

Leadership Communication Skills and the Empowerment of Future Leaders in the UAE Ministry of Sports

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DOI Link: <http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARBSS/v16-i1/27564>

Published Date: 29 January 2026

Abstract

Effective leadership communication is widely recognised as a critical capability in public sector leadership, particularly for the preparation and empowerment of future leaders. Although leadership development initiatives in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) have expanded substantially, empirical evidence remains limited on how leadership communication functions as a practical mechanism for managerial empowerment, especially within sector-specific contexts such as sports administration. This study examines the role of leadership communication skills in empowering future leaders in the UAE Ministry of Sports. A qualitative interpretive research design was employed to explore the perceptions and experiences of emerging leaders. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 14 future leaders who currently hold or are being prepared for supervisory and leadership roles. The data were analysed using thematic analysis supported by NVivo software. The findings indicate that leadership communication among future leaders is predominantly practised at the operational level, focusing on task clarification and routine coordination. Nevertheless, effective communication was found to enhance trust, autonomy, psychological readiness, and participation in decision-making, thereby supporting managerial empowerment. In contrast, weak or inconsistent communication limited empowerment, rendering it symbolic rather than substantive. Organisational factors, including supportive culture, workload pressure, time constraints, and recognition mechanisms, emerged as key enablers and constraints. Overall, the study demonstrates that leadership communication functions as a central mechanism through which managerial empowerment is enacted and underscores the need to reposition communication as a strategic leadership capability within the UAE public sector.

Keywords: Leadership Communication, Managerial Empowerment, Future Leaders, Public Sector Leadership, United Arab Emirates (UAE)

Introduction

Contemporary public sector organisations are undergoing profound transformation driven by increasing societal expectations, administrative complexity, and the demand for participatory governance. Traditional hierarchical leadership models, which emphasised authority, control, and procedural compliance, are increasingly viewed as insufficient for addressing dynamic organisational challenges and developing future-ready leadership capacity (OECD, 2015; Tourish, 2014). Within this evolving landscape, leadership is no longer defined solely by positional authority, but by relational capabilities that enable dialogue, trust-building, and shared meaning-making. Communication, therefore, has emerged as a central leadership process through which influence, coordination, and empowerment are enacted in modern public sector organisations.

Effective communication constitutes a fundamental element of leadership practice in contemporary organisations. Communication is considered effective when messages are conveyed clearly and interpreted accurately in accordance with the sender's intent—a process shaped by the communicator's ability to organise ideas, select appropriate channels, and articulate meaning, as well as by the receiver's capacity for understanding and interpretation (Zaki, 2021). In organisational settings, communication therefore functions not merely as a technical process, but as a social mechanism through which meaning, trust, and coordinated action are constructed. Within public sector institutions, leadership communication skills have become increasingly central as organisations shift from traditional hierarchical models to more participatory, people-oriented approaches. Criticism of classical leadership theories has contributed to the emergence of perspectives that emphasise interaction, engagement, and follower development rather than authority alone (Avolio, Walumbwa & Weber, 2009). In this context, effective communication—particularly listening, persuasion, and constructive dialogue—enables leaders to foster shared understanding, commitment, and collaboration, thereby enhancing organisational performance and leadership legitimacy (Saad, 2020; Tourish, 2014).

Closely linked to leadership communication is the concept of managerial empowerment. Empowerment refers to the process through which individuals are granted autonomy, confidence, and opportunities to participate meaningfully in decision-making and organisational problem-solving (Conger & Kanungo, 1988). In leadership development contexts, empowerment is particularly critical for future leaders, as it shapes leadership readiness, psychological confidence, and accountability prior to assuming senior roles. Importantly, empowerment cannot be achieved solely through formal delegation or structural reforms. Rather, it is enacted through everyday communicative practices that clarify expectations, encourage participation, and reinforce trust between leaders and their teams (Seibert, Wang & Courtright, 2011; Mayfield & Mayfield, 2018).

In the United Arab Emirates (UAE), leadership development has been positioned as a national strategic priority aligned with long-term initiatives such as *We the UAE 2031* and *Centennial 2071*. Government institutions have invested substantially in preparing future leaders capable of navigating change, responding to emerging challenges, and contributing

to sustainable governance (OECD, 2015). Within this national agenda, the Ministry of Sports occupies a strategic position due to its responsibility for youth development, institutional governance, and the advancement of sports as a national priority. Developing empowered future leaders within this Ministry is therefore essential for ensuring organisational effectiveness and long-term sectoral sustainability.

