



LEADERSHIP STYLES AND EFFECTIVE PUBLIC SECTOR MANAGEMENT IN OMAN

Evidence from a Case Study of Three Administrative Units

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Abstract: Effective leadership is central to public-sector modernization because managers must combine lawful administration and performance control with employee motivation, organizational learning, and adaptability. This study examines leadership styles and their implications for effective public-sector management in three administrative units in Oman. It draws on semi-structured interviews with the heads of the selected units and an employee questionnaire administered in December 2023. The analysis integrates the qualitative and quantitative evidence to identify the prevailing leadership patterns and their implications for institutional performance within the context of Oman Vision 2040. The descriptive findings indicate that 84.0% of employees valued their leaders' decisions. However, only 29.8% responded positively to the statement that leaders clearly set goals for every task, compared with 46.8% who responded negatively. Similarly, only 8.5% responded positively to the maintenance of error records, while 48.8% responded negatively. The interview evidence characterizes leadership across the three units as predominantly transformational, supplemented by active management-by-exception, through which leaders monitor deviations from expected performance and address them before they escalate. The findings indicate a high level of employee acceptance of leaders' decisions but also reveal the need for stronger mechanisms for goal clarification and organizational learning. The study recommends translating strategic priorities into measurable unit-level objectives, conducting non-punitive after-action reviews, connecting leadership development to employee feedback, and monitoring leadership through balanced performance indicators. Because the source material does not report the survey sample size, response rate, or item-level data, the findings are descriptive and cannot be generalized to the entire Omani public sector. Future research should employ a larger multi-agency sample and a validated full-range leadership instrument.

Index Terms - Transformational leadership, transactional leadership, public-sector management, Oman Vision 2040, organizational performance, governance.

1. INTRODUCTION

Public organizations are expected to provide reliable services, uphold legality, use public resources responsibly, and respond to changing citizen expectations. Leadership is important not only because it affects what employees do but because it links policy goals to the day-to-day work of administration. A meta-analysis of public-administration research found that administrative leadership was consistently associated with employee, organizational, and public-service outcomes, but that effects were also dependent on context and measurement [1]. In Oman, where public institutions embark on an ambitious national transformation agenda, this contextual qualification is particularly important.

Governance and institutional performance constitute one of the principal pillars of Oman Vision 2040. Its priorities include effective oversight, measurable performance, efficient administration, accountable resource management, and capable institutions [2]. Achieving these priorities requires leaders who can articulate a credible direction, coordinate implementation, support innovation, and maintain procedural discipline. Transformational leadership deals with the motivational and developmental side of the challenge, while transactional leadership deals with the clarification, monitoring, rewards, and corrective action side. Full-range leadership theory suggests that these approaches are not mutually exclusive, but may be complementary [3]. This study examines leadership styles in three public-sector administrative units in Oman. It draws on semi-structured interviews with the heads of the selected units and an employee questionnaire administered in December 2023. By integrating interview evidence with reported employee response patterns, the study provides a context-specific assessment of leadership practices and identifies practical implications for public-sector management and institutional performance in Oman.

1.1 Research problem

The literature on leadership is large, but the evidence cannot be automatically transferred from private organizations or other national settings to Omani public administration. Public managers operate within legal constraints, multiple accountability relationships, formal hierarchies, and public-value expectations. Leadership behaviors are also understood in terms of cultural expectations of authority, consultation, responsibility, and consensus. The practical problem is to identify the observable leadership behaviors within Omani administrative units and to determine whether such behaviors are conducive to effective management.

1.2 Objectives and research questions

The study has three goals: (1) to determine the leadership pattern reported in the administrative units selected, (2) to assess employee perceptions of selected leadership practices related to goal clarity, error monitoring, and acceptance of leaders' decisions, and (3) to derive practical implications for leadership development and institutional performance in Oman. The following questions are answered: What transformational and transactional characteristics exist in the chosen units? How do employees judge selected leadership practices? What can be done to enhance the role of leadership in the effective management of the public sector?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Leadership in public administration

Public sector leadership is different from a purely commercial model. Leaders must produce results under the guidance of due process, political authorization, equity, transparency, and stewardship. Van Wart argues that public leadership research draws on an evolving body of theories that must account for administrative values and institutional constraints [4]. Wright and Pandey also find that transformational leadership can emerge in public organizations despite hierarchy and formalization; structures may influence leadership behavior but not prevent vision, inspiration, and change [5]. Public service motivation is also associated with public sector leadership. Transformational leaders can make public values salient by connecting daily work to a meaningful social purpose, increasing commitment and discretionary effort. Empirical research in public management indicates that leaders affect whether employees use performance information and whether organizational goals become behaviorally meaningful to employees [6]. Therefore, effective leadership ought to be evaluated based on visible factors—goal articulation, feedback, learning opportunities, coordination, and employee growth—rather than solely on charisma.

