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Developing Leadership in Higher Education: Professional Identity Formation among Senior Academic Leaders in Libya and United Kingdom

Ramadan Mohamed Alhamroni

Assistant Lecturer Elmergib University

*** Corresponding author:ramyalhamrony1979@gmail.com**

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ABSTRACT:

The role of senior academic leaders, specifically at the level of dean, in advancing the quality and performance of university education is an important one that has changed in nature over recent decades to become more managerial. This Research Paper explores the nature of this role, and how those who are in it develop their professional identities. It begins from the premise that both the characteristics of the role, and the self-images subsequently generated by deans are culture-specific, a belief held by the researcher as an ‘insider’ within the Libyan Higher Education context.

Consequently, this research undertakes the developing leadership in Higher education (HE) professional identity senior leadership in a Libyan university, and those in a United Kingdom university. The researcher adopts a qualitative methodology, using in-depth face-to-face interviews between the researcher, and six senior leadership in each of the two universities. The interview protocol follows the life history approach in which participants are asked to share their stories of their formative years, their early careers, their journey to deanship, their accounts of their roles as deans, and their aspirations for the future. The data are analysed through a three-dimensional theoretical framework which addresses life/career stages, national culture, and the social construction of identity.

It finds that culture and politics are influencers of what is expected of a dean as a senior academic leader, and that the daily lives and professional identities of the two research samples can be differentiated as a result of those two factors, since the formative years of all interviewees were similar and hence, the impact of family upbringing is controlled for. The major difference between the role and professional image of Libyan deans and UK deans, is the pressure from Libyan society, politics, and culture, for the appointment criteria in respect of deanships to relate to factors other than suitability for the job. This leads to a situation where Libyan deans are managerial, implementing regulations made by others further up the hierarchy, and generally having no room to 'lead' in the academic sense. Indeed, they are not given any form of leadership training in preparation for deanship which confirms the intended scope of the role. UK deans enjoy greater freedom in the discharge of their deanships, but nonetheless report being over-burdened by managerial responsibilities which they perceive to distract from their effectiveness as leaders.

Keywords: Senior leadership, Libyan Universities, UK, Qualitative Methods , culture

1. Introduction:

Effective leadership in Higher Education is considered to be fundamental to the advancement of HE organisations (Bolden et al., 2008: Richards, 2016). Moreover, such effectiveness in the discharge of leadership abilities is not only required of those in top leadership positions within universities and colleges, but also of individuals with less authority and power but who, nevertheless, operate in leadership roles of differing strength, throughout HEIs. Indeed, it is argued that it is sensible to disseminate leadership responsibility in HEIs and to cascade this down the academic hierarchy (Bolden et al., 2012; Ramsden, 1998), such that individuals with responsibility for modules, years of a course, full programs, schools, and deans for example, become adept at leading the educational enterprise. In recognition of this desirability, there has been an explosion of advice within the literature and from practitioners and professional organisations about how to lead well, and what constitutes a good leader (Busher, 2005; Floyd, 2012). All of this intellectual effort and practical guidance emphasises the need for preparation for the role of leader, whether that be through formal programmes or periods of apprenticeship in supervisory positions of some kind.

However, my professional experience as an academic leader in a Libyan HEI (head of department for four years, and a dean for one year) has made it plain to me that within the Libyan context, there are many inefficiencies, that deans in Libya find it hard to discharge their role, to persuade subordinates to be innovative and step outside of the box, and in some instances, to realise any co-operation at all from them. This personal experience of being a dean has highlighted the difficulties encountered in Libyan HEIs, since the task of managing a faculty of 50 academic staff and 55 administrative staff as a senior leader is one that I have actually had to manage. It illuminated the need for effective communication skills as essentially, the dean operates in the role of buffer between heads of department, and top management of the university (university president), and involves not only the chairmanship of many formal meetings, but the management of endless informal attempts to secure co-operation. The types of problem that arise for deans undoubtedly serve to prevent the necessary curriculum development in Libyan HE, and hence, have a negative influence upon efforts to promote national capability among Libyan youth.

Having had the opportunity to teach in a university in America where I also had to conduct many meetings and operate in a leadership position, it is clear to me that differences in leadership practice exist within these two contexts, and those differences seem to be influenced by socialisation, culture, and the particular organisation involved. Consequently, there are questions to be asked surrounding these variables, to establish for example, how leaders find themselves in their roles, whether they have had any preparation, in which respect life history becomes important, how their identities as leaders have emerged, and to what extent their cultural context has provided encouragement, strong direction or otherwise.infrastructure delivery.