Despite the growing recognition of communication and empowerment in leadership scholarship, empirical research has paid limited attention to how leadership communication skills function as a practical mechanism for empowering future leaders within public sector organisations, particularly in sector-specific contexts such as sports administration. Much of the existing literature continues to treat leadership communication and empowerment as analytically distinct constructs, or examines empowerment primarily as an outcome variable rather than as a communicative process enacted in practice (Fairhurst & Connaughton, 2014; Seibert, Wang & Courtright, 2011). More critically, recent leadership debates highlight that contemporary research remains heavily model-driven and insufficiently attentive to everyday leadership practices through which empowerment is realised (Tourish, 2020). Consequently, a significant empirical and contextual gap remains in understanding how leadership communication operates as a mechanism of empowerment within governmental institutions in non-Western contexts, including the United Arab Emirates.

Addressing this gap, the present study examines the relationship between leadership communication skills and the empowerment of future leaders in the UAE Ministry of Sports. By exploring the perceptions and lived experiences of emerging leaders, the study seeks to illuminate how communication practices influence autonomy, participation, and managerial readiness within a public sector context. This analysis contributes to leadership and communication scholarship by repositioning communication as a central mechanism of empowerment, while also offering practical insights for leadership development and public sector reform initiatives in the UAE.

Conceptual Background

This section outlines the conceptual foundations of the study by examining key concepts and theoretical perspectives related to leadership communication and managerial empowerment. It focuses on leadership communication skills as a core capability of future leaders and explores empowerment as an outcome shaped by communicative leadership practices. By integrating these concepts, the section offers a theoretical lens for understanding how communication functions as a mechanism for empowerment within public sector leadership contexts.

Leadership Communication Skills of Future Leaders

Leadership communication skills constitute a fundamental pillar of contemporary leadership practice, particularly within public sector organisations. Communication in leadership contexts extends beyond the mere exchange of information to include the construction of shared understanding, management of expectations, and influence on organisational behaviour (Al-Musa'id, 2018). Within leadership roles, communication becomes the primary mechanism through which leaders guide individuals, motivate teams, and align efforts toward institutional objectives (Al-Badawi, 2020).

Administrative communication is commonly defined as an interactive process through which ideas, information, and directives are transmitted among organisational members using diverse channels to achieve mutual understanding and organisational goals (Shalhoub, 2018). This definition underscores that communication is not a one-way process, but a continuous interaction dependent on message clarity, sender competence, and the receiver's capacity for interpretation. Leadership communication skills refer to a set of behavioural and cognitive abilities that enable leaders to express ideas clearly, listen effectively, persuade ethically, and build professional relationships based on trust and mutual respect (Al-Otaibi, 2021). These skills are not innate traits, but competencies that can be developed through training and practice, which aligns with contemporary approaches to preparing future leaders in governmental institutions.

The shift from traditional, command-based leadership to participative leadership has placed communication at the core of leadership practice. Modern leaders rely less on directives and more on dialogue, persuasion, and relationship-building, particularly in environments characterised by rapid change, cultural diversity, and organisational complexity (Makhlouf, 2019). Accordingly, leadership communication skills are especially critical for future leaders who operate within dynamic and multicultural public sector contexts.

Leadership communication encompasses multiple dimensions, including active listening, persuasive communication, clear verbal expression, relationship-building, and digital communication. Active listening enables leaders to understand employees' needs and expectations, while persuasion facilitates influence on attitudes and behaviours. Digital communication has become an integral component of governmental work, requiring leaders to manage written messages, select appropriate platforms, and maintain professionalism in virtual environments (Dabbous, 2022; Jawhar, 2019). Deficiencies in these skills may lead to communication gaps that negatively affect leadership effectiveness and administrative empowerment.

Importantly, leadership communication skills are closely associated with managerial empowerment. Effective communication clarifies authority, encourages participation, and fosters trust between leaders and subordinates. Leaders who possess strong communication skills are better positioned to delegate responsibilities, involve future leaders in decision-making, and create supportive organisational environments that encourage initiative and accountability (Zaki, 2021). Thus, leadership communication skills represent a strategic leadership tool rather than a functional managerial activity.

Managerial Empowerment of Future Leaders

Managerial empowerment has emerged as a central concept in modern administrative thought, gaining prominence amid organisational transformation and increasing complexity in public sector governance. It is grounded in granting individuals the capacity to participate meaningfully in decision-making, assume responsibility, and exercise authority within a framework of institutional trust and support (Al-Ali, 2021). In the context of future leadership development, empowerment functions as a strategic approach to cultivating leaders capable of innovation and adaptive decision-making (Hamed, 2021).

