who possess detailed experience in the operation of industry, could serve as invaluable assets in overall economic planning. Public funds could be allocated to new projects that employ advanced technologies, arising from both local and national discussions about what should be produced within a given social framework.

This approach would not only ensure a stable and expanding economy but also aid in addressing environmental and regional challenges. Furthermore, it would create opportunities to experiment with democratic methods of management and control in Dubai.

While the path toward a future that promises the realization of creative human potential may be fraught with significant obstacles, it remains a realistic and achievable goal for humanity.

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Appendix A

Questionnaire of the interview - Employee participation in the decision-making process

First: participation style	
A-Direct participation by ask four questions are listed below:	
1.	Do you believe that abroad participation is necessary at every level of management?
2.	Worker's participation can elevate the roles and needs of top management.
3.	In my task, I share problems with subordinates to find solutions
4.	I would consider improving "the way we work together" to important as improving task accomplishment.
B. Indirect participation by asking three questions is listed below	
1.	Workers councils and joint consultations could be one of the ways I can participate.
2.	Collective bargaining can be a more important aspect than workers' councils and joining consultations
3.	I believe that frequent meetings between workers' employers and their supervisor's suitable aspects of participating in decision-making
Second: organizational effectiveness:	
1.	Participation in decision-making in my company makes me feel satisfaction, more partition, and a high degree of esprit de corps in my job.
2.	Participation could reduce the turnover of workers and create some loyalty for workers.

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