Leadership Capability of Emerging Somali-American Leaders: Surveying by Leadership Practice Inventory

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Abstract

This study is a replicate of the Leadership Practice Inventory (LPI-Observer), a half-a-century-old research instrument. Having every component of the instrument intact, the aim of this study was to evaluate the leadership capability of Somali-American leaders. The study looked into the actions and/or behaviors of 21 emerging, Somali-American leaders in different disciplines in Minnesota, USA. The participants were presented with thirty descriptive statements measuring the following five leadership practices and behaviors: (a) Challenging the Process, (b) Inspiring a Shared Vision, (c) Enabling Others to Act, (d) Modeling the Way, (e) and Encouraging the Heart. The findings show a higher-than-average ranking of between 100th and 70th percentile. Compared to the semi-universal, overall score of 89, the result shows an overall score of 114 for the Somali-American leaders.

Keywords: Somali-Americans, Somali community, leadership practice inventory, leadership competence, Somali diaspora, Somali Minnesotans

1. Introduction

Though there is no one single way to predict leadership success, literature has been defining and refining leadership since the dawn of the last century. A consistent definition, therefore, is that leadership is the exercise of influence over groups or their activity in a structured or unstructured context to accomplish goals and meet objectives (Huber et al., 2000; Johnson, 2015).

This is a study on leadership which is based on a predetermined guidepost, a well-known leadership research instrument. This study wanted to contextualize leadership for cultural compatibility and to see whether this guidepost could be true of Somali community leaders in Minnesota.

The 2010 U.S. Census put the Somali population in the country at 80,000. While that number has met challenges over the past couple of years, one thing is crystal clear: The Somali community is making an integral progress in different areas, namely business and politics. But like any other immigrant community new to the sociopolitical landscape of America, this progress has not only been slow but also fragile and with hope. However, the leadership effectiveness of the Somali community leaders is unknown. For example, how could Somali American leaders be rated in terms of best leadership practices and behaviors? This study was determined to answer that question scientifically by employing the LPI-Observer, the finest leadership research instrument.

The LPI-Observer uses thirty carefully worded statements representing universally accepted domain of leadership practices and behaviors (Kouzes & Posner, 1998). Focusing on affective domain, the LPI-Observer measures leaders' attitudes, feelings, and perceptions.

The LPI-Observer focuses on five leadership practices: (a) Challenging the Process, the leader's "willingness to challenge the status quo"; (b) Inspiring a Shared Vision, leader's ability to look beyond the position; (c) Enabling Others to Act, leader's ability to enlist the cooperation of others; (d) Modeling the Way, setting an example for others; (e) and Encouraging the Heart, leader's skillfulness to promote team spirit across the organization (Kouzes & Posner, 1998). These leadership practices are believed to be an excellent predictor of leadership success, or failure. They are the building blocks of LPI-Observer Instrument.

The LPI-Observer Instrument generated an average score of 89 percent from different cultures varying from North American to European to Asian (Kouzes & Posner, 1998; Posner, 2016). This study wanted to see whether the LPI-Observer could hold the same average score for Somali American leaders.

There are serious implications for both academia and practice in the context of the Somalis in the diaspora. Academic institutions and professional development programs about Somalis in the diaspora will be able to tailor their focus to the evolving nature of the leadership practices in Somali culture. Similarly, organization development practitioners in their respective fields will be able to ground their understanding on action research. The significance of this study, therefore, reflects the contributions to the knowledge repertoire in relation to Somali-based leadership theories and practices.

2. Method

2.1 Validity

Validity refers to the degree to which a test measures what it is supposed to measure and yield accurate inferences about the test results (Carless,

2001; Newton, 2012; Popham, 2000). The LPI Instrument uses several ways to determine the validity of the instrument. Face validity, empirical measures (studies), and predictive or concurrent validity are the backbone of LPI tests.

The LPI was first born out of a pilot test consisting of a 30-item survey in which 19 graduate students (seven men and twelve women) participated. "Of the thirty test items, twenty-five (83 percent) were unanimously determined to be clear and understandable and to consist of terminology and concepts that were within students' and student leaders' experiences" (Kouzes & Posner, 1998, pp. 7-8). With a validity rate of 83 percent, this instrument can yield valid results. Then, over the years, the credibility of this instrument has been confirmed with "over 2,500 managers about their personal-best experiences as leaders" (Kouzes & Posner, 1998, p. 5).