Managerial empowerment is commonly defined as an organisational process aimed at expanding employees' authority, enhancing professional autonomy, and enabling participation in decisions related to their functional roles, thereby improving performance and job satisfaction (Al-Douri, 2019). From a leadership perspective, empowerment entails delegating authority, involving subordinates in leadership responsibilities, and providing opportunities for experiential leadership. These processes are particularly important for future leaders as they develop decision-making competence and self-confidence (Al-Yamahi, 2024).

Empowerment extends beyond the formal delegation of authority to include access to information, organisational support, training, and role clarity. These elements ensure the effective use of delegated authority and enhance leaders' readiness to act responsibly. The key dimensions of managerial empowerment for future leaders include participation in decision-making, delegation of authority, autonomy in task execution, and opportunities for learning and experimentation. Collectively, these dimensions support the development of leaders with strategic thinking abilities, calculated risk-taking skills, and effective team management capabilities (Ishtiywi, 2018).

In governmental institutions, empowerment assumes particular significance due to rigid organisational structures and regulatory frameworks. Effective empowerment, therefore, requires a careful balance between regulatory compliance and the flexibility needed for emerging leaders to innovate. Recognising this, the United Arab Emirates has placed strong emphasis on empowering future leaders through national programmes aimed at developing advanced administrative and leadership competencies (UAE Prime Minister's Office, 2025). Managerial empowerment is viewed as a key mechanism for enabling leaders to drive governmental transformation and achieve sustainable development objectives across sectors (Government Excellence Framework, UAE, 2025).

However, the success of empowerment initiatives is contingent upon leaders' personal and professional competencies—particularly communication skills, trust-building, dialogue management, and openness to diverse perspectives. Leaders who lack these competencies may hinder empowerment efforts, despite the formal delegation of authority. Consequently, the managerial empowerment of future leaders requires an integrated approach that aligns organisational structures with leadership communication competencies to achieve meaningful and sustainable outcomes (Endriz, 2019).

Communication as a Mechanism of Empowerment

Existing literature consistently indicates that leadership communication skills constitute the primary mechanism through which managerial empowerment is enacted. Empowerment cannot be realised without clear communication that defines authority, clarifies expectations, and fosters trust (Jahel, 2017). Effective communication enables future leaders to understand their roles, participate actively in decision-making, and assume responsibility, rendering the relationship between communication and empowerment foundational rather than supplementary (Al-Musa'id, 2018).

This relationship is supported by Psychological Empowerment Theory (Spreitzer, 1995), which conceptualises empowerment through four dimensions: meaning, competence,

self-determination, and impact. Leadership communication particularly listening and persuasion, facilitates the transmission of meaning, enhances perceived competence, and supports autonomy, thereby transforming communication into a psychological mechanism that enables future leaders to perform leadership roles with confidence (Zulkifly & Roshamida, 2016). Similarly, Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964) posits that organisational relationships are governed by reciprocity, whereby trust and support generate commitment and proactive behaviour. Through open dialogue, recognition, and attentive listening, leadership communication fosters trust between senior leaders and future leaders, encouraging greater responsibility and participation.

The relationship is further reinforced by Transformational Leadership Theory (Burns, 1978; Bass, 1985), which emphasises inspirational communication and the articulation of vision as central tools for empowering followers. Persuasive and motivational communication enables future leaders to internalise strategic goals, while delegation and encouragement translate authority into shared responsibility (Setianingsih, 2024). Likewise, Participative Leadership Theory, derived from Likert's (1967) participative group management system, emphasises open communication and employee involvement in decision-making as prerequisites for genuine empowerment (Likert, 1967; Al-Yamahi, 2024). In contemporary public sector contexts, Digital Leadership Theory (Avolio, Kahai & Dodge, 2000) underscores the growing importance of digital communication in empowerment processes. Leaders' ability to manage digital messages, engage in virtual communication, and utilise technology for coordination expands participation and accelerates empowerment. Conversely, weak digital communication may constrain empowerment efforts (Dabbous, 2022).

Collectively, these theoretical perspectives demonstrate that leadership communication skills form the operational foundation of managerial empowerment. Empowerment is not achieved through delegation alone but through communication that constructs meaning, builds trust, and enables participation. Accordingly, systematic investment in the development of listening, persuasion, and broader communication competencies represents a strategic pathway for empowering future leaders within the UAE Ministry of Sports.

