

Changing University Governance Paradigms in the Middle East and North Africa: The UAE Example

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Abstract – When Al Ain University (AU) was inceptioned in 2005 it was aimed to be a higher education institution of its kind and was meant to grow into an international-class university. Five years later, however, it found itself lagging behind the top twenty UAE universities. In less than half a dozen of years, no less than four presidents have resigned or been terminated prior to the expiration of their terms, in most cases, within one or two years of assuming office which stroke a serious blow to the institution's governance system. This state-of-affairs had had a grave impact on the stability, functioning and growth of the institution and thus prompted an urgent need for a stable organizational model of governance. Consequently, AU developed a new management system derived from the Commission for Academic Accreditation 2011 Standards of UAE Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research (CAA Standards) meaning to move the institution forward to accomplishments and excellence. This paper examines the nature and the effects of change involved through the application of the CAA Standards as an organizational model of governance and provides recommendations as to how the model can be efficaciously implemented.

Keywords – Organizational culture; University governance; CAA standards; Education quality.

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1. Introduction

There is not a great deal of research that examined the type of organizational culture prevailing in universities in the Arab World. To some degree, the interest in culture was neglected because higher education institutions in this part of the world were state-owned and state-run. The very few existing studies that investigated this domain recognize that organizational culture has been neglected in the Arab universities. It is perhaps needless to tell that the dominant model of governance in the majority of Arab universities is a highly-centralized one and that it is the governments who “own” these higher education institutions who in fact administer them, directly or indirectly, through supreme councils they unilaterally nominate. In fact, institutional actors at every level are accountable to the state authorities. However, the few studies have somewhat tried to shed some light on the type of organizational culture that is prevalent in some Arab universities [1], [2], [20]. Seemingly, over the past few decades, Arab universities started to review their internal structural system as a result of national and globalization demands, and to break away from the very traditional and obsolete modes of state control and governance. Since then a number of public and private universities looked into ways of changing the concept of organizational culture and sought greater homogeneity, higher effectiveness, strength and international visibility.

Likewise, studies that examined organizational culture in European educational settings are somewhat rare [13], hence the need for investigating organizational culture in the context of higher education arises. The numerous studies in the domain of organizational culture provided evidence that culture and behavior constitute central elements of an organization's governance operations. According to Salonda [24], university culture is a distinct type of organizational culture. Basically, university culture emanates from within the organization. It is the values, beliefs, interactions and practices its members share throughout their stay within the organization. The stronger the culture is, the bigger the

accomplishments. Organizational culture strength arises from a culture that is grounded on supporting solid teamwork, collaboration and individual integration. Within a strong university culture, faculties value the contributions and beliefs of others, exhibit strong norms of behavior that foster everlasting improvement. Based on underlying assumptions and belief systems, the norms of behavior of a university are diffused in the form of institutional models and terminology. In a university setting, establishing a strong organizational culture can only be achieved with the cooperation and support of the founders, and the collaboration of middle level managers, faculty and staff. In fact, the most successful university cultures are those that support group collaboration and individual achievement. In other instances, university culture may also be created by new members and leaders who bring along new sets of values, beliefs, and assumptions. These cultures might as well reflect the personalities and conduct of their founders and may be shaped accordingly. Therefore, the extent of performance of an academic organization will be determined by a manager's sets of beliefs, values and assumptions he/she shares with its members. An autocratic manager, for example, may exert negative influence on the personnel's state of mind and behavior which may alter the homogeneity of the organization and affect its stability. When a newly-established culture is autocratic and ambiguous, the new ways of acting and thinking cannot be internalized by organizational members so this is likely to result in conflict. An organizational culture built on conflict poses significant challenges to the pursuit of the organization's strategic objectives and may threaten its stability and existence. In university organizational theory, a culture that is based on autocratic and ambiguous values is known as a weak culture. Schein claims that "if things are ambiguous, then by definition, that group does not have a culture" [25]. Clarity fosters an environment which people can perform at their best to advance the organization's strategy.

Leaders and managers play a dominant role in shaping and reinforcing culture within their organization. Unlike an autocratic culture, a supportive culture has proven to be an important motivational factor in the life of an organization. It fosters greater acceptance of exchange and collective acceptance of the subcultures and creates a healthier organizational environment. Sporn [29] identified two types of culture that characterize contemporary higher education institutions: strong and weak culture. A culture is deemed weak when its fundamental beliefs, values, norms, patterns and behaviors are not adhered to (or partly) by organization members. In a weak culture, actions and

experiences involving these elements are barely observed or shared by the group. A university characterized by disagreement and unclear communication among its members, absence of norms that nurture individual involvement, and breach of laws will, by definition, have a weak culture [3]. In contrast, a strong culture is one that not only fosters debate and enthusiasm but values and encourages debate and discussion for the sake of improvement of decision-making and problem-solving. Shared effort, collegiality and enthusiasm will be more favorable to strengthening group ties than individualistic behavior and non-adherence to norms and values. Schein [25] relates strong culture to group stability, homogeneity and endurance. Investigative research on culture has demonstrated a significant correlation between a strong organizational culture and an organization's performance. It is worth reiterating, for the sake of this study, researchers' hypotheses that a strong culture is associated with organizational excellence and performance.

