

The Impact of Collaborative Leadership on Engaging Change Initiatives in Teaching Political Science

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Abstract

Collaborative leadership has become an increasingly popular approach to leadership in education. It is an approach that emphasizes the importance of shared decision-making and collaboration among all stakeholders in the university. In the context of change initiatives in teaching political science, collaborative leadership has been shown to have a significant impact on engagement and buy-in among faculty members. This paper examines the impact of collaborative leadership on engaging change initiatives in teaching political science. It begins by defining collaborative leadership and discussing its key characteristics. It then explores the challenges that political science departments face when implementing change initiatives, such as resistance to change and lack of buy-in from faculty members. The paper argues that collaborative leadership can help overcome these challenges by fostering a collaborative culture that encourages open communication, shared decision-making, and a sense of ownership among faculty members.

The paper also reviews the existing literature on collaborative leadership in education and its impact on organizational change. It draws on case studies from political science departments that have successfully implemented change initiatives using a collaborative leadership approach. These case studies illustrate how collaborative leadership can facilitate the implementation of change initiatives by building trust, promoting transparency, and encouraging participation among faculty members. Finally, the paper concludes by discussing the implications of these findings for the political science department. The leader should urge others to interact with the development initiative by changing their perceptions before changing their practices because the alteration in behavior is a reflection of a change in minds. Taken together, these academic practices suggest that change initiatives may be

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effective if they are built on the foundations of persuasion and dialogue with the work team.

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Introduction

Our academic experience, in the field of Political science, in Bahrain, has enabled us to influence the practices of others. We hold a strategic leadership role as an Academic Programs Team (APT) member in the Department of Political Science (DPS) from 2017 until 2023. The APT team had a strategic level of responsibility over learning and teaching initiatives in the Bachelor Program in Political Science (BPPS).

Over the last few years, we attended many workshops organized and an unforgettable one was about “Program Leadership Role & Function”. At this event, the presenter gave us a piece of advice that I will never forget. The core of this advice is that there is no point in coming up with new and creative ideas while not being able to present them in a way that convinces others, because the effectiveness of change initiatives in the political science field depends on the ability to persuade others, and here the leader must be able to adopt strategies and mechanisms that influence others in order to convince them of any creative ideas. This advice has become a guiding light in my social and professional life. Therefore, when we introduce initiatives to develop students’ learning experiences and lead academic programs, we strive to persuade others through dialogue and benchmarking with international universities. sometimes as the case study below shows, it takes time to achieve change and impact.

We've been told before that influencing others doesn't require being in a management position like department chair or dean. But influencing others requires initiative. This is the core of my philosophy in political science. Through our academic journey, we impacted other staff by designing learning and teaching initiatives, which influenced staff and students.

Our leadership philosophy is structured on three pillars. First: cooperating with others because teamwork increases the effectiveness of change initiatives. Second: working with the Head of Department (HD) and Program Coordinator (PC) and considering them as a bridge to influence others. Third: take advantage of the small environment to influence others, especially in terms of resources, facilities, and student numbers, and this feature facilitated my leadership roles. This paper provides a unique aspect of the role of collaborative leadership in promoting change initiatives in the political science field, and its impact on improving the educational process and learners' learning.

Collaborative Leadership

Increasing knowledge of the benefits of participation in academic bodies has promoted collaborative organizational structures (Dynak et al. 1997; Mullen and Lick 1999). Collaborative leaders are successful in the workplace because they are able to recruit the talent needed to achieve goals by involving others.

Collaborative leadership is the practice of more than one person with a certain degree of leadership (Pearce, Conger and Locke, 2007). This term does not necessarily mean that there is a sharing of responsibilities and authority at the organizational and hierarchical levels (Jameson, 2006a). However, this concept denotes the sharing of some powers and temporarily to carry out certain actions to achieve a common goal (Locke, 2003: 271). Collaborative leadership requires joint work, sharing of responsibility and knowledge, because people work honestly together if they are involved in decision-making and problem-solving, and this implies a sharing of power in leadership tasks (Mehra, Smith, Dixon, & Robertson, 2006).