Leadership Development in the UAE Context

Leadership development has been positioned as a strategic national priority in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), reflecting the country's long-term vision for sustainable governance, institutional excellence, and future readiness (UAE Government, 2015; UAE Government, 2021). Over the past two decades, the UAE has adopted a proactive approach to cultivating leadership capacity within the public sector, recognising effective leadership as a critical driver of organisational performance, innovation, and societal development (OECD, 2001). This strategic orientation is evident in systematic investments in leadership frameworks, national programmes, and competency models aimed at preparing a new generation of leaders capable of navigating complex and rapidly evolving governance environments (OECD, 2015; UAE Government, 2015).

Central to the UAE's leadership development agenda is the institutionalisation of structured leadership models that emphasise strategic thinking, adaptability, communication competence, and ethical responsibility (UAE Government, 2015). The introduction of the UAE

Government Leadership Model and subsequent initiatives—such as the 21st Century Leader Model—reflects a deliberate shift toward future-oriented leadership preparation that prioritises behavioural and relational competencies alongside technical expertise (UAE Government, 2015; UAE Government, 2021). These frameworks conceptualise future leaders not merely as administrative actors, but as individuals equipped with interpersonal and communicative capabilities necessary to influence others, manage diversity, and operate effectively in collaborative organisational environments. Leadership development in the UAE, therefore, extends beyond positional authority, focusing instead on cultivating behavioural competencies that support empowerment, shared responsibility, and participatory governance, in line with contemporary public sector leadership principles (OECD, 2001).

Within this national framework, governmental institutions are encouraged to embed leadership development into their organisational strategies through targeted training, mentoring, and experiential learning opportunities. Emphasis is placed on empowering emerging leaders by exposing them to decision-making processes, cross-functional collaboration, and real-world leadership challenges. Such exposure is intended to enhance leadership readiness, build confidence, and foster a sense of accountability. However, the effectiveness of these initiatives depends significantly on the extent to which leaders are supported by enabling organisational practices particularly those related to communication, trust, and participation.

The sports sector occupies a distinctive position within the UAE's leadership development landscape. As a sector closely associated with youth development, national identity, and international representation, sports governance requires leaders who can balance strategic vision with operational effectiveness (UAE Government, 2021). The Ministry of Sports plays a pivotal role in this regard, being responsible for policy formulation, institutional coordination, and human capital development within a dynamic and performance-driven environment. Consequently, leadership development within the Ministry is not only an organisational necessity but also a national imperative aligned with broader governance and development objectives articulated in the UAE's leadership and public sector reform agenda (UAE Government, 2015).

Despite the existence of comprehensive leadership development programmes at the national level, sector-specific challenges persist. The sports sector is characterised by diverse stakeholders, high public visibility, and rapidly changing demands, all of which place additional pressure on leadership practices. Future leaders within the Ministry of Sports are often required to operate across hierarchical boundaries, coordinate with multiple actors, and respond to emerging challenges with agility. In such contexts, managerial empowerment becomes a critical factor in enabling leaders to act decisively and responsibly. However, empowerment initiatives may remain symbolic if they are not supported by effective communication practices that clarify roles, encourage participation, and foster mutual trust.

Recent institutional indicators continue to highlight the need to strengthen leadership empowerment within the sports sector. Although leadership development initiatives in the UAE public sector have expanded in both scope and intensity, evidence from leadership scholarship suggests that persistent gaps often exist between formal leadership frameworks and actual leadership practices at the organisational level. In particular, the communicative

dimensions of leadership—such as dialogue, participation, and trust-building—are frequently underemphasised in comparison to structural competencies and performance-driven outcomes. As a result, leadership empowerment may be implemented procedurally without being fully experienced by emerging leaders in their daily organisational interactions. This underscores the importance of examining leadership development not only through programme structures and policy objectives, but also through the everyday communicative practices that shape how leadership is enacted and how empowerment is perceived within organisations (Tourish, 2014).

In this context, examining leadership communication skills as a mechanism for empowering future leaders offers valuable insight into how leadership development efforts are translated into organisational practice. By focusing on the Ministry of Sports as a case study, the present research situates leadership communication and managerial empowerment within the broader UAE public sector environment, while also addressing the specific organisational and sectoral dynamics that shape leadership experiences. This approach enables a more nuanced understanding of leadership development as a lived organisational process—shaped by interaction, meaning-making, and communication rather than as a purely structural or policy-driven initiative (Men & Yue, 2019; Seibert, Wang & Courtright, 2011).