2.2 Reliability

Reliability refers to the ability of an instrument to give the same result consistently, when repeated under the same conditions (Carless, 2001; Newton, 2012; Popham, 2000). The LPI-Observer uses a test-retest reliability, split-half reliability, and alternate-form of reliability, generating a reliability coefficient of up to .95 (Kouzes & Posner, 1998; Posner, 2016). Over the years, the LPI Instrument's repetitive tests achieved consistent results across contemporary Western cultures.

Replicating the same LPI test procedures, this study was to see whether results drawn from leaders with East African cultures could produce the same result. Simply put, taking the same procedure, step-by-step, the mission of this study was to see whether or not the same result could be achieved for Somali-American leaders.

2.3 Data Collection

The data were collected between July and August of 2017 from 21 community leaders (17 men and 4 women), all of whom had emigrated from Somalia and now live across the State of Minnesota. All subjects agreed to participate in the study voluntarily.

These participants were presented with a 30-item survey measuring their behaviors and actions as leaders. In this survey, and consistent with the LPI format, participants were asked to rate themselves on a scale of 1-10 (1 being almost never and 10 being almost always).

3. Results

Coding raw data is an indispensable step, no matter how boring the data might get (Kane, 2013). After the data were collected and the coding carried out, scores were tallied and grouped for analysis. Using a five-point Likert scale system ranging from "rarely" to "very frequently," the final scores were then turned into the following scale.

1	2	3	4	5
Rarely	Once a while	Sometimes	Fairly often	Very frequently

Consistent with the LPI-Observer Instrument guide, the data were scored in grids and in self-rating models representing each of the five leadership practices. For example, the first grid (Challenging the Process) corresponds to items 1, 6, 11, 16, 21, and 26 on the questionnaire. The next grid starts with item 2 and ends with 27—jumping five places between items from the first digit. The same procedure is repeated for other three grids. (Look at Appendix B for details regarding how each item corresponds to the five leadership practices.) Below is a table that shows the percentile score of each respondent, based on these grids.

Table 1

Individual rater score by each leadership practice

Raters	Percentile	Challenging the Process	Inspiring a Vision	Enabling Other to Act	Modeling the Way	Encouraging the Heart
1	100%	30	28	29	30	29
2		30	28	29	30	30
3		30	30	30	30	30
4		30	30	18	30	30
5		30	30	29	30	30
6		26	29	29	30	26
7		30	30	29	30	30
8		30	30	30	30	30
9		29	29	30	30	30
10		29	28	26	30	30
11		26	29	28	28	30
12		27	29	28	29	29
13		27	28	27	29	29
14		27	27	27	29	29
15		28	29	30	30	29
16	90%	30	25	23	27	29
17	80%	28	23	29	26	17
18	70%	26	26	24	25	26
19	60%	23	22	27	27	26
20	50%	22	25	25	22	23
21	40%	12	9	13	12	10

4. Discussion and Analysis

The next table shows another snapshot displaying how the percentile has been distributed from high to low.

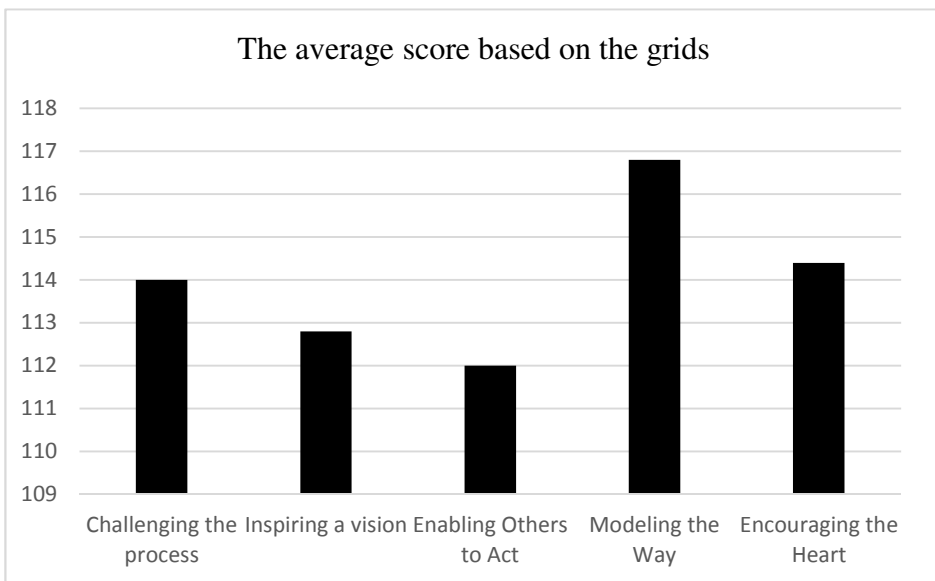Table 2
Individual percentile ranking by leadership practice