2.2 Full-range leadership theory

Full-range leadership theory categorizes leadership behaviors into transformational, transactional, and passive or laissez-faire dimensions [3]. Transformational leadership comprises idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. These behaviors establish a credible leadership example, communicate a shared purpose, encourage employees to question established routines, and address individual development needs. Meta-analytic studies typically link transformational leadership to follower satisfaction, motivation, and leader effectiveness [7], though the need for caution arises from common-method measurement and contextual differences. Transactional leadership establishes exchanges and defines performance limits. Contingent reward specifies expectations and acknowledges accomplishments. Active management-by-exception monitors deviations from expected performance and addresses them before they escalate. Passive management-by-exception steps in only when issues escalate significantly. Transactional mechanisms are not inherently less effective in public administration: defined standards and appropriate oversight can ensure accountability. Problems arise when monitoring substitutes for organizational learning, when rewards are disconnected from public value, or when leaders intervene only after failures have occurred. Effective public management may thus necessitate a balanced leadership configuration—transformational guidance backed by precise expectations, consistent feedback, and legal controls.

2.3 Leadership and organizational outcomes

Leadership can affect performance through various channels. First, goal clarification reduces uncertainty and enables employees to prioritize their tasks. Secondly, inspirational communication links personal endeavors to shared goals. Third, intellectual stimulation encourages improvement and innovation. Fourth, individualized consideration supports employee development and affective commitment. Ultimately, transactional monitoring offers insights and safeguards basic standards. Podsakoff and colleagues found that transformational leadership behaviors were associated with trust in the leader, employee satisfaction, and organizational citizenship behavior [8]. Recent synthesis in public-administration research affirms that leadership correlates with various outcomes but cautions that research designs and national contexts influence the observed relationships [1].

2.4 Omani institutional context and conceptual framework

In Oman, public-sector leadership operates within established administrative structures, while Oman Vision 2040 emphasizes institutional accountability, collaboration, measurable performance, and enhanced government capacity [2]. These circumstances indicate that neither a purely directive model nor a purely inspirational model is adequate. Leaders should maintain administrative legitimacy while allowing space for employee input and data-driven enhancement.

Table 1. Analytical framework linking leadership behavior to public-sector management

Leadership dimension	Observable mechanism	Expected management contribution
Transformational direction	Vision, role modelling, shared purpose	Commitment and alignment with public value
Intellectual stimulation	Questioning routines and encouraging ideas	Innovation and process improvement
Individual consideration	Coaching, feedback, and development	Capability, engagement, and retention
Contingent reward	Clear expectations and recognition	Role clarity and accountable delivery
Active management-by-exception	Early detection and corrective feedback	Risk control and service reliability
Passive or laissez-faire behavior	Delayed or absent intervention	Expected to weaken clarity and responsiveness

The framework suggests that effective leadership in the selected units would be reflected in a hybrid pattern combining transformational and transactional behaviors. Transformational behavior should provide direction, legitimacy, and employee development, while transactional behavior should translate that direction into clear tasks and timely corrective feedback. The empirical analysis thus contrasts the overall depiction of leadership in the interviews with three practices reported by employees that reflect goal clarification, recording of errors, and confidence in leaders' decisions.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Design and case scope

The study employs a descriptive case-study design with multiple sources of evidence. The case comprises three administrative units included in the study: International Governance and Relations, Development and Investment Promotion, and Human Resources. Fieldwork was conducted in December 2023. The case design is appropriate for investigating leadership in the organizational context, but it limits the statistical generalization to the participating units [9]. The combination of qualitative and quantitative evidence also provides a more comprehensive understanding of the research problem than reliance on a single source of data [10].

3.2 Data sources

The qualitative part included online semi-structured interviews with the heads of the three units on 4, 5, and 7 December 2023. Interview prompts included leaders' understanding of their own style, contingent reward, active and passive management-by-exception, idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. The source document reports that the interviews were recorded and subsequently transcribed. The quantitative part was an employee questionnaire with a five-point agreement scale. The available survey documentation does not report the number of respondents, response rate, sampling frame, complete questionnaire, or item-level data. Consequently, the survey findings are treated as descriptive case evidence. Respondent counts, reliability coefficients, confidence intervals, hypothesis tests, and other inferential statistics cannot be calculated from the available information.