Leadership in the Context of Higher Education in the UK and Libya:

In the West the rhetoric about organisational improvement being supported by good leadership has resulted in an explosion of advice concerning how to lead well, and what constitutes a good leader. There is also a broader belief that effective leadership in HE – that which can encourage all stakeholders to internalise the HE mission - is at the core of the success of the organisations involved (Bolden et al., 2008) Browne and Rayner, 2015), and "the absence of leadership is often seen as the absence of organization" (Smircich and Morgan, 1982:257). This success is not due only to those in the higher ranks of HEIs, but to individuals with less authority and power but who nonetheless adopt leadership roles of varying strength, throughout the HE institution. The point is made in this connection by Bolden et al. (2012) that it is not advisable to concentrate leadership responsibility in just a few individuals within universities, and that all lecturers have such responsibility albeit in varying degrees. Hence, leadership is relevant to everyone at all levels (Ramsden, 1998), being visible in the academic leadership brought to bear by module leaders, year tutors, etc.

Since Libyan and UK HE form the focus of this study, it is essential to shed light on the nature of leadership in these two environments, and in this connection it can be said that the Libyan tradition is to perceive leadership as management, to believe that there is no genuine difference between the two, whilst that tendency is much less prevalent in the UK. These beliefs and general attitudes towards leadership and management in Libya are characteristically different from those in the UK and are explained in total by the fact that the long-ruling political regime of the past, and the centrally-driven edicts concerning all aspects of social life, have stifled academic debate, with the outcome that there is little historical literature of any worth on the topic of leadership in the Libyan HE sector, and only a small amount of emerging commentary from academics. Leadership, therefore, does not feature as a discreet concept in academic literature in Libya. Consequently, a clear overview of how Libya's HEIs are actually governed must first be established, as this influences the day-to-day operational aspects of leadership.

2.3.1 Libyan Experiences of HEI Leadership and Management

The Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research (MHE&SR) is the body responsible for delivering this tier of education, and it discharges this obligation through delegated authority to three other bodies, these being: the Administration for Universities, the National Foundation for Technical and Vocational Education, and the Administration for Private Education. Together, these three arms of the MHE&SR take responsibility for the supervision of HEIs and for ensuring co-ordination between them, a task which is executed through a regulatory framework.

At the level of the individual university, the chairman is responsible for overall management and academic decision-making, with deans assuming a leadership role at the faculty level, that being to guide the faculty to the achievement of its educational objectives. University committees are comprised of the deputies of the chairman, the deans of faculties, and two representatives, one each from the student body, and the university staff union. At the level of the faculty, these committees comprise the heads of departments, and again a representative of the student body, and another representative of the faculty staff union. Academic staff are appointed and promoted by universities themselves, and the curricula delivered within the universities are also internally approved. The universities must implement the general policy relating to HE as dictated by the MHE&SR, and this applies throughout the university hierarchy (institution, faculty, and department level). The MHE&SR plays the major role in appointing university chairmen and their deputies as they make recommendations in this respect, and appointments are then secured through a Cabinet decree. Lower down the hierarchy, the MHE&SR is the absolute decision-maker, as it is responsible for appointing deans of faculty in universities, and deans in technical colleges.

It can thus be appreciated, that a definite process has been established for the positioning of personnel within the various levels of the Libyan HE sector, but in the day-to-day operation of Libyan HEIs, there is no such regulatory framework leading to consistency in management practice, and currently, Libyan HE faces a significant number of challenges as noted by several researchers, see for example, Al-Howat (1996); Theeb (2009); Tarhoni (2011). These challenges exist despite the increased number of universities in both the public and private sectors, and the obvious availability of places for students within the overall system, and as observed by Tamtam et al. (2011), only a few research studies have focused on these challenges.

One challenge that is pinpointed by all researchers is the lack of management and leadership evident in institutions, and this results in the absence of any clear vision and aims within the HE system generally. Tamtam et al. (2011), for instance, state that Libyan HEIs suffer from the absence of strategic planning, and consequently focus on short-term operational objectives at the expense of long-term educational goals. They also emphasise that there is a problem within most HEIs concerning the selection of individuals for leadership roles since there are no criteria in place for this activity, and consequently, there is a need to develop appropriate selection criteria such that academic leaders with the ability to direct and mould the future of HE can be appointed and properly trained. In terms of training, Tamtam et al. (2011) mention that faculty members are not supported by training and development initiatives that would enable them to participate in academic life for the betterment of the system.