Leadership Practice	Participants	Percentile	Rating
Challenging the Process	16	100-90%	H
Inspiring a Shared Vision	2	80-70%	H
Enabling Others to Act	3	60-50%	M
Modeling the Way	0	40-30%	L
Encouraging the Heart	0	20-10%	L

As is apparent from Table 2, the majority of the respondents (about 86%) scored a higher percentile, between 100th and 70th percentile. Only 14 percent scored at or around the middle percentile. According to Kouzes and Posner (1998), a higher score is at or above the 70th percentile, a lower score is at or below 40, and anything that falls between these figures is considered to be moderate (Kouzes & Posner, 1998).

The philosophy behind this type of test is that the higher the score, the greater the leadership potential in test takers, and similarly, lower scores mean the lack of potential leadership in them (Posner, 2016). In other words, those who score low on the LPI-Observer tests are deemed to have less leadership capacity, and vice versa.

Although there is no universal rule of rating leadership, the LPI Instrument assumes that those who score higher share the same qualities. These qualities are (a) "personal credibility, (b) "effective in running meetings" (c) successfully representing your organization or group to nonmembers" (d) "generating a sense of enthusiasm and cooperation" and (e) "having a higher-performing team" (Kouzes & Posner, 1998).

While an average of 87 percent is normal for LPI studies on leaders from various cultures (Kouzes & Posner, 1998), the average score for Somali-American leaders turned out to be extremely higher than the average score. The chart below shows the average score for each leadership practice (114, 112.8, 112, 116.8, 114.4—from left to right), yielding an average of 114. That is completely above than the average score for any

The average score based on the grids

	Challenging the process	Inspiring a vision	Enabling Others to Act	Modeling the Way	Encouraging the Heart

LPI studies (114 > 89).

In comparison, a study of 1440 international (outside the U.S.) respondents has shown a little bit lower result. In this study, for example, an average score of 92 was achieved for Challenging the Process, 90 for

Inspiring a Shared Vision, 81 for Enabling Others to Act, 94 for Modeling the Way, and 76 for Encouraging the Heart, yielding an overall average score of 86.6 (Carless, 2001). Yet, when the average score for this international study is compared to the score achieved for the Somali-American leadership, a huge difference still exists (86.6 < 114). A difference of 27.4 points is incredibly worth noting.

Some may wonder whether languages play a role in LPI tests. However, a quick look at a longitudinal study reveals otherwise. Posner (2016) was able to secure a similar overall score of 87.46 percent, 86.36 percent, and 90.6 percent for Arabic, Brazilian Portuguese, and Mongolian speakers respectively. That means that the test taker's language plays no significant role.

While what accounted for such a level of discrepancy is hard to pinpoint, several assumptions may help explain why such a high score exists for Somali leaders. The following factors might have played a role. Consider their implications on test takers.

False Pride

The first of these is what could be termed as a false pride factor, wherein a respondent may intentionally choose to score higher in the hope of not looking bad in the face of today's competitive world. False pride is assumed to be at play when respondents have self-imposed insecurities but do not want researchers, or their collaborators, to know about these insecurities. When study participants harbor a sense of false pride, they are determined to hide this self-doubt behind false impressions.

This competition could also be internal, toward Somali-Americans. Because the primary audience for the study outcome is the Somali communities and other concerning parties across the globe, respondents

may have been driven by an inward competition. Here is where the data collectors for this study also come in. The data collection process had been done through a collaborative process where the researcher and an assistant (both Somalis) collected the data from respondents in separate engagements.

Another corollary point relates to the research assistant. An educated, female assistant involved in the data collection, and because most participants were male leaders, they might have felt threatened and therefore chose to inflate the scores. This could be highly relevant because the Somali culture views males as authoritative and commanding; therefore, a female data collector in this male-dominated community work could instill unfounded insecurity in men.

Cultural Susceptibility

Another possible issue is cultural. According to Popham (2000), cultural misunderstanding, or lack of interest in diverse cultural values and beliefs, costs leaders opportunities to set their mentalities as flexible as possible. Similarly, Banks (2012) also believed that cultural susceptibility overshadows both practical and scientific application of leadership theories, as well as how leaders behave. While the increasing interconnectedness of the world eliminated the walls between cultures and customs, cultural challenges still impact both academic and real-world practices of leadership.

