A Systematic Approach to an Academic Institution Culture Change

Mohammad Essawi[1*]

[1]*Academic College of Education Al-Qasemi, P.O. Box124, Baqa El-Gharbieh, 30100, Israel.*

Author's contribution

This whole work was carried out by the author ME.

ABSTRACT

A systematic approach to organizational culture change is aimed at promotion of liberal culture in an academic institution functioning in conservative Arab society in Israel for providing transparency, respect, integrity, empowering women, excellence and effective knowledge management. The approach is developed and implemented in Al-Qasemi Academic College of Education through leadership creating, sustaining and guiding constructive confrontation in the college. The challenges discussed were in changing the college culture through adoption of universal cultural values, and providing influence of the college on Arab community towards liberalization. The actions taken to address the aforementioned challenges were: to cultivate favorable environment allowing adoption of universal cultural values by staff and students; provide cultural diversity of staff and students; embed democratic principles of staff formation and promotion; empower women through appointment of qualified female faculty members to senior positions at the college and encouragement of women from the administrative staff to pursue academic degrees; develop and implement a complex community-oriented educational program; guide profound dialogues with the academic community in Israel and abroad; improve operational performance of the college. Actions resulted in the successful realization of the approach. It provided for enormous improvement of the college performance, better quality of life for staff, opportunity for students to adapt to a modern society, and influence of the college on the Arab community towards liberalization.

Corresponding author: Email: essawi_m@qsm.ac.il, moham.essawi1@gmail.com;

1. INTRODUCTION

Al-Qasemi Academic College of Education is an Arab Moslem college functioning in conservative Arab society in Israel. Conservatism is caused by challenges of the society. The challenges are tribal organizational culture, traditions and patriarchal structure, structure-bound social interactions, low status of women, dogmatic educational system structured around past heritage. We may describe a conservative as supporting minimal change in society to preserve things as they are emphasizing stability and continuity [1,2].

The institutions of teacher education in the Arab educational system in Israel interact with the Jewish institutions of the modern Israeli society [3-5]. Owing to this interaction, they aspire to adopt the teacher educational programs of the Jewish institutions. However, these programs are not in alignment with the reality of the Arab educational system and the larger Arab society. As a result of this, the conservative social environment hinders adaptation of these programs. The conservatism [2] puts obstacles before the personal and professional development of teachers employed in educational system is disregarded for relevance to the modern era of developing and using advanced informational technologies. As a result of this, teachers in the Arab education system face social, cultural, and professional challenges [6].

The situation demonstrates the gap between conservative beliefs and values [2] and liberalism peculiar to the modern society [7,8]. Liberalism assures the importance of universal values [9-11]. A core of universal values involves freedom of choice, human rights, empowering women [7]. A liberal has turned outside, seeking to break down the barriers between the religious word and the secular word [12]. A liberal supports a change in society.

The situation can be improved by moving in conservative society from coercion to choice, from tribal culture to modern systematic organizational culture, from tradition to modernity, from dogmatic education to reflective and critical systems thinking [13-15], tolerance, ethnocultural empathy and conflict resolution [16]. Thereby, the studies and activities of the educational system should be changed towards democracy, human and citizens' rights, respect, equality and tolerance in majority-minority relations. We suggest a systematic approach to changing culture in Al-Qasemi academic college of education towards liberalism. Liberal change in the college entails change in conservative Arab community.

2. THE CHALLENGES

The challenges were in conducting liberal change of the college culture. Furthermore, the college should serve as an agent of liberal change in conservative Arab society in Israel. There are the two primary barriers to change in conservative Arab society – the traditional hamula (clan) power structure and the inferior status of women. The college culture change realizing adoption of universal values by staff and students should promote liberalization of Arab society. The change should be conducted according to a clear social vision reflecting a cohesive ethical perspective.

The college's vision expresses aspiration for staff and students determined by three aims: the promotion of universal cultural values; the creation and dissemination of knowledge; and the development of an organizational culture of excellence and transparency. The vision also expresses the need to cope with controversial issues, and to encourage cultural

diversity, a variety of opinions and worldviews. The vision is represented by the college's covenant. The covenant outlines the college's long-term goals and objectives of the culture change, as well as its everyday practices.

The college culture change should promote effective adoption of universal cultural values by staff and students. Yet, the need for the new behavior corresponding to the new organizational values engenders their resistance to the change [17-20] and provokes confrontation in the college. Confrontation caused by difference between the declared universal values of the college and the current conservative values of staff and students creates an obstacle in moving the individual cultural values towards the new liberal values. Leadership activity aimed at decrease of confrontation in the college should push aside the obstacle.