2. Review of the Literature

The most striking of all definitions pertaining to organizational culture is perhaps that forwarded by Lundy [19] who summed up organizational culture as "the way we do things around here". Moran [21] claims that "Culture is a distinctly human means of adapting to circumstances and transmitting this coping skill and knowledge to subsequent generations. Culture gives people a sense of who they are, of belonging to one entity, of how they should behave, and of what they should be doing." Since culture revolves around a set of "basic assumptions and beliefs" [25], members of an organization respond as a member of the collective. According to Testa [30], organizational culture strengthens the feeling of identity and commitment to the organization among its internal constituents and creates a motivating and competitive verge.

Organizational culture is seen by many as a fundamental key to understanding the realities of an organization from within. Kunda [16] defines culture as: "a learned body of tradition that governs what one needs to know, think, and feel in order to meet the standards of membership". Culture or shared assumptions can either empower the organization to climb the ladder to success or impede its development. Because culture affects the performance of organizations, managerial thinking and research in the past decades steered managers' action towards creating solid organizational cultures that best support the goals of their company. Heskett [14], informs us that "Culture can account for 20-30% of the differential in corporate performance

when compared with culturally unremarkable competitors". Culture represents such a critical element in organizational decision-making that ignoring it is likely to cause negative effects on constituents' performance. Seemingly, management scholars and practitioners in the field of organizational culture argue that culture is directly related to organizational performance because culture deeply impacts the engagement of individual members of the organization and shapes their behavior [26].

Key factors considered highly strategic to an organization's success and survival include clarity of purpose and consensus about strategy. Members of an organization should be made aware of the scope and purpose of the organization if leaders want to see them more engaged in their roles and responsibilities and highly committed to the vision statement of the organization. Consensus about strategy is vehicled by a culture, which emphasizes knowledge exchange, trust in interactions and creativity and involves all organization members. That is to say, the people who lead an organization should be open to feedback from those who work for it and inspire them to commit to the organization's stability, development, and high performance. In any case, leaders have to bear in mind that culture is not imposed but shared.

Often, new leaders are brought in to redesign an organization and bring about change. More often, they will start by addressing the basic tenets of the organization: its internal culture. Every organization has a unique culture of its own, one which when activated is deemed to trigger enthusiasm, commitment and the best *savoir-faire*. It is seen by many as a critical source of organizational stability. Often, leaders strive to shape it in a way consistent with their managerial endeavors. Research has shown that culture is a variable internal to an organization malleable enough to be modified to impact the process of change. The assumption that culture can be molded into a coveted framework to impact change is shared by Moran [21] who stresses, however, that this desired framework can be time consuming and needs to be treated with flexibility and patience.

When an organization struggles to adapt to change, when its survival is potentially at stake, a rebuilding plan is crucial. The success of such venture relies entirely on a number of elements the most important of which is the culture of the organization. Such component can be approached from different perspectives one of which relates to the organizational context whereby leaders establish conditions, structures and processes necessary for achieving sustainable organization performance and large-scale effectiveness. Within this context, a host of elements are deemed necessary. Leaders have the

responsibility to create conditions under which employees develop their potential perspectives and capabilities that will enable them to "cope with [...] problems of external adaptation and internal integration", Schein [26]. This literature review suggests a strong link between organizational culture and organizational performance.

Organizational culture has emerged in recent organizational literature as a critical constituent of successful institutional change in governance. It is a kind of charter englobing a blend of assumptions, values, symbols, and rituals meant to guide the way in which members in the organization come together, interpret, understand and solve problems. When systematically manipulated, when converted into a blueprint, a distinctly observable outline may come up out of these assumptions and beliefs to form specific organizational traits or character. These specific traits or character echo the organization's image to the external world and dictate its own internal actions. Improving performance within an organization depends on whether and how congruent its cultural values are with the beliefs and values of its employees [18]. Any organization striving for fulfillment and success must identify the type of culture it englobes.

One of the most frequently cited and agreed upon definitions concerning the concept of organizational culture is that offered by Schein [25]. He says that organizational culture is "a pattern of shared basic assumptions that was learned by a group as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems" (p.12). In a relatively short time, somewhere between the late 1980s and early 1990s, organizational culture has prompted a great deal of research and inquiry, thus becoming the 'hottest' topic in the field of corporate management. Following Schein's [25] concept of organizational culture, studies have arrived at different conclusions, one of which maintains that creating a culture within an organization gives it its unique character and identity. Building a strong organizational culture that is adaptive to change, however, can meet tough challenges down the road. These challenges are associated with what Schein calls external adaptation and internal integration. Internal integration may be associated with the internal processes needed to ensure the functioning of the organization in a competitive context and its positioning at the top of the spectrum. External adaptation entails survival in and adjustment to the external challenges in order to endure and thrive. Schein believes that all organizations are socio-technical systems in which the mechanisms to adapt

and survive to the external environment are entwined with what is to be a resolution of internal integration conflicts. According to Shein [26], the main challenge organizations face with regards to external adaptation, is to obtain a shared understanding and consensus on (1) mission, strategy, and goals, (2) means (structure, systems, processes), (3) measurement (error-detection, and correction systems). As for internal integration, Shein states that the main problems are: (1) common language and concepts, (2) group boundaries and identity, (3) the nature of authority and relationships, (4) allocation of rewards and status [26].