In setting political science courses, collaborative leaders need to nurture, guide, and respect the team, even if they are highly qualified or smart, to achieve the desired goal (Joan, Dhiman, and King, 2011, P.16). Collaborative leadership requires flexible communication with the work team and their participation in decision-making, and this will contribute to building trust with them (Mason and Lefrere, 2003).

Effective leadership must positively influence educational and academic performance (Robinson et al., 2008; Leithwood et al., 2004). Participation in decision-making is a way of meeting the human need for equality and respect (O'Brien, 2002), which leads to an improvement in the employee's performance and enhances his effectiveness in the educational environment (Ghasemi, 2009).

Collaborative leadership in the educational environment urges the work team not to resist change and ignore decisions (Mirkamali, 1997). Collaborative leadership is one of the leadership methods that development organizations and promote their development) Arbabi, Abdolhamid, and Vali Mehdi-zhad, 2016). Employee participation is one way to deal with change and improve performance and decision-making (Fine 1986; Miller and Mange, 1986). In this regard, this study seeks to answer the following questions: to what extent collaborative leadership enhance the effectiveness of change initiatives in political science?

Methods

The qualitative methods consisted of dialogue designs and observations (Gall, Gall & Borg, 2003). Employing these methods gives

more relaxed conditions leading to more genuine interactions and reflective narratives between the researcher, faculty, and participants. The research resulted from many observations of students and faculty responses to collaborative leadership and its impact on change initiatives in political science.

Since our aim was to comprehend faculty's perceptions of collaborative leadership and its value in an education environment, we concentrate on how did participation in the change initiative and decision-making influenced the effectiveness of the educational process. We used dialogues in department meetings and observation, as main sources to explain the theme addressed. These dialogues were transcribed in minutes. We used these minutes to answer on above research questions. We reviewed the documents related to the Education and Training Quality Authority (BQA) in Bahrain and the Department of Political Science, including meeting minutes, focus group minutes, surveys, and annual reports.

Knowledge Sharing

At the beginning of 2015, as a member of APT, we led a change initiative by designing a Pre-Internal Moderation Report for Course Works Template (PIMRCWT) to manage the quality of coursework (CW) in the DPS. At that time, there was not any moderation for the CW, which was seen as a weak point in the bachelor program by BQA in Bahrain. Therefore, we designed the PIMRCWT to supervise the quality of CW assessments. We designed PIMRCWT to use it as a guide for CW to guarantee the reliability of assignments (Bloxham, 2009). We participated with quality bodies in the university and the PC to design the PIMRCWT. These consultations confirmed to me that collaboration with others is key to a change initiative.

Therefore, in 2015, we organized a workshop about the PIMRCWT to share my ideas with all staff in the DPS. Importantly, the workshops helped me to ensure that all instructors get outstanding advice backing on the assessment criteria (Laser Learning Awards). The workshops provided excellent opportunities to explain the objectives of the PIMRCWT for staff to enhance their participation in a Moderation Process (MP). As well, it gave other teams' work a strategic view regarding the evaluation of the Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs). By the end of 2017, the BQA informed the university that the PIMRCWT had helped successfully the CW assessment moderation (Follow-up visit report. 11-16 January 2017). In addition, the BQA confirmed that the PIMRCWT give staff a space to regulate learners' assessment load across the courses by reviewing CW instructions and timeline. Accordingly, the PIMRCWT with other factors led to the BPPS continuity by obtaining full confidence from BQA and fulfilling all the requirements about the MP (Follow-up visit report. 11-16 January 2017).

Building Trust and Dialogue

In 2015, we found that most colleagues evaluated student performance in the coursework without any criteria. It has been identified that the evaluation for coursework was based on traditional methods only with each faculty member evaluating students' work according to their opinion and without standards. Through the student questionnaire conducted by Admission and Registration Office (ARO), we found that this practice did not achieve justice among students or assess their level. We were not alone in seeing the problem. At the same time, the BPPS was assessed by BQA in Bahrain. BQA found that the evaluation process in the program needed some improvements and a review process (Follow-up visit report, 2017). Therefore, the BPPS obtained limited confidence from BQA (Follow-up visit report, 2017). In order to develop the quality of education and ensure program sustainability and continuity of the learning process, we sought to design a Marking Criterion for Coursework (MCC), because it was part of the program development and periodic review conducted every four years by BQA.