3. ACTIONS

Conducting change of an academic institution culture consisted in creation of an organizational environment. This environment empowers staff and students to evaluate their opportunities in order to improve their quality of life through adoption of universal cultural values. The environment engenders constructive confrontation [21] promoting adoption of universal cultural values by staff and students. This process does not eradicate traditional Arab values but incorporates them with universal values, which allows them to get adapted to a modern society. Furthermore, improving organizational performance requires diminishing influence of the clan system. It necessitates the development of a systematic approach to an academic institution culture change. Consequently, the actions taken to address the aforementioned challenges were directed towards the development and implementation of a systematic approach to changing college culture according to the aforementioned the college's vision.

The approach intends: creating cultural diversity of staff and students; empowering women; embedding democratic principles of staff formation and promotion; developing and realizing a complex community-oriented educational program; conducting profound dialogues with the academic community in Israel and abroad; improving organizational performance.

Cultural diversity of staff is provided through joint teaching and researches of Arab and Jewish male and female instructors. Cultural diversity of students is provided through co-education of male and female students, and co-education of Arab and Jewish students.

The inferior status of women creates obstacles on the way to development of Arab society. Consequently, empowering women is the basic principle of the college development. Due to the importance of promoting leadership among women, qualified female faculty members were appointed to senior positions at the college. Women from the administrative staff were encouraged to pursue academic degrees. Democratic principles of staff formation and promotion are realized through comprehensive work of corresponding committees based on transparent criteria. It allows to diminish influence of the traditional hamula (clan) power structure.

The developed and realized complex educational program having an ethical and social orientation is multipurpose, always accessible and open to new ideas, relevant, experiential and oriented towards the community. This program involves: a program of joint courses for students of Al-Qasemi college and Jewish colleges; a special program in Islamic studies; a

teacher trainer educational program aimed at change of teacher trainers' attitudes towards universal values.

Joint courses for Arab and Jewish students allow to discuss issues such as human and civil rights, women's rights, democracy, tension between Arabs and Jews, identities of the Arabs in Israel. The program in Islamic studies is intended for students, most of whom are young Arab women from traditional Muslim background. This program offers the following courses: Education for Criticism, Similarities and Differences between Religions, Modern Theological Issues, Women in Religion, Education for Peace, Multiculturalism and Pluralism. The educational program to change teacher trainers' attitudes towards universal cultural values was realized by means of use of a reflective educational technology through workshops [22]. The workshop serves as an alternative to existing models of teacher education helping conduct change in attitudes towards universal values.

Profound dialogues with the academic community in Israel and abroad are realized through symposiums, conferences, seminars and study days. The dialogues are aimed to mutual understanding, trust, openness and creating a knowledge sharing culture [23]. The study days conducted on a regular basis bring together students from the Islamic Studies Department of the college and students from Islamic studies departments of other universities in Israel and abroad. Other seminars and study days provide opportunities for Arab and Jewish educators to discuss a broad range and variety of educational issues with an emphasis on universal values.

The improvement of the college's performance along with academic and social initiatives was realized during implementation of a humanistic and ethical vision of the college on the basis of a long-term strategic plan. The processes have been put into action thanks to the trust built between the Arab community and the college based upon its successes and commitment to the community. The improvement intended: employees' development through diagnosing their expertise and skills and support of a constant dialogue between the employees and the college's administration; changing organizational structure, planning and managing the college. It provided diminishing influence of the Arab clan system**.**

As appears from the above, the college culture changes engender confrontation. It causes difficulties in implementation of systemic approach to organizational culture change according to determined directions. So, diversity of cultures, levels of education and teaching methods engenders confrontation among instructors; confrontation is also engendered as a result of sexual and cultural diversity among students and between instructors and students. Empowering women engenders the confrontation of males. Staff formation and promotion on the basis of complex impartial evaluation of employees engenders confrontation caused by influence of the clan power structure. Realization of the complex educational program engenders students' confrontation since the program is aimed to induce them to adoption of universal cultural values. Dialogues with the academic community in Israel and abroad engender confrontation since they are directed towards change of conservative society. Aspiration for improvement of organizational performance requiring more accountability and professional skills from employees also engenders confrontation.