3. Organizational Culture Types and University Governance Models

Cameron and Quinn [8] drew four quadrants of organizational culture. At the other end of the spectrum, five models of university governance have dominated higher education in the past century; Collegial governance, Corporate governance, Trustee governance, Stakeholder governance, and Business governance. These four labels are believed to, “match key management theories about organizational success, approaches to organizational quality, leadership roles, and management skills” [8]. Comparing the four quadrants in relation to company characteristics, we have come to understand that these don't, in fact, operate as one block in relation to organizational performance; that is to say one cultural type might be appropriate to one organizational context but not to another. Cameron and Quinn [8] assumed that the same thing applies to the different models of university governance. Hence, it is important for this research to explore the connections between the different organizational types and their corresponding models of governance.

Adhocracy oriented cultures are characterized by such features as risk taking, innovation, and building partnerships. Their formal structure is based on commitment to experimentation and innovation. Because they are dynamic, entrepreneur, and creative in nature, these organization types favour individual initiative, establish bases for experimentation and innovativeness as these are believed to lead to new resources and profitability. Corporate governance is found to be interconnected with adhocracy culture with its strategic focus on innovation, creativity, and risk acceptance. Both leadership and employees are considered to be innovators and risk takers. Members of an adhocracy are beckoned to be ready to adapt new opportunities, to be creative and above all to anticipate situation changes for adhocracies are short lived in nature. Hence, due to the rapid changing market, frequent adaptation and institutional change become mandatory in order to implement strategies

for increased productivity and performance. In the frenzied race for educational reforms, many western universities adopted a “performance culture approach” making them more corporate in nature. Typifying this view is Trackman [31] who asserts that “the corporate governance model is prevalent today in universities” (p. 68). However, some critics of the corporate governance model argue that it will lead to the ‘commodification’ of education, displacing academic distinctiveness toward the pursuit of corporate efficiency [5]. In Oxford University, corporate governance has been widely rejected by its faculty as this type of managerial governance is believed to produce only partial and short-term governance solutions. Yet, even those who remain doubtful of corporate governance models in Universities reckon that these can act as a saviour in times of severe economic difficulties. In Australia, for example, the corporate governance model is adopted to comply with government demands for more cost effective and cost-reducing university management. Hence, in order for universities to be governed in an economically efficient manner, they need to adopt the corporate model because, as Trackman [31] puts it, “many practical attributes of corporate governance match the requirements of universities”.

Clan Culture is portrayed as the most flexible of the four culture types as it values human affiliation, support, retention, and exerts less control over employee's behaviour. To Cameron and Quinn [8], a clan culture is “a friendly work environment where people have the ability to share a lot of themselves. It is like being with friends and family at work. The internal climate is the main determinant of success”. Organizations that fall under this kind of culture tend to favour trust in and commitment to employees, build these employees into a team and eradicate self-destructive behaviour. Universities that adopt a system of governance based on “trust” relationship between a trustee board that acts in trust for, and on behalf of trust beneficiaries, strive to fulfil their fiduciary duties towards their students, staff, government and the public at large. In the USA for example, and as a response to change in a fierce era of higher education competitiveness, universities are managed through “Boards of Trustees” composed of independent members and elected most particularly for their managerial skills. Fairtlough [12] portrayed an organization of this sort as a place where ‘...there are high levels of trust, and everyone is bound together by a deep understanding of and commitment to organization goals’ (p.271). Hence, like in a clan culture where the internal climate is jealously well-kept-up, it is the duty of the members of a “Trustee model” to exercise the highest levels of diligence in protecting the trust, including disclosing any factor

that might constitute a conflict of interest with that trust. The rare advocates of the model assert that it can serve as a pervasive model of governance in the face of concerns about the safety and security of students, confidence in senior administrators and worries about intemperate leadership.

Hierarchy Culture is known to be bureaucratic in nature and presents considerable resistance to change and adaptation. Cameron and Quinn [8] defined a hierarchy culture as “a very formalized and structured place to work.... Formal rules and policies hold the organization together” (p.75). Organizations characterized by this type of culture are internally oriented as they exert strict control and monitoring over employees through formal measures. Leaders in hierarchical cultures concern themselves exclusively with organizational control and stability as these are believed to foster efficiency, timeliness, and smooth functioning of the organization. Universities that adopt a system of governance based on bureaucracy usually delegate leadership to academics who monitor the contents of education and research, supported by administrative personnel whose main function is to ascertain that the government’s rules and policies are respected. Also known as bureaucratic-oligarchic model of governance, it is characterized by the government’s bureaucratic direct interference with the intent to regulate the access conditions, the curriculum, the degree requirements, the examination systems, the appointment and remuneration of academic staff etc. and by the academic oligarchy’s responsibility of the university’s academic affairs. This model also known as ‘state control model’ has proved to be very resistant to change. That is why it has become more and more unsuitable in the face of the new roles universities are asked to play.