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative interpretive approach to examine how leadership communication skills contribute to the managerial empowerment of future leaders within the UAE Ministry of Sports. A qualitative approach was deemed appropriate, as the study sought to understand leadership practices, meanings, and experiences that are socially constructed and context-dependent, particularly within organisational and governmental settings (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Creswell & Poth, 2018). The interpretive stance enabled the researcher to explore how participants make sense of leadership communication and empowerment based on their lived experiences rather than predefined variables.

A qualitative case study design was adopted to allow for an in-depth exploration of leadership communication practices as they are enacted in the daily administrative environment of the Ministry. Case study research is particularly suitable when the focus of inquiry involves a contemporary phenomenon embedded within a real-life context, and when the boundaries between the phenomenon and the context are not clearly defined (Yin, 2018). This design facilitated a holistic understanding of how communication practices function as mechanisms of empowerment within a specific institutional setting.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with fourteen (14) future leaders, selected through purposive sampling. This sampling technique ensured that participants possessed relevant experience and exposure to leadership communication practices within the Ministry (Patton, 2015). Selection criteria included involvement in leadership development programmes, holding supervisory or coordination roles, and having basic administrative experience. The sample size was considered sufficient, as data saturation was reached when no new themes or significant insights emerged from subsequent interviews (Guest, Bunce & Johnson, 2006). An interview protocol consisting of open-ended questions was developed to guide data collection. The questions focused on four key areas:

(1) participants' understanding of leadership communication skills; (2) communication practices in their daily administrative roles; (3) perceived effects of communication on managerial empowerment; and (4) organisational factors that enable or constrain empowerment. All interviews were conducted with informed consent, audio-recorded, and transcribed verbatim to ensure accuracy and analytical rigour.

Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis, following the systematic phases of familiarisation, initial coding, theme development, and refinement (Braun & Clarke, 2006). NVivo software supported data management, coding consistency, and systematic comparison across interview transcripts. To enhance the trustworthiness of the findings, the interview guide was reviewed by subject-matter experts, coding procedures were peer-checked, and all stages of analysis were carefully documented to ensure transparency, dependability, and methodological rigour (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Findings

Understanding of Leadership Communication Skills among Future Leaders

The findings indicate that future leaders in the UAE Ministry of Sports demonstrate a moderate understanding of leadership communication skills. More than half of the participants (57%) perceived leadership communication primarily as a functional tool for verbal interaction, delivering instructions, and providing direct encouragement to employees. These participants tended to associate communication with routine administrative practices rather than with broader leadership functions. Approximately one-third of the participants (35%) linked leadership communication skills to contemporary leadership approaches, particularly transformational leadership models. However, their understanding remained largely conceptual and was primarily derived from leadership development programmes rather than sustained organisational practice. For this group, leadership communication was viewed as a supportive or complementary skill, rather than as a central mechanism that directly influences managerial empowerment and decision-making authority.

In contrast, a small proportion of participants (14%) demonstrated a limited interpretation of leadership communication skills, reducing them to interpersonal courtesy, politeness, and general human interaction. While such elements were acknowledged as important for maintaining positive workplace relationships, they were not associated with strategic leadership roles such as influence, trust-building, or empowering others. Overall, the findings suggest that leadership communication skills have not yet crystallised into an integrated conceptual framework among most future leaders in the Ministry of Sports. Although participants recognised the importance of communication in administrative work, they predominantly interpreted it through the lens of daily operational practice, rather than as a strategic leadership capability linked to influence, trust, and participatory decision-making. This conceptual gap may limit the effective use of leadership communication as a mechanism for empowering future leaders within the organisation.

Dominant Leadership Communication Skills Practised by Future Leaders

The findings reveal that future leaders in the UAE Ministry of Sports practise a range of leadership communication skills at a moderate to relatively high level, as reflected in the frequency of thematic coding across interview transcripts. More than half of the participants (64%) identified clarifying goals and explaining task expectations as their most frequently

practised communication skill. Participants reported that this type of communication plays a central role in guiding teams, reducing ambiguity, and enhancing clarity, thereby strengthening commitment and accountability among team members.

Similarly, 57% of participants emphasised verbal recognition and positive reinforcement as key leadership practices. They viewed expressions of appreciation and acknowledgement of effort as effective strategies for motivating employees and reinforcing mutual trust within work teams. In addition, half of the participants (50%) highlighted the importance of demonstrating trust through supportive communication such as granting greater autonomy, encouraging initiative, and allowing freedom of expression. This reflects a strong presence of communication practices associated with psychological support and empowerment.