Table 2. Evidence base and permitted analytical use

Source	Reported coverage	Use in this paper	Boundary
Semi-structured interviews	Three unit heads; December 2023	Thematic interpretation of leadership pattern	No verbatim transcripts supplied
Employee questionnaire	Three units; five-point Likert items	Descriptive percentages and response profiles	Sample size and raw data not reported
Documentary context	Leadership literature and Vision 2040	Theory and policy interpretation	No evidence of causal impact

3.3 Analysis

Interview material was organized deductively around the dimensions of full-range leadership and examined for recurring themes. Questionnaire categories were collapsed into response groups of positive (agree and strongly agree), neutral, and negative (disagree and strongly disagree). The percentages are presented as reported. Small totals of 99.9% or 100.1% are due to rounding in the source. The analysis employs a careful use of triangulation: interview-based characterizations are compared with employee perceptions, but neither source is taken as proof of causality.

3.4 Ethics and quality safeguards

Before data collection, participants were informed of the study's purpose and voluntarily agreed to participate. Participants could decline to answer questions or withdraw without penalty. No individual participants are named in this paper, and the interview findings are presented collectively rather than attributed to particular unit heads. Research materials were stored securely and were accessible only to the researcher.

4. RESULTS

4.1 Respondent profile

Of the reported employee respondents, 56.7% were male and 43.3% were female. Most respondents held diploma-level qualifications (58.7%), followed by undergraduate degrees (32.3%) and postgraduate qualifications (9.0%). Because the survey sample size was not reported, these percentages cannot be converted into respondent counts.

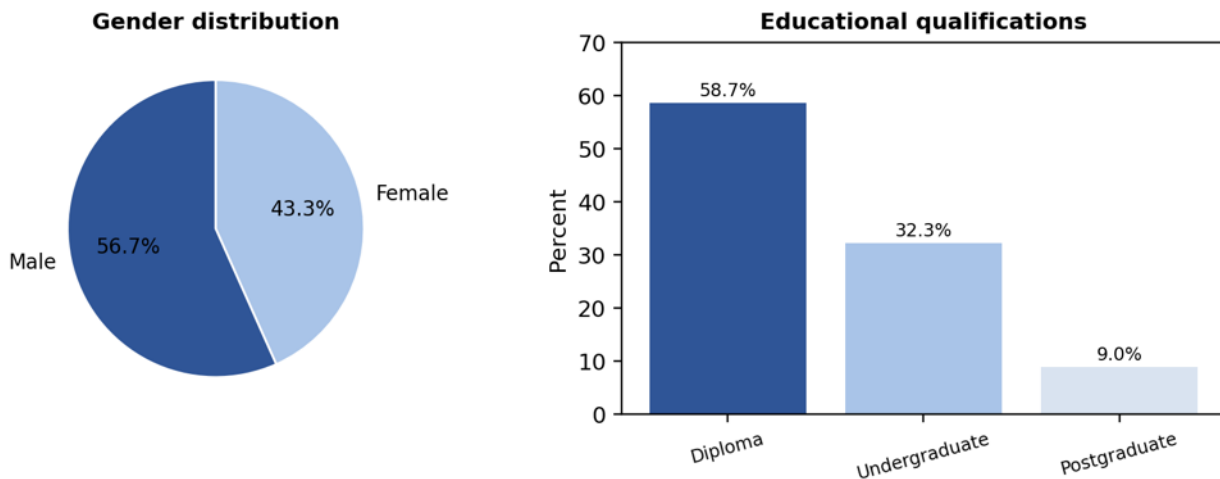


Figure 1. Reported demographic composition of employee respondents

4.2 Employee perceptions of leadership practices

Table 3 summarizes employee responses to the three selected leadership practices, while Figure 2 presents the same response profiles visually.

Table 3. Response distributions for selected leadership practices

Survey statement	Positive (%)	Neutral (%)	Negative (%)	Interpretation
Leader clearly sets goals and objectives for every task	29.8	23.4	46.8	Weak goal clarity
Leader maintains a record of errors	8.5	42.8	48.8	Limited formal error documentation
I value my leader's decisions	84.0	13.4	2.5	High reported acceptance of leaders' decisions