Market Culture is represented by Cameron and Quinn, [8] as being oriented towards “competitiveness and aggressiveness”. They defined it as a “result oriented workplace, focusing on gaining market share and penetration, focusing on external continuance with the need for steadiness and power”. Thus, organizations structured under this category are goal-oriented and lay emphasis on competitiveness. They aim for immediate success and for market share by adopting aggressive marketing strategies. At the university echelon of governance model types, the business model, with its concepts and ideas typical of businesses, ideally links to “market” culture. However, the business model demands an efficient higher education market. Under this model, a few bodies control decision-making powers: the board of directors, at central level, and the Dean in each college. The business or market model is the fastest spreading model in some parts of the developing world, most notably in Eastern

European countries. According to Lazzeretti [17] the model is based on a very superficial imitation of the North American model, which is not deeply understood like in a market culture, the values of a university business governance model are based on a culture of results and are characterized by strong entrepreneurial features. This governance model type mainly works well the world’s most developed university institutions and markets. With focus on results, leaders concern themselves with introducing strategies of winning and success with the intent to enhance their market share and profitability. Likewise, in a business model of governance, university leaders are required to make use of the language and tools representative of businesses and the market surrounding them for the sake of achieving the highest levels of performance and visibility.

4. Organizational Culture Change

The key to survival in a constantly competitive and changing landscape is change. Cameron and Quinn [8] argue that changing an organization’s rooted culture involves identification and altering; “A change in culture depends on the implementation of behaviours by individuals in the organization that reinforce the new cultural values and are consistent with them”. However, when implementing change in an organization, resistance to change is more likely to occur. This can be particularly true in the case of major changes in the overall design of an organization. The best way to avoid resistance to change is to know the culture of the organization from within. Members in an organization self-confidently adapt to changing goals and situations only when leaders whose responsibility is to ensure creativity and novelty build solid mechanisms of trust, functional coordination, and stability within the organization as “any change tends to interfere with the sense of security and arouses anxiety, and as a consequence, resistance of organization members” [4] because as Schein [26] claims “Human minds need cognitive stability and any challenge of a basic assumption will release anxiety and defensiveness”. Most importantly, adaptation to change and involvement depend upon the responsiveness from the leaders through active and ongoing participation in the process of change they built up alongside the members of the organization. Leadership styles often follow the type already established organizational structures. In organizations that involve their constituents in decision-making, there is a tendency to describe these as less directorial and consensus-based [6], [7]. Generally speaking, higher education institutions are known to recognize the value of collaboration and partnering over dictating.

However, a vast majority of universities around the world still adopt those traditional models of governance that are based on the belief that leading is a leader's business. The difficulty, however, lies more in introducing change than in anything else.

Successful implementation helps leadership run organizations that have rather rigid systems, bring about considerable change and solutions to the organizational structure, including balancing conflicting interests, desires, and goals among constituents. In the current climate of higher education competition, organizational culture constitutes an invaluable tool academic institutions make use of in a bid to mould and reinforce relations and values among their internal constituencies. When implemented well, organizational culture does exert critical impact on the quality of governance, itself strategic to high performance and conducive to the organization's long range growth.

5. Background Context -- AU Organizational Culture Model

Half a decade after its inception, AU has experienced a major process of change in its system of governance. The need to respond to local, regional, and world demands in terms of academic quality, accreditation, research productivity and service to the local communities is of central importance in today's globalized world. This went along with the establishment of a new model of governance based on the Commission for Academic Accreditation (CAA) Standards of the UAE Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research [9] and which came into force in 2012. This orientation was supported by two arguments. First, AU leadership saw in the CAA Standards for Institutional and Program Accreditation an effective framework to function as an organizational agenda. Second, successful implementation will increase the professionalization of faculty and staff, and will develop in them leadership capacity and initiative.

The University senior management team considered leadership styles, entrustment of responsibility and communication channels to delegate the decision-making accountability to its internal constituencies. The CAA Standards for Institutional and Program Accreditation require action from faculty and staff as if serving in a variety of roles. These standards, eleven in total, constitute the essential pillars of the adopted governance system. AU senior management team sees the CAA Standards for Institutional and Program Accreditation as more than a means of ensuring the quality of instruction but as a model for institutional governance. The main advantage of the model lies in the fact that it paves way for all internal constituencies to take part in the decision-making

process of the academic institution towards achieving its mission. It is a framework whereby, in addition to their traditional roles, faculty and staff are converted into decision-makers and are brought to develop leadership skills and a higher level of commitment necessary for the growth of the institution. The CAA Standards for Institutional and Program Accreditation can be a great tool for building positive self-governed entities within rapidly changing higher education environments. They support the sort of professional governance needed between staff and leadership and influence decisional involvement at various levels. With these standards, collaborative governance is strengthened and well-structured and is thus made less complex.