In 2016, we created a rubric for coursework to develop the learning process to achieve justice among students, in which each rubric task had specific assessment criteria based on the ILOs. In addition, we sought to promote the equality of opportunity for individual and group learners by developing the knowledge and experience of lecturers in the DPS in aspects related to the marking criterion for coursework. The design MCC also directed lecturers to become more familiar with the categories of marks, the subject material, student's performance levels, grade distribution, the standard of ILOs for all courses in BPPS to guide learners towards best evaluation practices. It is necessary here to clarify exactly that designing MCC allowed staff to assess student's attitudes, skills and knowledge that they would require to apply in the working environment.

We structured an action plan to design MCC based on benchmarking results. The benchmarking compared our program with local, international and regional universities such as the University of Jordan, Cairo University, Kuwait University and King Saud University in Riyadh. Based on research in Jackson and Lund (2000), we managed the process of benchmarking for MCC to reframe the standards of evaluation to enhance confidence and credibility of the academic program. To justify our approach and building trust, the benchmarking with other organizations was fundamental to assure stakeholders that the programs offered in the DPS were in line with regional and international standards (Hanover Research, 2009).

It is important to bear in mind that we linked marking criteria with assessment methods and the subject material in all courses in programs to get integration. We understood the importance of linking

the rubric with the university vision, program description and subject material to ensure uniformity of the evaluation process among all lecturers in the DPS. In fact, the marking criteria in MCC were coherent with the standards of ILOs, students' performance levels either individually or in groups, market needs, and the vision of BQA to maintain the quality of the teaching and learning process. We utilized research (eg Cole and Tibby, 2013; Archer and Jess, 2008) to find the various assessment criteria to help academic staff distinguish between students' performance and employer needs. In view of all that has been mentioned so far, we suppose that these researches helped me to direct the academic staff to engage with employability skills and assessment methods because this will enhance students' skills equally.

Surprisingly, according to the CC notes in 2017, many of the lecturers changed their minds because the MCC helped them to assess students' course works fairly and commensurate with the level of the subject material. In 2017, according to BQA, the MCC helped all faculty members to respect the values of fairness and reliability in the assessment process (Follow-up visit report, 2017). In 2018, the Periodic Programme Review Report identified that the MCC was very important in assessing the extent to which learners have achieved ILOs, promoting learning, motivating learners, and helping learners to reflect on feedback to evaluate personal and group performance. In addition, through a questionnaire of students in 2019, we found that MCC helped students to learn the subject material by understanding the methods of measuring their performance and levels, which this really important to assess the student to recognize their weaknesses and strength by comparing their performance and distinguish between good and excellent students.

Within another context, one of the greatest challenges is people sometimes lose faith in initiatives, especially during difficult situations. In the midst of the Corona pandemic, most of the faculty in the DPS faced obstacles in describing the assessment requirements for students, bearing in mind that shifts towards virtual education. It became clear to us through the department council discussions in 2020, that some staff had doubts about the effectiveness of the MCC in light of the shifts towards virtual education. With confidence, we worked to convince all faculty members in the DPS that the MCC would help them communicate with learners, especially if the MCC were employed in assessment methods in the e-learning system. As the Chair of the E-Learning Committee in the DPS, we cooperated with the HD to urge all faculty to place the MCC in the e-learning system to clarify for students the nature of assessments (K4). In the absence of physical contact, written communication via the e-learning system may be an appropriate method. This made it clear to us that difficult situations may require a person to have a high degree of self-

confidence because this will make others trust his initiative. According to the External Examiner Programme Review Report in 2021, the MCC made it easier for the students to understand the coursework requirements, which ensured the integrity of the evaluation across courses.