It is clear from an understanding of the governing bodies of Libyan HE, that the system is highly centralised. This heavy reliance on centralisation, as cited by Theeb (2009), is also seen through the Supreme Council of Universities, and within individual university administrations, which result in the inability of faculties to manage their own affairs and the subsequent delays in the overall educational process. Such delays, it could be suggested, promote a loss of work-hours and adversely affect performance as the ability to make timely decisions is denied. Hence, delays both in academic matters and general administration are endemic in the overall system. Undoubtedly, the Libyan HE management system is bureaucratic, a characteristic noted by Al-Howat (1996), who criticised it as being bureaucratic and manual, observing at the same time that even with the very large increases in student numbers, administration was still undertaken manually (i.e., using pens, paper, and files), rather than through the use of new technologies, which would enable swifter communication, and decision-making. Indeed, Al-Howat (1996) offered an example of a simple letter taking a week to travel from a university's administration office to a department, despite the physical distance between these two places being only 300 metres. That situation has not changed. Very recently, Aboajela (2015) also related the Libyan management system in all organisations to bureaucracy. Therefore, Theeb (2009) suggests that a crucial and strategic goal for HE is the development of an integrated management system which allows for the enhancement of co-ordination between the ministers concerned, HEIs and universities, to ensure that appropriate decisions are taken and done so in a timely manner, all of which will lead to progress in the HE system nationally.

A consideration of the background to the current management problems within Libyan HE provides some understanding of how such difficulties have arisen over the years. Specifically, under the previous political regime, there was interference in most organisations by Qadafi, despite the fact that legally he was not authorised to comment. Indeed, the instructions contained within Qadafi's speeches were considered as orders to be followed, even when they diverged from existing laws and resolutions. One good example of this occurred in a particular session of the General People's Congress in 2010, when Qadafi took the unilateral decision to abolish the death penalty for certain people who had committed crimes (murders), irrespective of the decisions that had been made previously by the Minister of Justice; and another example occurred when, during his visit to the Faculty of Medicine, he upheld complaints made by some students who had been denied entry to the Faculty because of their low scores, and instructed that even low-scoring students could enter any faculty including Medicine, despite the regulations requiring high scores. These are only two examples of many interventions by the regime's leader and the fact that no person was able to criticise. These interferences clearly had a marked impact on the management systems in all organisations where they occurred, as they could happen at any time, and anywhere. What is more surprising is that all such decisions were taken at the time of the speech, without being preceded by any investigation or research. Consequently, there was no evidence to suggest they would have beneficial outcomes. In fact, as history shows, the opposite resulted.

At the faculty level, it is clear that senior leaders face the outcomes of the frequent policy changes, and that this involves their inability to discharge their roles effectively, as external interventions prevent continuity of operation and deans find themselves having to react to such change rather than being able to plan for educational developments that are logical for their subject areas. Hence, it can be argued, and I believe it to be the case from my own experience as a dean, an issue that I will examine within the methodology section in this paper, that the obligations placed upon senior leaders in university faculties in Libya, lean more towards those of management than leadership. Essentially, these leaders have functioned purely to implement the policies and regulations dictated by committees further up the political hierarchy, and to abide by impromptu changes imposed as a result of changes requested by Qadafi. Moreover, it is important to note, as indicated earlier, that the MHE&SR with its authority to appoint such personnel was always at the behest of Qadafi, with the result that no appointments were ever made which did not have his seal of approval, and that were conferred on the basis that the individuals in question showed allegiance to his political philosophy. Consequently, the situation arose that those in senior leadership and higher positions found their way into those jobs irrespective of whether they possessed the skills, abilities, and qualifications to discharge the responsibilities associated with them. Basically, such appointments were political. Likewise, the entire HE system has historically been the creation of, and a response to, the political regime, and hence has been characterised by interference and control from the centre.

2.1Research Design:

It is useful to place this study and what it seeks to achieve within a wider framework in order to clarify precisely what it is about. In this connection, the work of Ribbins and Gunter (2002) is useful since it provides a model through which it is possible to identify the nature of the knowledge to be generated in any study. The framework proposed is known as the 'five knowledge domains' which are summarised in Table 3.1. Using these domains, it is possible to position research, and from that, to determine how to go about it.

In the current study, individuals' lives and experiences are explored, with a view to determining "how knowledge is produced", and therefore, the study can be aligned with the third knowledge domain, which is the humanistic one. The study is directed "towards developing knowledge-for-understanding" (Hoyle, 2005:113), and might be used, as Inman (2007) states, as a "basis" to enable "knowledge-for-action" (Ribbins and Gunter, 2002:18).