In contrast, communication skills with a more strategic and long-term focus were less frequently mentioned. Approximately one-third of participants (36%) reported encouraging initiative through dialogue, while a smaller group (28%) associated communication with building professional meaning or linking tasks to broader organisational goals. These findings suggest that future leaders tend to prioritise direct, short-term communication practices over the strategic use of communication to shape vision, foster innovation, and promote long-term professional growth. Furthermore, only 21% of participants recognised the leader's role as a communicative role model, and just 14% referred to practices such as sharing collective successes through group communication.

Despite these variations, most participants acknowledged that leadership communication regardless of its level of complexity has a tangible impact on team interaction and employees' readiness to assume responsibility. Overall, the findings indicate that while future leaders in the Ministry of Sports actively practise foundational leadership communication skills, the strategic use of communication as a tool for vision-building, innovation, and long-term empowerment remains underdeveloped.

The Impact of Leadership Communication Skills on Managerial Empowerment

The findings demonstrate that the use of leadership communication skills has a clear and direct influence on the level of managerial empowerment experienced by future leaders in the UAE Ministry of Sports. More than two-thirds of the participants (71%) indicated that leaders with effective communication skills contribute directly to building trust, strengthening autonomy, and enabling future leaders to participate more actively in decision-making processes.

Participants emphasised that leaders who clearly articulate organisational goals, explain the significance of individual roles, and highlight how personal contributions align with the Ministry's objectives help create an environment that encourages initiative and responsibility. In this context, leadership communication particularly the clarification of vision, verbal recognition, and expressions of trust, was perceived as a catalyst for developing future leaders' readiness to assume leadership roles, manage teams effectively, and make independent decisions. In addition, more than half of the participants (64%) reported that effective communication improves the quality of interaction within work teams, while 57% associated communication practices with higher levels of commitment and responsibility in

job performance. These findings suggest that communication functions as a practical mechanism through which empowerment is enacted in daily leadership behaviour.

Conversely, the findings also reveal the limiting effects of weak leadership communication. Approximately 42% of participants noted that inadequate or inconsistent communication reduces managerial empowerment, leading future leaders to carry out tasks in a routine manner, with limited initiative and minimal involvement in decision-making. In such cases, empowerment was perceived as formal rather than substantive. Participants also observed that future leaders who receive consistent communicative support exhibit higher levels of emotional regulation, effective listening, and accountability in executing delegated responsibilities. However, only a minority of participants (28%) linked leadership communication to enhanced job satisfaction and a strong sense of empowerment, indicating that while communication significantly supports empowerment, its full potential remains underutilised.

Overall, the findings highlight leadership communication skills as a critical enabler of managerial empowerment, influencing psychological readiness, decision-making capacity, and professional responsibility among future leaders in the Ministry of Sports.

Organisational Factors Influencing the Effectiveness of Leadership Communication in Achieving Managerial Empowerment

The findings indicate that organisational factors play a critical role in either enhancing or constraining the effectiveness of leadership communication skills in achieving managerial empowerment among future leaders in the UAE Ministry of Sports. More than half of the participants (64%) identified a supportive and collaborative work culture as a key enabling factor. Participants emphasised that an organisational climate characterised by mutual support and psychological safety encourages open communication, idea-sharing, and constructive dialogue. Such an environment was perceived to empower future leaders by enabling them to express opinions freely and engage in leadership communication without fear of organisational constraints.

In addition, 57% of participants acknowledged that existing leadership development programmes contribute to raising awareness of contemporary leadership approaches and basic communication skills. However, they also noted that these programmes lack specialised, practice-oriented components that position communication as a direct mechanism for managerial empowerment. As a result, the effective application of communication skills was perceived to rely more on individual initiative than on systematic organisational support. Conversely, half of the participants (50%) identified workload pressure and task intensity as major barriers to effective communication. Participants explained that the emphasis on rapid task completion often limits opportunities for dialogue, reflection, and participatory communication, thereby constraining empowerment practices. Similarly, 43% of participants highlighted time constraints as a factor that restricts meaningful leadership interaction.

Regarding improvement strategies, more than two-thirds of participants (71%) stressed the need for a targeted training framework focused on strategic communication skills, including vision articulation, persuasive communication, and dialogue management. They viewed such training as essential for transforming communication from a routine

practice into a deliberate, empowerment-oriented leadership process. Furthermore, 43% of participants emphasised the importance of expanding organisational spaces for empowerment by granting future leaders' greater autonomy, initiative, and involvement in decision-making. Participants also pointed out that weak institutional recognition mechanisms undermine empowering communication, with 39% noting that insufficient acknowledgement reduces motivation to engage proactively.

Overall, the findings suggest that while individual leadership communication skills are important, their effectiveness in achieving managerial empowerment depends significantly on organisational culture, structural support, and targeted leadership development policies within the Ministry of Sports.