Role of Collaboration in Managed Resistance

Since 2016, as a member of the APT, we and the PC directed all Course Coordinators (CC) in the BPPS to use MCC in order to guarantee the diversity of the marking criterion in course works considering student performance. While at the APT we led the CC to adopt MCC to show for the Quality Unit at the university and external reviewer that all criteria assess the ILOs in all course works through MP. Although many staff in the DPS have used MCC, a few lecturers were against MCC because it takes too much time and effort. A possible explanation for this might be that they rejected MCC because they were afraid of any change. Our relationship with some lecturers was strained because they thought we were putting new burdens on them, especially as we were the youngest faculty member in the department. In addition, we encountered some obstacles in applying these new criteria, particularly some faculty thought that MCC should not give to students because they do not understand these criteria. However, recognizing the resistance, we were able to convince much staff about MCC by introducing university practices, such as the University of West Florida.

In order to manage resistance, we got other APT members to participate in the design of the MCC through the formal discussion at meetings, which enhanced their abilities and knowledge on how to evaluate students either in the group or individual projects. As regards influential leadership, we also used the strategy of influencing some academic staff through informal discussions during the breaks. It can therefore be assumed that these meetings provided excellent chances for me to demonstrate the necessity of finding an innovative mechanism for evaluating the course works to enhance student's learning experiences, promote equality of opportunity for learners and ensure the sustainability of the learning process.

As part of leading change in education quality, we cooperated with the HD to arrange focus group meetings for all academic staff in the department. It is almost certain that was perceived as an actual strength because it demonstrated the culture of communication in leading change. we used several focus groups to show the recent research and practices at other universities and drew on my own expertise to enable the staff to think about their previous practice of evaluation without standards. As part of the sustainability of faculty members' development, we and HD supported the sustainability of education through workshops about MCC using my experience to promote good practice, particularly that rubrics have been designed

with due regard to preventing academic misconduct. It is also worth noting that through sustained discussions, we helped change their perceptions of current practices because they do not ensure that all learners have equal opportunity to demonstrate achievement of ILOs.

Collaboration & Leading Assessment Practices

In 2016, we collaborated with the Program Coordinator (PC) and several academic staff in the DPS to lead a new initiative to develop lecturers' practices in the field of assessment in BPPS. Collaborating with PC and other faculty enabled us to find out the weaknesses of the CW assessment. In 2016, we found through the survey conducted by ARO that 40% of students fully agreed that lecturers did not put assessment requirements in the E-Learning system, resulting in many students facing difficulty in understanding the requirements. Therefore, in 2017, we collaborated with PC to develop CW guidelines for all individual and group learners. To succeed in this, we looked to other professional practices such as Bloxham and Pete Boyd (2007) to assist staff in standardizing the CW. As a result of the work we led, in 2017, the BQA confirmed that CW guidelines reflected positively on the student's performance (Follow-up visit report. 11-16 January 2017). According to the BQA, the students benefited from CW guidelines identifying that they enabled them to define the ILOs and instructions of CW clearly.

During the Covid-19, faculty faced challenges in clarifying assessments for students. As the Head and member of the E-learning Committee, we collaborated with the HD and PC to direct staff to put the CW guidelines in the e-learning platforms to reduce the ambiguity of requirements for learners. Supporting staff to develop their practice led to a positive outcome. According to the questionnaire conducted by ARO in 2021, 70% of students agreed that staff had put assessment instructions in the E-Learning system, which has improved their responsiveness to the subject effectively.

Involve faculty in Mentor the Students' Progress

Our responsibility as a member in the APT was to collaborate with lecturers to mentor the students' progress. We worked with academic supervisors to develop a new mechanism called Monthly Progress Record (MPR) to help them to assess the student's performance each month in graduation projects. We developed MPR to facilitate the tracking system in graduation projects, whether they acted as individuals or groups. As well, we also used the policies of the Reading University in the UK in designing MPR (Reading University, 2013). This benchmarking was important because it gave us an opportunity to show staff how MPR might help learners to complete their graduation research on time and with high quality and as a result assisted in persuading them to develop their practice.