Leadership realizing the systematic approach to the college culture change provides elimination of the confrontation. It is attained by transformation of the confrontation in constructive process. A constructive confrontation is not only a tool but also a significant component of the organizational culture. Such confrontation allows the energies and capacities of employees, engendered as a result of confrontation, to be directed towards

productive adoption of the liberal cultural values by staff and students. It persuades and inspires them to take part in adoption of the new organizational values as well as stimulating and facilitating this process. A value confrontation model creates framework for leadership activity aimed at creating and sustaining the constructive confrontation in the college [23].

Creating and sustaining the constructive confrontation are provided by using various tools, realizing: development of interpersonal relationships based on trust; balance between collaboration and competition among employees [24]; adjustment of the order of adoption of the new cultural values by employees for improvement in quality of their lives; encouragement of employees toward excellent performance of the required behavioral actions with the help of a dynamic reward system [25,26]; alteration of the nature of work by using a mechanism of rotation [27]; promotion of adoption of the new organizational values by employees by means of mentorship and workshops [28]; motivation of employees toward self-selection of required behavioral actions through using focused storytelling and focused recognition [29].

4. RESULTS

Realization of a systematic approach to changing organizational culture in the institute aimed at adoption of universal cultural values by staff and students reveals its effectiveness. The Al-Qasemi college in Baqa-El-Gharbia was founded in 1989 by the Sufi Al-tariqa al-khalwatiya order as an institute of Sharia and Islamic studies. Actions resulted in realization of a systematic approach allowed to transform the institute into Al-Qasemi academic college of education. Today approximately 1,200 students study at the academic college of education in a variety of degree programs-mostly young Muslim women from the Galilee and Triangle regions. Master's degree programs in teaching have been added in the last few years. The academic faculty comprises around 150 lecturers, including 15 Jewish lecturers.

Effective adoption of universal cultural values by staff and students was attained by development and implementation of a value confrontation leadership model [23]. Leadership creating cultural diversity in the college, furthering empowering women and realizing democratic principles of staff formation and promotion induced and guided constructive confrontation in the college which served as leverage of individual and organizational development. It allowed to raise professional level of instructors and administrative staff.

A change in management culture provided confidence of women in possibility of their promotion. As a result of this, almost all instructors hold doctoral degrees; employees of administrative staff, which mainly are women, hold second and third academic degrees. Qualified female faculty members hold senior positions at the college. Encouragement of employees toward excellent performance favored high productivity of skilled labor. Quality of employees' lives is improved. Interpersonal relationships of the staff based on trust and collaboration was formed. It fosters creating and sharing knowledge.

Realizing the complex community-oriented educational program has allowed effective adoption of universal cultural values by students and teacher trainers. It fosters their critical thinking, creates relevance between Islam and modern times, highlights the positive contribution of religion to human culture, and qualifies students to take their roles as active partners in the culture of the world. The program provided training specialists which can work productively in modern high technological and multicultural society.

The college has become the international center of intercultural dialogue. Dialogues among people of conservative and liberal societies provided movement from awareness to mutuality through trust and openness. It allowed creating a knowledge sharing culture. The college's achievements and recognized contributions to the community promoted a process of mutual understanding between the Jewish and Arab citizens of Israel.

Improvement of the college's performance is attained through: human resource development based on continuous diagnosing of employees' expertise and skills; building dynamic organizational structure allowing to realize complex research projects through collaboration between departments; change of planning, and managing the college allowed to define personal accountability on all levels of an organizational structure, and to provide monitoring of personal and department activities. It promoted creating the new work places owing to the college's development, and raising quality of life as a result of personal promotion.

Implementation of the systematic approach to changing culture in the college has excited quick quantitative and qualitative growth of the college and creation of new organizations. Al-Qasemi Academy now is a union including the academic college of education, some technological colleges, a high school, cultural centers and a number of kindergartens.

5. CONCLUSIONS

A systematic approach to changing culture in an educational institution functioning in conservative Arab society in Israel is suggested. The approach intends: creating cultural diversity of staff and students; empowering women; embedding democratic principles of staff formation and promotion; developing and realizing the complex community-oriented educational program; conducting profound dialogues with the academic community in Israel and abroad; improving organizational performance.

Leadership realizing the approach creates, sustains and guides constructive confrontation which serves as a tool and a significant component of the institution culture. Such confrontation allows the energies and capacities of staff and students, engendered as a result of confrontation caused by difference between conservative and universal cultural values, to be directed towards productive adoption of the universal cultural values by them.

Results of the approach implementation through the value confrontation leadership demonstrate quick quantitative and qualitative growth of the institution, and contributions of the institution to the Arab community.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Author has declared that no competing interests exist.