Discussion

From Operational to Strategic Communication

The findings indicate that leadership communication among future leaders in the UAE Ministry of Sports is predominantly practised at an operational level, rather than understood as a strategic leadership capability. Most participants associated communication primarily with task clarification, instruction delivery, and routine interpersonal interaction aimed at ensuring smooth daily operations. While these practices contribute to administrative efficiency, they reflect a narrow conception of leadership communication, one confined to functional coordination.

This pattern aligns with the notion of administrative communication discussed in the conceptual background, where communication is viewed mainly as a mechanism for transmitting information and maintaining organisational control (Shalhoub, 2018; Al-Badawi, 2020). In contrast, leadership communication, as articulated by Al-Musa'id (2018) and Hackman and Johnson (2013), extends beyond information exchange to encompass meaning-making, vision articulation, and influence over organisational behaviour. The present findings suggest that this broader, leadership-oriented understanding of communication has not yet been fully internalised by future leaders in the Ministry.

From the perspective of transformational leadership theory, communication plays a central role in articulating vision, shaping shared meaning, and inspiring followers (Burns, 1978; Bass, 1985). However, the communication practices described by participants were more frequently focused on compliance, coordination, and short-term task execution than on vision-building or leadership identity formation. This finding reflects similar trends identified in previous studies of public sector leadership, where emerging leaders often rely on directive communication styles due to bureaucratic structures, accountability requirements, and performance pressures (Avolio, Walumbwa & Weber, 2009; Tourish, 2014).

Additionally, leadership development literature emphasises an increasing expectation for future public sector leaders to move beyond operational efficiency towards strategic leadership capabilities, including strategic communication (OECD, 2001). The persistence of operational communication practices observed in this study therefore signals a developmental gap between policy-level leadership aspirations and the day-to-day realities of organisational communication. The transition from operational to strategic communication thus emerges as a critical area for leadership development. Without this shift, leadership

communication risks remaining a functional managerial skill, rather than evolving into a strategic leadership resource capable of shaping organisational culture, fostering shared purpose, and supporting the empowerment of future leaders within the UAE Ministry of Sports.

Communication-Driven Empowerment of Future Leaders

A central contribution of this study lies in demonstrating that leadership communication functions as a primary mechanism through which managerial empowerment is enacted among future leaders in the UAE Ministry of Sports. The findings indicate that effective communication enhances trust, autonomy, psychological readiness, and participation in decision-making, thereby shaping how empowerment is experienced beyond formal structures. This outcome aligns with the conceptualisation of managerial empowerment discussed earlier, which emphasises empowerment as a multidimensional process involving autonomy, participation, and responsibility, rather than merely the delegation of authority (Conger & Kanungo, 1988; Al-Badawi, 2020). From a psychological perspective, the findings strongly correspond with psychological empowerment theory (Spreitzer, 1995), which identifies meaning, competence, self-determination, and impact as the core dimensions through which individuals internalise empowerment. In this study, leadership communication particularly clarity of expectations, recognition of contributions, and trust-based dialogue, emerged as the primary communicative pathway through which these dimensions were activated.

Specifically, when leaders clearly articulated purpose, acknowledged individual efforts, and engaged in open dialogue, future leaders reported higher levels of confidence, readiness to assume responsibility, and willingness to exercise delegated authority. These findings support prior research suggesting that communication plays a central role in translating formal empowerment structures into lived experiences of empowerment (Seibert, Wang & Courtright, 2011; Mayfield & Mayfield, 2018). In this sense, communication does not merely accompany empowerment; it constitutes the mechanism through which empowerment is realised and sustained.

Conversely, the findings reveal that weak, inconsistent, or purely transactional communication undermines empowerment by rendering it symbolic rather than substantive. Even when authority and responsibility were formally delegated, the absence of sustained communicative support limited initiative and fostered risk-averse behaviour among future leaders. This reinforces earlier arguments that structural delegation alone is insufficient and must be complemented by continuous, supportive leadership communication (Conger & Kanungo, 1988; Spreitzer, 1995).

Accordingly, leadership communication should not be viewed as an auxiliary managerial skill, but as a core leadership capability that actively shapes how authority, responsibility, and trust are constructed and experienced in organisational life. In the context of leadership development within the UAE Ministry of Sports, strengthening communication-driven empowerment is essential for preparing future leaders who are confident, autonomous, and capable of meaningful participation in governance and decision-making processes.