Philosophical Stance

Research, according to Cohen et al. (2011:3), is "concerned with understanding the world; this is informed by how we view our world(s), what we take understanding to be and what we see as the purpose of understanding". Philosophical issues are, therefore, integral to the research process because they constitute what researchers 'silently think' about research (Scott and Usher, 1999a). In order to understand the chosen design of this research study (its method and methodology), it is first necessary to identify the ontological and epistemological stance I, as researcher, intend to take since this informs all that follows. On this issue, Klenke (2016:16) argues:

"Epistemology is intimately related to both ontology and methodology; ontology involves the philosophy of reality, epistemology addresses how we come to know that reality while methodology identifies the particular practices used to attain knowledge of it."

Essentially, therefore, if a researcher holds a particular view of what counts as knowledge (ontology), then s/he will usually hold another particular view of how that knowledge can be found (epistemology), and of the best way of finding it (methodology). This is the relationship between epistemology, ontology, and methodology.

The two main traditions in such thinking are expressed in the positivist, and interpretivist paradigms. The former developed from observation of the natural sciences and is underpinned by the belief that "there exists a single, objective reality or 'truth' which can be discovered by scientific investigation"; the latter considers 'truth' to be more elusive, something constructed by individuals according to their view of what is happening around them, that is to say, their social world (Gilbert, 2001:33).

Given that it has already been indicated that in this study, that the intention is to explore individuals' lives and experiences to establish how they produce knowledge and identities for themselves, it is clear that implicitly, this study lies within the interpretivist paradigm. The combined use of the life history, and figured worlds approaches is an inherent recognition that knowledge will be gained through these mechanisms, and that indeed, that 'knowledge' will be socially-constructed rather than being in the realms of universal 'truths'. Consequently, the positivist philosophy is rejected as a foundation for this study.

Research Approach

Within the literature it is clear that varying approaches can be taken to undertake research. Indeed, as noted by Bryman and Bell (2015), and in reference to the two fundamental philosophical positions discussed in the previous section, there are different traditions in research, and these adopt different methods to gather the data required. However, Bryman and Bell (2015) do argue that there is no automatic prescription or rejection of any specific method; and this is an assertion which finds consensus in the literature, where it is emphasised that the aim and objectives of a study, and the types of research question being asked, are the determinants of the particular methods chosen to collect the information required.

In this study, the aim is to explore the phenomenon of educational leadership, in particular to determine how leaders learn to lead. This entails delving into the life histories of educational leaders (specifically at the level of senior leader in Higher Education), and exploring how these life experiences influence the development of their leadership skills, and the eventual leadership styles they display. It also involves exploring cultural predispositions which push these senior leaders into a particular way of interpreting their immediate and more general surroundings, such that they 'figure' out the worlds in which they operate and find a personal and professional identity for themselves. This 'figuring out' is confirmed by Ribbins and Gunter (2002:372), who note that educational leadership is "a mediated activity or, more precisely, a field of knowledge", and this suggests that in being 'mediated' such leadership is responsive to the social context in which it is occurring. Clearly, therefore, the study of educational leadership falls into the category of social science research, and discussing such research, Tarhoni (2011:92) observes that a range of methods are available, but the one selected must take into account of "the subject under investigation, the theoretical orientation of the study, the timescale available, and accessibility to the study subjects".

An approach which brings the leaders (research sample) into close contact with the researcher, and allows for a social encounter that produces rich data, is the best one to adopt to secure personal histories, and this scenario points to the need for a qualitative rather than a quantitative approach. Quantitative designs aim to measure phenomena by using numbers, and statistical techniques (Punch, 2000; Gilbert, 2001). To reach the 'truth', means to identify the objective fact relating to a situation. This, as already mentioned, is not appropriate for an interpretivist design, which must by nature seek to establish the reality for the participants through their descriptions in words. In considering the nature of qualitative research, Creswell (2014:4) notes it to be:

"a means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. The process of research involves emerging questions and procedures, data typically collected in the participants' setting, data analysis inductively building from particular to general themes, and the researcher making interpretations of the meaning of the data."