AU has taken an urgent and successful approach to implement the Model through which academic and administrative staff are empowered to take part in decision-making and to continue to commit to the institution's vision and goals. But empowering faculty and staff is a great challenge. It requires strategies that maximize involvement, commitment and performance. However, often there is conflict with existing academic cultures, raising questions about the impact of structural changes on academic behaviour.

Faculty and staff members are responsible for the implementation of the institutional policies, rules and procedures through the adopted new system of governance and are held accountable for consolidating its operational practice and effectiveness. Frustration grows over the pace and scale of change as change is expected to happen more quickly. However, one of the strategies employed by the senior management team has been that whenever decisions taken reach their office, they are discussed then implemented without delay. This tactic was used so as to enhance confidence and boost faculty enthusiasm and commitment.

In this context, connecting the governance structure and practice to the Ministry's Standards for Institutional and Program Accreditation will pave way to a new model of governance with a resulting positive effect on the constituencies' organizational commitment and organizational performance. The idea is for colleges, departments, centres and units to start sharing responsibility and to influence decisions on major strategic issues.

As a consequence, the incorporation of a culture of an organizational culture raises questions about its effects on staff's level of commitment to the shared governance model. Hence, strategies were needed to facilitate the introduction of such model and to ensure its success. The implications included, in particular, providing the indispensable reinforcement as well as the resources needed to implement the proposals suggested by the various councils.

Attending to councils' initiatives, suggestions and recommendations was regarded as highly necessary to ensure the model's success and to lead the institution one step further towards the effective and efficient pursuit of shared leadership.

The CAA Standards for Institutional and Program Accreditation were meant to provide opportunity for all actors to participate in institutional governance. Consequently, AU took the decision to adopt the CAA standards as an organizational agenda. The intention behind this new culture of governance has been to instil greater professionalism in both faculty and staff, and to achieve the desired goals. At the outset, CAA guidelines and regulations were brought in alongside the institution's traditional governing rules and procedures to meet institutional quality assurance requirements and to respond to CAA Standards for Institutional and Program Accreditation. Later, these were introduced with the idea to serve as a blueprint to further enhance the involvement of all internal constituencies in academic and administrative governance decisions. These academic and administrative bodies have been delegated the power to take all decisions through their council meetings. Key decisions are, however, submitted to the University Council and the Board of Trustees.

The new governing body saw in the CAA Standards for Institutional and Program Accreditation more than a simple system that regulates higher education institutions in the UAE in terms of quality and orientation but as a model for ensuring better governance if adopted comprehensively and wisely. Schofield [27] supports this argument when he says that effective governance "has been emphasized by its recognition as crucial for the future success of HE in the UAE (for example it is one of the five pillars on which the current Abu Dhabi HE policy is based, and also by the CAA in its Standards for Licensure and Accreditation" (p. 13). AU management sought to define its main orientations and to direct (draw up) its development objectives within the CAA framework in a bid to ensure high quality not only in learning and teaching but in institutional governance as well. CAA Standards for Institutional and Program Accreditation facilitated the introduction of institutional effectiveness plans at all levels: infrastructure, academic staff and students, programs, for licensing and for quality control. The introduction of the standards as an organizational model of governance provided an opportunity for colleges, departments, centres and units alike with an opportunity to govern themselves and were charged with leading efforts to improve. At issue is how propagating a culture of shared governance will be considered by faculty and staff. Or, managers are

aware that whenever change is announced, varying degrees of attitude and confusion arise. In these circumstances, it is essential for the senior management team to promote an awareness of their roles in shared governance and the influence they would yield on institutional decision-making that affects change within their work environment and develop a new type of relationship with the senior management team. AU senior management team asserts that building a culture for shared governance is simply a matter of making faculty and staff initiate a new workplace culture, accept responsibility and demonstrate commitment and competence. The adoption of the CAA Standards for Institutional and Program Accreditation as an organizational agenda was intended and above all expected to lead to the enhancement of leadership skills and shared governance practices. Of course these developments came as a result of the reorganization of the system of governance, found to be exceedingly traditional and narrowly-oriented in implementing the institutional goals. Results have come more quickly and deeply than they have been expected as the institution witnessed a sharp increase in the volume of scholarly productivity. These have, in effect, become the means by which colleges, departments, units, and centres have readjusted to the new mission of AU in the prioritization of shared governance and its decentralization.

Consistency in decision-making whereby all internal constituencies have a "voice" facilitates the process of shared leadership and sustains high performance within the institution. When planning for change and in order for shared governance to work, there is a need to help administrators, faculty, and staff have a deep understanding of the envisioned governance model and how it works. Seemingly, good practice requires that when through its organizational agenda comes a decision or recommendation the senior campus management must attend to it more quickly and more effectively.