Organisational Enablers and Constraints

The findings further demonstrate that the effectiveness of leadership communication as a mechanism for empowerment is significantly shaped by the organisational context in which it is enacted. A supportive organisational culture characterised by openness, collaboration, and psychological safety emerged as a key enabler of empowering communication among future leaders in the UAE Ministry of Sports. Participants emphasised that environments fostering dialogue, mutual respect, and openness to ideas enable leaders to communicate with greater confidence and to engage more meaningfully in decision-making processes. This finding is consistent with Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964), which emphasises that trust, commitment, and reciprocal behaviour develop through sustained, supportive interactions. As discussed in the conceptual background, leadership communication operates not only at the individual level but is embedded in organisational norms and expectations. When the organisational culture supports open communication, leadership communication becomes a relational process that reinforces trust and facilitates empowerment rather than merely serving as a tool for task coordination.

In contrast, the study identified several organisational constraints that limit the empowering potential of leadership communication. Structural factors such as workload pressure, time constraints, and inadequate recognition mechanisms were found to reduce opportunities for meaningful dialogue and reflective interaction. Under such conditions, communication tends to become transactional, directive, and task-focused reflecting an administrative rather than leadership-oriented pattern (Shalhoub, 2018; Al-Badawi, 2020). These constraints limit leaders' capacity to use communication strategically to support autonomy, participation, and initiative among future leaders.

Importantly, participants' emphasis on the need for targeted training in strategic leadership communication points to a gap between leadership development aspirations and current organisational practices. While existing programmes contribute to general leadership awareness, they appear to insufficiently position communication as a core leadership capability essential to empowerment. This finding aligns with contemporary leadership literature that advocates communication-centred leadership development, particularly within public sector institutions undergoing structural and cultural transformation (Hackman & Johnson, 2013; Tourish, 2014).

Overall, the findings suggest that empowering leadership communication arises from the interaction between individual communicative capability and organisational support structures. Communication skills alone are insufficient if organisational conditions do not provide the time, recognition, and cultural openness necessary for empowering interaction. In the context of the UAE Ministry of Sports, strengthening organisational enablers alongside developing individual communication competencies is essential to realise leadership empowerment in a substantive and sustainable manner.

Conclusion

This study set out to examine the role of leadership communication skills in empowering future leaders within the UAE Ministry of Sports. The findings reveal that leadership communication is predominantly enacted at an operational level, with a primary focus on task clarification and administrative coordination. While these practices support day-to-day

efficiency, they reflect a limited conceptualisation of communication that falls short of its strategic leadership potential. This underscores a critical developmental gap between administrative communication and strategic leadership communication particularly within public sector leadership development.

Crucially, the study confirms that leadership communication plays a decisive role in shaping managerial empowerment. Effective communication characterised by clarity of purpose, recognition, trust-based dialogue, and openness, enhances psychological readiness, autonomy, and participation in decision-making among future leaders. Conversely, weak or inconsistent communication undermines empowerment, rendering it symbolic rather than substantive, even when formal authority is delegated. These findings reinforce the argument that empowerment cannot be achieved through structural arrangements alone; it must be continuously enacted through communicative practices.

The study also highlights the significance of organisational context in enabling or constraining empowering leadership communication. Supportive organisational cultures that promote openness, collaboration, and psychological safety facilitate communication-driven empowerment. In contrast, structural barriers such as workload pressure, time constraints, and limited recognition mechanisms restrict leaders' capacity to communicate strategically. This dynamic interaction between individual communicative capability and organisational support points to the need for a holistic approach to leadership development. From a practical perspective, the study recommends that leadership development initiatives within the UAE Ministry of Sports and the wider UAE public sector, reposition communication as a core leadership capability rather than a supplementary skill. Targeted training in strategic leadership communication, alongside organisational policies that create space for dialogue and participation, is essential for cultivating empowered future leaders capable of navigating complexity and contributing meaningfully to governance and institutional performance.

Theoretically, this study contributes to leadership and communication scholarship by demonstrating how leadership communication functions as a central mechanism that bridges formal empowerment structures and the lived empowerment experiences of future leaders. By positioning communication at the core of leadership empowerment, the findings extend existing leadership theories that have often treated communication as a peripheral skill, and instead highlight how authority, trust, and responsibility are constructed through everyday communicative practices in public sector organisations. Contextually, the study provides empirical insights from the UAE public sector, focusing on the Ministry of Sports, an underrepresented setting in leadership research. The findings underscore the importance of leadership communication in translating formal leadership development initiatives into meaningful empowerment practices, offering contextually grounded contributions relevant to the UAE and comparable governmental institutions.

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