REFERENCES

1. Scruton Roger. Meaning of Conservatism, third edition, Great Britain: Palgrave; 2001.
2. Krohn Jonathan. Defining Conservatism: The Principles That Will Bring Our Country Back, New York: Vanguard Press; 2010.
3. Alhaj M. Education among Arabs in Israel, Magnes Publication, Florsheimer Institute; 1996.

4. Bishara A. Between I and We – The Construction of Identity and Israeli Identity, Jerusalem: Hakibbutz Hameuhad Publishing House; 1999.
5. Sicron M. Demography – Israel's Population Characteristics & Trends, Jerusalem: Carmel press; 2004.
6. Essawi M. Arab School Culture Organizational the Professional Development of Teacher, In: Zogla Ete (eds.), Proceeding of International Conference Theory and Practice of Complicates in Multi Culture, Riga; 2001.
7. Phillips Anne. Really' Equal: Opportunities and Autonomy, The Journal of Political Philosophy. 2006;14.1:18-32.
8. Ludwiq von Mises. Liberalism, Ludwiq von Mises Institute. USA;2010.
9. Christians Clifford, Traber Michael (editors). Communication Ethics and Universal Values, USA: Sage Publications Inc ; 1997.
10. Evers Hans-Dieter. Knowledge Society and the Knowledge Gap, International Conference "Globalisation, Culture and Inequalities", University Kebansaan, Malaysia; 2002.
11. Sörlin Sverker, Vessuri Hebe (editors). Knowledge Society vs. Knowledge Economy: Knowledge, Power and Politics, first edition, New York: Palgrave Macmillan. 2011.
12. Lewis Bernard. What Went Wrong? The Clash Between Islam and Modernity in the Middle East, New York: Oxford University Press Inc; 2002.
13. Flood Robert L. Liberating Systems Theory: Toward Critical Systems Thinking, Human Relations. 1990;43(1):49-75.
14. Jackson Mike C. Critical Systems Thinking and Practice, European Journal of Operational Research, Volume 128, issue2 Complex Societal Problems. 2001;233-244.
15. Cooper Trudi. Critical Management, Critical Systems Theory and System Dynamics, CMS3, Stream 13: OR/Systems Thinking for Social Improvement, online paper. 2003;1-17.
16. Rasoal Chato, Eklund Jakob, Hansen Eric. "Toward a Conceptualization of Ethnocultural Empathy", Journal of Social, Evolutionary, and Cultural Psychology. 2011;5(1):1-13.
17. Hultman Ken. Making Change Irresistible: Overcoming Resistance to Change in Your Organization, 1st edition, USA: Davies-Black Publishing; 1998.
18. Markham Donna J. Spiritlinking Leadership: Working Through Resistance to Organizational Change, New Jersey: Paulist Press; 1999.
19. Palmer Brien. Making Change Work: Practical Tools for Overcoming Human Resistance to Change, USA: American Society for Quality Press; 2003.
20. Maurer Rick. Beyond the Wall of Resistance: Why 70% of All Changes Still Fail and What You Can Do About It, 2nd edition, Austin, Texas: Bard Press; 2010.
21. Essawi M. The Value Confrontation Leadership Model. International Leadership Journal. 2012;4(2):72-82.
22. Essawi M. Reflective Educational Technology for Cultivating Universal Values. International Journal of Knowledge, Culture and Change Management. 2013;8(3):161-168.
23. Gurteen David. Creating a Knowledge Sharing Culture, Knowledge Management. 1999;2:5.
    Available:http://www.providersedge.com/docs/km_articles/Creating_a_K-Sharing_Culture-Gurteen.pdf.

24. Robbins Harvey, Finley Michael. Transcompetition: Moving Beyond Competition and Collaboration, first edition, Australia: Mcgraw-Hill; 1998.
25. Lawler Edward E. Rewarding Excellence: Pay Strategies for the New Economy, San Francisco, California: Jossey- Bass Inc; 2000.
26. Cummings Thomas, Worley Christopher. Organization Development & Change, 9th edition, USA: South-Western College Pub; 2009.
27. White Robert, Cooper Karyn. Principals in Succession: Transfer and Rotation in Educational Administration (Studies in Educational Leadership), 1st edition, Australia: Springer; 2011.
28. Boaqs Rita. Mentorship: A Pathway to Career Success, UK: Author House; 2008.
29. Connors Roger & Smith Tom. Change the Culture Change the Game, New York: Portfolio/Penguin Group Inc; 2011.

_____