The newly established organizational agenda delineates which constituent group is responsible for what portions of decision-making and at what level. For instance, such decisions as student numbers, departmental budgets, and curriculum content now lie partly or largely in the hands of the faculty. Pushing towards greater integration of technology in the curriculum and applying more efficient methods of assessment, on the other hand, is the responsibility of the Quality Assurance and Institutional Research Centre. Constructing new buildings, procuring equipment is the duty of the Board of Trustees. The librarian is responsible for building the Libraries' resources including books, journals, video and sound recordings, electronic resources, and other database sources.

The proposed blueprint, which has become a means of enforcing the agenda following the CAA Standards for Institutional and Program Accreditation outlined the institutional shared governance lines in terms of the roles and responsibilities exerted by the president, faculty and staff, administrators, students, and trustees in institutional decision-making all in their specific domain. Through the implementation of the model, the Board of Trustees roles involved overseeing management, finances and the overall quality of the institution, the president's main duty included creating and maintaining new resources, whereas the faculty bears responsibility for such fundamental areas as curriculum development and the introduction of new academic programs. In the old governance system students were acknowledged as institutional constituents, but not players in the governance of the institution. Under the newly introduced governance model, however, students are given the chance to influence institutional decision-making through committees and surveys of satisfaction and graduating surveys following CAA's recommendation 1.7.10 for Institutional Management and Administration which states that "Students have the opportunity to participate in the decision making processes within the institution; this should include formal representation on appropriate committees related to both academic and non-academic matters" [9]. Hence, by adopting the CAA Standards for Institutional and Program Accreditation, the senior management, trustees, colleges, departments units, centres, and students have come to influence, jointly, the norms that governed their own institution. A number of opportunities for sharing decision-making in varying domains occurred through the standards. Thus, in little more than a half decade, AU faculty, students and staff have demonstrated a high degree of professionalism. This triggered a climate of considerable competition among colleges seeking not only national but international accreditation as well.

The CAA Standards for Institutional and Program Accreditation were defined as a requisite policy for AU governance. According to El Refae [11] "AU was aware and devout to develop its strong institutional culture and identity through the shared and implemented values, norms and beliefs surrounding the guidelines of the 2011 CAA standards" (p. 247). Seeking to improve decision-making processes at different levels, rules and procedures were implemented at the council meetings.

Shared governance creates a supportive environment in which faculty and staff are encouraged to grow professionally and contribute more effectively to the institution. Greater collaboration between these groups and individuals

and the senior management team in addressing academic and non-academic governance issues will ultimately lead to the desired results and ensure the institution's capacity to thrive. Giving access to resources, information, and support systems through shared governance, empowers staff who create an environment that triggers motivation and increases performance. By adopting the CAA Standards for Institutional and Program Accreditation, colleges have been directly involved in significant decision-making and have thus been able to influence, however minimally, the norms governing their own institution.

Both academic and staff corps were subjected to the CAA Standards for Institutional and Program Accreditation, who became responsible for the management of their own colleges, departments, centres and units. Academics gradually became responsible for decisions in which they were not previously involved ranging from books, equipment and technological learning resources. The Council committees provided the opportunity to increase the level of their involvement and influence in decision-making. As a result, performance improved and the relationships between academics and the institutional management evolved.

6. How Does it Work?

Each Council establishes a committee structure in line with the 11 organizational agenda. The Council then develops relationships with its committees and delegates powers, functions and duties to these committees, which are considered the executing body within the university, college, department, centre, or unit. In return, the committees report actions taken by its members to their respective council. Thus, decisions made at a lower level are passed on to a higher level through the councils; a revolutionary approach to governance in the Gulf where the reality is that decision-making is essentially top-down in nature. Porter-O'Grady [22] acknowledges that the "key characteristic of the administrative model is the structural familiarity in discussing, recommending, and moving decisions upward" (p.101). To ensure effective and efficient operations of the University's system of governance, matters are discussed in the meetings under the CAA standardized items. Each standard works in collaboration to reinforce and support the other standards. The 11 standards discussed in each Councils' agenda further the alignment of the whole university system engagement to the university's key strategy, vision and mission.

7. Data Collection

The topic under investigation in this study is the newly developed management system derived from the Commission for Academic Accreditation 2011 Standards of the UAE Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research [9] and used as a governance model at Al Ain University, UAE. This study conducted individual semi-structured interviews with present and former key members of the university's middle level managers (Dean, Deputy Dean, Head of Department, Unit and Centre Director) as well as faculty and staff who served or are still serving on the various university constituencies' Councils. An interview timeline was provided, with appointments for individuals to select at their convenience. The duration of each interview was approximately 30–45 minutes, taking place in the participant's office. Participants were given a participant information sheet detailing the purpose of the study and the use of data, confidentiality and other important data protection and governance related matters. The use of one-to-one semi-structured interviews was important to establish the university's administrators and faculty's insights and experience of utilizing the AU Model. The use of such a method in our context is appropriate when the aim is to gain an accurate reflection of the interviewees' perceptions and experiences of and involvement in working in a complex, dynamic and evolving academic culture and working environment.