In other words, the difference between the score of the Somali-American respondents and that of the global respondents could be due to cultural challenges, rather than practical, on the part of the Somali culture. For example, even though the LPI Instrument uses a highly thought-out language (Kouzes & Posner, 1998), the average Somali leader may have interpreted culturally differently the items on the LPI-

Observer questionnaire. For instance, here is a statement on the LPI Instrument that may not culturally sensitive. "I am upbeat and positive when talking about what our organization is doing." Does the term "upbeat" mean the same thing in the Somali culture? How about "positive?" How positive is positive in different cultures?

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

The applicability of the LPI-Observer to the Somali culture seems to be prone to potential biases, yet bear the same implications for the practice of leadership. And despite the viability of the instrument used for this study, the result turned out to be highly above the average score for other test takers, more than 27 percent higher than the semi-universal score. Because test takers of the same socioeconomic group or race may show cultural dissimilarities (Banks, 2012), cross insensitivity and cultural bias could be the cause of the discrepancy shown by the study.

Researchers and practitioners alike may benefit from investing in a full-fletched and longitudinal study, with a larger sample size. A future research should particularly consider the cultural aspects that are likely to cloud the understanding of Somali leaders. Two likely factors researchers should take into consideration are socioeconomic status and cultural background of the test takers. Non-Somali researchers might be able to work around the impact of the false pride and generate a different result.

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Appendix A: LPI Instrument

To what extend does this leader engage in the following behaviors? Please read statements carefully and choose an answer that best applies to each statement by circling the number associated with the particular statement. He/she:

1-Almost Never to 10-Almost Always

1. Sets a personal example of what he/she expects of others	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
2. Talks about future trends that will influence how our work gets done	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
3. Seeks out challenging opportunities that test his/her own skills and abilities	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
4. Develops cooperative relationships among the people he/she works with	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
5. Praises people for a job well done	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
6. Spends time and energy making certain that the people he/she works with adhere to the principles and standards that we have agreed on	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
7. Describes a compelling image of what our future could be like	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

8. Challenges people to try out new and innovative ways to do their work	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
9. Actively listens to diverse points of view	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
10. Makes it a point to let people know about his/her confidence in their abilities	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11. Follows through on promises and commitments he/she makes	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
12. Appeals to others to share an exciting dream of the future	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
13. Searches outside the formal boundaries of his/her organization for innovative ways to improve what we do	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
14. Treats others with dignity and respect	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
15. Makes sure that people are creatively rewarded for their contributions to the success of projects	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
16. Asks for feedback on how his/her actions affect other people's performance	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
17. Shows others how their long-term interests can be realized by enlisting in a common vision	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
18. Asks "What can we learn?" when things don't go as expected	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
19. Supports the decisions that people make on their own	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
20. Publicly recognizes people who exemplify commitment to shared values	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
21. Builds consensus around a common set of values for running our organization	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
22. Paints the "big picture" of what we aspire to accomplish	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
23. Makes certain that we set achievable goals, make concrete plans, and establish measurable milestones for the projects and programs that we work on	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
24. Gives people a great deal of freedom and choice in deciding how to do their work	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
25. Finds ways to celebrate accomplishments	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
26. Is clear about his/her philosophy of leadership	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
27. Speaks with genuine conviction about the higher meaning and purpose of our work	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
28. Experiments and takes risks, even when there is a chance of failure	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
29. Ensures that people grow in their jobs by learning new skills and developing themselves	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
30. Gives the members of the team lots of appreciation and support for their contributions	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Appendix B: Five Leadership Practices

Encouraging the Heart

5. Encourages other people

10. Recognizes people's contributions

15. Praises people for job well done

20. Gives support and appreciation

25. Finds ways to publicly celebrate

30. Tells others about group's good work

Modeling the Way

4. Shares beliefs about leading

9. Breaks projects into steps

14. Sets personal example

19. Talks about guiding values

24. Follows through on promises

29. Sets clear goals and plans

Enabling Others to Act

3. Includes other in planning

8. Treats others with respect

13. Supports decisions of others

18. Fosters cooperative relationships

23. Provides freedom and choice

28. Lets others lead

Inspiring a Shared Vision

2. Describes ideal capabilities

7. Looks ahead and communicates future

12. Upbeat and positive communicator

17. Finds common ground

22. Communicates purpose and meaning

27. Enthusiastic about possibilities

Challenging the Process

1. Seeks challenge

6. Keeps current

11. Initiates experiment

16. Looks way to improve

21. Asks "what can we learn?"

26. Lets others take risks

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