As well, we moderated several discussion sessions in order to ensure that everyone participated in constructing the MPR. Some instructors who participated in these workshops criticized the MPR. They believed that MPR would drain the time of faculty. This gave us the impression that the journey of improvement might face a hurricane of criticism, and it is not an easy process. On the other hand, in these discussions, many staff supported the MPR because they saw it would improve the quality of graduation projects.

At the end of 2020, the MPR was fully adopted by the DPS. After applying this mechanism, the supervisors found that the MPR helped them to provide all appropriate recommendations to overcome obstacles in front of students who were working as a group or individually equally. In 2021, moreover, after auditing the Course Evaluation Report, it was clear to us that the success rate of students in their graduation projects had increased by 6%.

Staff Development Activity

During the Corona pandemic and the rapid transformation into virtual space, we were appointed as the Chair and member of the E-Learning Committee in the DPS. We were responsible for providing IT support for staff. Our role was to enhance the lecturers' skills in the field of IT to empower them to use e-learning platforms in teaching and learning. Bearing in mind that some lecturers have a limited ability to design teaching and assessment methods on the e-learning system. Therefore, we formed a team consisting of three people to provide one-to-one consultations and training for all staff in the DPS.

One-to-one sessions were used because many staff do not interact in collective workshops, because they do not want to seem they are illiterate in e-learning matters, and this constitutes embarrassment for them. However, six months after the outbreak of the epidemic, we noticed that the interaction of faculty with students on e-learning increased by more than 70%, as lecturers were able to diversify the teaching and learning methods in e-learning platforms. Then, in an advanced way, we sought to enhance the technological skills of the lecturers that help them to give feedback to the students effectively. In the first semester of 2020-2021, it became clear to us through the observation that 80% of faculty relied on themselves independently in designing various assessment and feedback methods in e-learning platforms.

Conclusion

Employing collaborative leadership is a must in today's political science environments. The involvement of the work team in the change and development initiative will help ensure the achievement of the goals and vision of the educational institution.

Sharing knowledge with the work team contributes to improving the political science courses environment by building the academic capacity of faculty members and students, and knowing the individual's skills and needs. Collective participation in accordance with the principles of trust and respect may enhance the role of the work team in managing the development and change of higher education institutions.

In a professional context, our experience enabled us to deliver an obvious vision of standards for all stakeholders. We used my skills in an effective way within the program to lead others in the assessment process, which impacted staff's activities and students' performance, as well as, it guided a varied group of employees and learners within a complicated situation during Covid-19. According to these academic experiences, we can infer that the success of change initiatives during difficult situations depends mainly on cooperation and joint work with others in the spirit of one team.

Experience has taught us that calamities can only be overcome by creating initiatives that develop the skills of others, which the main purpose of any development initiative is to facilitate the work of other staff by taking the consideration their personal needs, not complicating it. This sense impacted on our approach and way of supporting other staff through a crisis.

In general, one of the big lessons we have learned from our academic journey is collaborating with others helps develop opportunities for improvement. However, this does not mean that all people will be happy with the development steps. A change initiative may occasionally encounter resistance, but a persuasion is a successful approach to creating change initiatives. Managing staff resistance was a great opportunity to evaluate our approach as a leader of change, especially since we believe that an effective leader must listen to the voices of others to be able to convince them.

Nevertheless, our academic experiences taught us that some people prefer to maintain the status quo. Amidst such experiences, interacting with others taught me that an initiative person may be subject to rejection of his ideas for one reason or another, but it is worth noting that the person with a proactive personality does not accept giving up, and therefore; He repeatedly tries to convince others and puts forward new initiatives because it will be accepted in the work environment no matter how long or short. In addition, the leader should urge others to interact with the development initiative by changing their perceptions before changing their practices, because the alteration in behavior is a reflection of a change in minds. Taken together, these academic practices suggest that change initiatives may be effective if they are built on the foundations of persuasion and dialogue with the work team.

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