The application of one-to-one semi-structured interviews is important in that research that investigates culture with the intent of addressing the inconsistencies between espoused values and actual practice requires greater usage of qualitative methods [15]. One-to-one semi-structured interviews have been widely used to review the various dimensions and factors associated with organizational cultures and working environments. They are known to provide a rich and deep exploration of individuals' experiences and perceptions of major factors that influence culture. More importantly, semi-structured interviews have the benefit of capturing examples of how employees' values, beliefs and behaviours actually influence organizational culture and performances [23].

8. Findings

The importance of a stable and efficacious organizational culture is crucial for any university striving to prosper in an academic world dominated by competitiveness and by national and international ranking. Hence, organizational culture is fast becoming a key factor in shaping the strategies and behaviour of a university. In seeking to answer the

research question, it was acknowledged by the respondents involved in this study that:

'Thanks to the CAA Model, the values and beliefs concerning the mission and aims of the University activities are now well defined, there are now specific guidelines on how to manage teaching and research and offer service to the community'.

The intent behind this move was to align the University's constituencies' Council agenda with the CAA Standards for Institutional and Program Accreditation and to come up with an exclusive management system that serves as effectively and efficiently as possible the mission and vision of Al Ain University. Those interviewed for this study talked about their experience with enthusiasm and acknowledged the fact that the Model made them feel being something that they have not been before.

- *'The Model gave them the opportunity to exercise their powers and functions as university faculty through academic councils. They were given the power to make recommendations and pass decisions concerning matters of general university interests including physical and learning resources, as well as students' issues and campus life'.*
- *'The Model enabled them to be involved in decision-making in all university matters, including, for instance, educational and research matters, faculty hiring, budgeting, promotion, resources.*
- *'The Model allows for proposals to be brought forward for discussion and decisions taken are considered ones and not simply adopted "on the nod", thus strengthening councils' real contribution to the strategic plan of the constituency'.*
- *'The model is comprehensive, in that it integrates middle level managers, faculty and staff as well as all organization systems variables within one framework'.*
- *'The Model represents an audience-friendly resource tab for middle level managers, faculty and staff to go and get rationales for decision-making on various issues'.*

Adopted by the Commission of Academic Accreditation to establish and operate institutions of higher education, (Standards for Academic Accreditation 2011), the CAA standards have been fully adopted by the Colleges Council, Units, Departments and Centres as their respective agenda and as an endeavour to building a new organizational culture and to meeting the university's managerial needs as well as achieving optimal educational outcomes. This view as to the objective of the Model, one senior administrator indicated that:

‘The standards, as an organizational agenda, focus on improving the quality of the university policy setting, educational programs, student enrolment, faculty recruitment, its campus environment and infrastructure, research productivity as well as service to the community’.

Intended to be implemented with a long-term focus, the main purpose of the university’s internal organizational structure is to increase decision-making opportunities of middle level managers, faculty and staff, to standardize communication across the institution and to ensure that coordination between the various decision-making bodies is ran in a methodical manner and leads to the creation of an effective workforce. From the deans’ point of view, the Model helped academics gain valuable governance skills which enabled them to truly participate in sharing decision-making:

‘The proposed organizational culture model involves greater entrustment of various tasks among teams, bigger and faster coordination, greater communication between constituents, differences in objectives are reduced or brought to a bare minimum, if not completely eliminated’.

El Refae [11] sums up this adapted organizational culture as follows: “any decision making, problem solving, procedure or guideline springs its source at all levels from the CAA standards” (p. 247). Most participants in the study mentioned that the Model:

‘Provided form and meaning for activities in the absence of visible organizational structure and roles in the past’.

According to the CAA, a higher education institution is required to build “an appropriate organization structure and a system of governance that facilitates the accomplishment of its mission, furthers institutional effectiveness, and clearly distinguishes the authority, roles, and responsibilities of its governing body (the Board), administration, faculty, and staff “Standards for Academic Accreditation 2011). In this context, one of the participants (Dean) also suggested that:

‘This is also meant to unite the organization and its constituents around a set of beliefs, structures, values, and norms and allow for the creation and shaping up of a cohesive and purposeful culture that instigates and directs behaviour in one and same direction’.

Seemingly, an academic faculty highlighted the necessity of a structured, managerial approach. With regards the AU Model, she said:

‘It raised my enthusiasm and broadened my horizon with regard the notion of university governance in its holistic organization’.

Another academic faculty declared that:

‘The Model allowed me to play a meaningful role in decision-making on issues of greatest importance to me, and enabled me to approach them professionally’.

According to Moran [21], culture “gives people a sense of who they are, of belonging, of how they should behave, and of what they should be doing”. Culture generates the assumptions members of the organization make as a team in different organizational settings in order to achieve desirable results.

‘The standards and criteria shove for a culture of quality and excellence in program effectiveness, research and scholarly activities, organization and governance, and community engagement’.