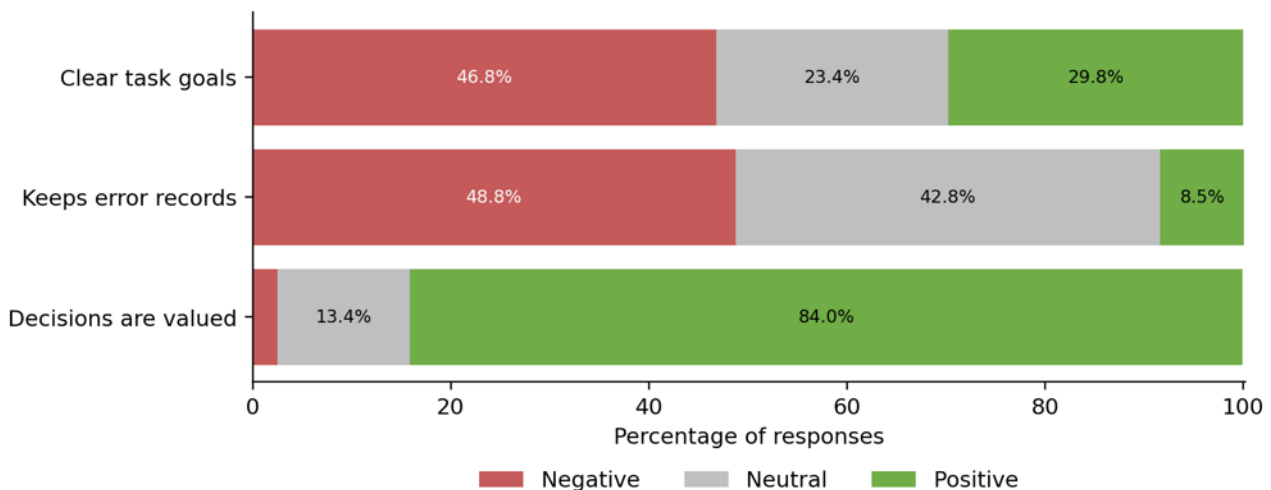


Figure 2. Consolidated response profiles for selected leadership practices

Three prominent patterns emerge from the response profiles. First, employees reported high acceptance of their leaders' decisions: 84.0% responded positively, whereas only 2.5% responded negatively. Secondly, the clarity of goals was noticeably less strong. Negative reactions to explicit task objectives (46.8%) surpassed positive reactions (29.8%), with nearly a quarter remaining neutral. Third, the item concerning the maintenance of error records received only 8.5% positive responses, while 48.8% were negative and 42.8% were neutral. This result should not automatically be interpreted as evidence of leadership failure because maintaining error records may be understood either as an organizational-learning practice or as a form of punitive monitoring. This ambiguity represents an instrument-design limitation.

4.3 Leadership pattern emerging from the interviews

The interview evidence suggests that transformational leadership was the predominant reported orientation across the three units. Leaders were characterized as conveying guidance, fostering staff involvement, promoting career development, and pursuing proactive resolutions. The synthesis also highlights active management-by-exception: leaders monitored emerging issues and sought to resolve them prior to escalation. Laissez-faire leadership was not identified as a dominant pattern within the three administrative units. The interview findings and employee responses are largely aligned but not the same. High acceptance of leaders' decisions may reflect confidence in leadership, although this single questionnaire item does not by itself establish leadership legitimacy or organizational effectiveness. Nonetheless, the lower score for task-goal clarity suggests that esteemed leadership does not consistently convert into clear operational expectations. Similarly, the low positive response regarding error records may indicate that formal error-recording practices are either limited, not visible to employees, or perceived negatively by respondents. The resulting pattern can be characterized as relationally robust yet procedurally inconsistent.

5. DISCUSSION

5.1 Transformational leadership with transactional support

The case suggests that transformational and transactional leadership can operate simultaneously. Transformational behavior seems to instill confidence in leadership choices and a sense of purpose, while active oversight may support administrative effectiveness. This aligns with full-range leadership theory, which does not necessitate that leaders adopt only one style [3]. It aligns with meta-analytic findings that both transformational and contingent-reward behaviors can positively influence effectiveness, while passive leadership is typically detrimental [7]. In Omani public administration, a hybrid model is institutionally feasible.

Oman Vision 2040 requires strategic alignment and institutional modernization, while government agencies remain accountable for regulations, public resources, and reliable service delivery. The effective blend involves a vision turned into quantifiable expectations, reinforced by coaching, feedback, and appropriate supervision. This combined leadership pattern reflects the distinction introduced by Burns [11] and subsequently developed by Bass [12]. Transformational leadership motivates employees to pursue broader organizational purposes, whereas transactional leadership clarifies expectations and supports performance through monitoring, recognition, and corrective action.