As a matter of fact, shared beliefs and values create homogeneity among organization members. Van der Steen [32] reveals that “shared beliefs lead to more delegation, less monitoring, higher utility (or satisfaction), higher execution effort (or motivation), faster coordination, less influence activities, and more communication, but also to less experimentation and less information collection”. In these contexts, one faculty member stated:

‘Ever since the Model has been introduced and applied, I feel safe to share ideas while serving on Councils. Due to transparency, my level of trust has grown significantly and my commitment to leadership roles increased’.

On the other hand, one dean stated:

‘As a dean, I regularly refer back to the CAA Standards when there are disagreements among council members with regard certain issues’.

A senior administrator believed that (1) the new organizational agenda is deemed to be a challenging affair, making it work and well is problematic and that (2) developing a solid foundation for the proposed model would take time and commitment, but if soundly implemented it would lead to faculty and staff having input on major decisions and would help the institution rebuild its organizational culture. He added:

‘Another motive for the implementation of such organizational agenda is to lessen the existing huge information gap between the senior campus management and faculty and staff and to build the kinds of collaboration and trust through communication, shared decision-making and transparency critical to overcoming the institutional challenges and to creating opportunities for development and maturity’.

The key feature of this Model is that it is introduced as a kind of a belief system the entire institutional constituents within the university follow to maintain organizational endurance and success. The CAA Standards are concerned with all that goes on in an academic institution as a whole. They shape and direct the members' actions, deeds, and behaviours whether consciously or otherwise. This type of culture is defined by Davis [10] as "The pattern of shared beliefs and values that give members of an institution meaning, and provide them with the rules for behaviour in their organization."

Throughout the interviews, one of the characteristics cited by all the participants was university compliance to legal obligations:

'Through the adopted model, appropriate councils ensure that the university is compliant with legal obligations in such areas as environment, health and safety program and thus contribute in a real way to the strategic plan of the university'.

The proposed model consists of 11 common standards. There seems to be consensus over comprehensiveness as it was considered by many participants to be one strong characteristic of the model:

'The Standards are comprehensive and descriptive enough for administrators, faculty and staff and help build the culture of the institution on solid grounds'.

The AU senior management team yearned to build a sense of commitment to this organizational agenda and to bring faculty, staff and students to a certain extent, to address issues seen as vital for ensuring a positive evolving route of the institution. The Model as a successful concept was pervasive throughout the interviews. The consensus among the respondents seemed to be that the Model made a more than valuable contribution to the university from a governance perspective. The Deans summed up the importance of AU governance model as follows:

'The Model gives members of all constituencies a sense of unified purpose, fosters commitment to leadership roles and reinforces their bonds with their constituency'.

Other Deans, however, recommended continued and deeper exploration of the CAA Standards especially as new issues emerge and existing ones shift in scope and meaning.

Ever since its adoption, the AU Model has served as a channel between the faculty and staff and the administration. The Model provided opportunity for faculty and staff to discuss and express their views upon matters that are presented on the council agenda for deliberation and decision-making. For some, the

actual experience of having served on councils for several years was important as it made their contribution valuable from a managerial perspective. They make recommendations and pass resolutions with regard to the issues put forward. Recommendations and resolutions that require the authority of the university higher administration for implementation are then conferred to the Office of the President. The effectiveness of the Model rests upon the unit directors, heads of departments, deans, president's office and the board of trustees' willingness to implement these recommendations and decisions. To these ends, a pattern of follow-up on implementation needs to be established between councils and decision-makers through a representative structure.

9. Conclusion

Put in place in 2012, the AU management model has now been running for the past seven years or so and has proven that it is a system that works. From an organizational point of view, consolidating the model shuns those who come in into the institution later in time from imposing their own system as this would lead to destabilization and ultimately to decline. In spite of belonging to the academic cadre, the newly appointed AU administrators governed the institution in the same way managers operated companies thanks to the introduction of well-established management methods and tools derived from the CAA Standards. These new types of managers are, according to Sørderberg and Holden [28]: "becoming sophisticated generalists, able to manage a potpourri of projects, people, resources, and issues". Following the application of new rules, norms and other frameworks (Standards for Academic Accreditation 2011), these have led to the institution become highly organized, better structured and most importantly more stable than ever before. These developments produced positive results. As example, academic faculty became involved in decision-making from which they were previously excluded following CAA's recommendation on the role of faculty, which underlines their role in governance. (Standards for Academic Accreditation 2011, p. 36). Additionally, the relationship between the academic faculty and the institution developed and brought swift change in teaching, research and community engagement, which emerged as an essential component of faculty involvement in the making of community-changing decisions. AU adopted the CAA Standards for Institutional and Program Accreditation as a local approach to self-governance in a bid to meet the challenges and complexity of the twenty-first century management requirements. With the system's effectiveness, there is, however, a case to be made for

the adoption of such model in the UAE HEIs and ultimately in the Gulf countries and other parts of the world. We earnestly hope that empirical research will look into the effectiveness of our proposed model of organizational structure as we believe that such adapted system provides new beginnings for organizational governance in the Middle East and North Africa and beyond.

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