Yukl [13] similarly argues that leadership effectiveness depends on the appropriate use of different behaviors according to organizational conditions, employee needs, and the nature of the task. Longitudinal evidence from public organizations suggests that managers may demonstrate multiple leadership behaviors over time rather than consistently relying on only one leadership style [14]. Contemporary leadership scholarship likewise emphasizes that effective leadership requires behaviors appropriate to the organizational context, task requirements, and follower needs [15].

5.2 Acceptance of leaders' decisions is an asset, not a complete performance measure

The most significant quantitative finding is the favorable assessment of leaders' choices. This might indicate trust, perceived ability, respect for authority, or satisfaction with consultation processes. Each interpretation may help explain why employees are willing to support leadership decisions that they perceive as legitimate. However, the acceptance of decisions alone cannot prove service quality or organizational effectiveness. Leadership assessment should consequently link employee views to other metrics like timeliness, error reduction, citizen satisfaction, staff development, innovation adoption, and achievement of unit goals.

5.3 Goal clarity as the main management gap

The outcome regarding task objectives is the most apparent practical issue. Transformational vision needs to be translated into immediate goals, duties, and feedback to influence performance effectively. Public employees frequently navigate formal processes and interconnected tasks; uncertainty can lead to redundancy, delays, and inconsistent accountability. This finding also qualifies the overall positive view of leadership: employees may appreciate leaders but still be unclear about the expectations for successfully finishing a task. Managers ought to utilize concise written task charters outlining the purpose, owner, deadline, dependencies, quality standard, and review point.

5.4 From recording mistakes to organizational learning

The low proportion of positive responses concerning the maintenance of error records should be interpreted cautiously. A punitive record of individual mistakes may inhibit reporting and innovation. In contrast, a confidential, process-oriented learning system can identify recurring causes and avoid recurrence. The appropriate response is not simply to document more mistakes. Instead, organizations should establish psychologically safe after-action reviews that examine what occurred, why it occurred, which controls failed, what corrective measures are required, who is responsible, and when follow-up should occur.

5.5 Contribution to Oman Vision 2040

The results are directly linked to the governance and institutional performance aspect of Oman Vision 2040 [2]. Robust acceptance of leaders' decisions can aid in executing reforms, whereas defined goals and organized learning can enhance effective oversight and institutional capacity. Consequently, leadership development ought to be regarded as a means of implementation instead of a separate training endeavor. Programs must be linked to actual administrative issues, monitored through observable changes in leadership behavior, and assessed through unit performance and employee feedback data.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

Table 4. Recommended leadership and management interventions

Priority	Action	Indicator	Suggested review
Translate vision into tasks	Use one-page task charters to define priority tasks, responsibilities, deadlines, and quality standards.	% priority tasks with owner, deadline, and quality standard	Monthly
Strengthen feedback	Introduce brief manager-employee progress conversations	Completion rate and action closure rate	Monthly
Learn from errors	Conduct non-punitive after-action reviews for material incidents	Recurring-error rate and corrective actions closed	Quarterly
Develop leaders	Use coaching, scenario practice, and 360-degree feedback	Behavioral improvement and employee feedback	Six-monthly
Balance performance	Combine employee, process, service, and citizen indicators	Balanced scorecard reviewed by unit leadership	Quarterly
Improve evidence	Repeat the study with validated scales and multi-agency sampling	Reliability, validity, response rate, and agency coverage	Next study cycle

Implementation should begin with a limited pilot in the three participating units. Baseline data should be collected before introducing leadership training or process changes. Leaders should select two or three behaviors for improvement, such as clearer task expectations, developmental feedback, or structured learning reviews. After six months, employee perceptions and operational indicators should be reassessed.

7. CONCLUSION

This study examined leadership practices and their implications for effective management in three public-sector administrative units in Oman. The data suggest a mainly transformational approach backed by proactive oversight. Employees reported high acceptance of their leaders' decisions, suggesting confidence in leadership while not necessarily demonstrating organizational effectiveness. Simultaneously, less favorable responses for task-goal clarity and error recording highlight discrepancies between broader leadership influence and routine management systems. Effective leadership in the public sector of Oman should thus be seen as a balanced skill set: leaders need to motivate commitment, convert strategy into clear expectations, identify issues promptly, and create psychologically safe mechanisms for organizational learning. This study is limited by the absence of the survey sample size, sampling and response-rate information, the complete questionnaire, and respondent-level data. Its findings are therefore descriptive and specific to the three participating administrative units; they should not be generalized to the wider Omani public sector or interpreted as evidence of causal relationships. Future studies should use a larger multi-agency sample, a validated leadership instrument, and complete respondent-level data to permit reliability testing and inferential statistical analysis.

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