In qualitative research, data is acquired from individuals or groups by meeting with them, or observing them in their natural surroundings, and by being both flexible and sensitive to those surroundings. Researchers then use their own powers of interpretation to analyse that data. Their interest is in understanding why and how people behave in a particular way, rather than in testing hypotheses through the use of statistical tests (Al-Balushi, 2012), which is the tradition in quantitative research. From qualitative data, it is possible for researchers to gain information about the lifestyles of the individuals they are observing. In this respect, Vygotsky (1980) argues that when people are allowed to use words to relate their stories in interview situations, they find it easier to explore their own consciousness and are encouraged to provide honest accounts of their life experiences. Haralambos and Holborn (2013) note the same effect when individuals are asked to produce written transcripts of their life history. From this it can be seen that qualitative data is collected through interviews, and written transcripts; and as Punch (2014) observes, it is also obtained via documentation and other personal material. The point to be appreciated is that it all represents empirical information.

In the context of leadership, the qualitative approach helps leaders to "tease out meanings and assumptions associated with leadership and to offer a grounded interpretation of what leadership means" (Bresnen, 1995:505), assuming that "meaning is embedded in people's experiences" (Merriam, 2001:6), as certain experience is "lived" or "felt" or "undergone"(Sherman and Webb, 1988).

Therefore, one could argue that qualitative research deals with perceptions, attitudes and experiences that are placed in specific circumstances. Consequently, it can be recognised that concepts such as 'experiences', 'perceptions', 'roles', and 'identity' are not quantifiable and need to be studied from the informants' perspectives which as noted by Pak (2007:65), is "sometimes referred to as the insider's perspective, and not the researcher's or outsider's perspective". Pak (2007) goes on to use this observation as a justification for employing the qualitative approach.

It can be seen that such methods enable researchers to gain a strong insight into leadership practice since they allow them to obtain answers to 'what?' 'where?' and 'why?' questions (Denscombe, 2014), which cannot be obtained from quantitative designs that force answers by using closed questions and restricting answer choices. Moreover, they allow leadership to be considered in real-life situations, and as noted by Inman (2014), leadership is highly context specific. Consequently, qualitative approaches lend authenticity to the study of leadership, providing, as observed by Haralambos and Holborn (2013:793), data which are usually seen as "richer, more vital, as having greater depth and as more likely to present a true picture of a way of life, of people's experiences, attitudes and beliefs".

From the aims and research questions associated with this study, it is clear that the purpose of the study is to gain and analyse the life histories of senior leaders. In this regard, it could be said that "everyone has stories to tell ... and life history helps to remind us of this, as it also shows how individual lives are affected by when, where, how and by whom (in social positioning terms) they are lived" (Goodson and Sikes, 2001:4). Giddens (2009:58) argues that the life history approach "belongs purely to sociology and social sciences [and] … has no place in natural science". It requires that past events are considered and reflected upon chronologically such that the experience gained over time is appreciated as something which moulds future thought and action, and in the context of leadership, this produces information concerning how leaders actually learn to lead. With such knowledge and understanding, it is possible to make educated decisions about leadership development (Ribbins and Gunter, 2002), whether it be precisely to do with educational leadership or leadership in any other field.

The method also provides the opportunity for face-to-face contact between informants and the researcher, giving more room for the researcher to explore and understand specific details regarding the topic investigated, and to make use of non-verbal signals which are not present in quantitative approaches.

Clearly, qualitative research provides several advantages over quantitative approaches in the very specific setting of educational leadership, and therefore, this approach to the collection of data for the study will be adopted.

Results

Data Analysis: The Thematic Approach

The method of data analysis is a logical outcome of the research questions and the approach used to gather data, and it should be as transparent as possible to indicate the academic rigour of research (Gubrium and Holstein, 2009). Given the qualitative design of this study, and the collection of words subsequently converted from audio data into text, a thematic approach to its analysis was adopted.

Thematic analysis, according to Denscombe (2003:292), is described as when "the researcher begins to identify relationships between codes or categories of the data or becomes aware of patterns of themes within the data." It, according to Braun and Clarke (2006:79), involves "identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data. It minimally organises and describes your data set in (rich) detail." One might well argue at this point, that all qualitative studies include in one way or another, some form of thematic analysis during a search for patterns, groups or categories of arising themes. This approach, however, often "goes further than this, and interprets various aspects of the research topic" (ibid: 79). The use of themes to interpret answers received is valuable in that the researcher can continually refer to the data to search for relevance to the themes of interest, and indeed this process can identify which themes are more significant than others. The procedure can thus be seen as a systematic one that preserves the data after its collection, and that can be interrogated as many times as required to establish the strength of a particular theme, and highlight emergent ideas.

This thematic underpinning to data analysis enables, as noted by Riessman (2005), the researcher to propose theories in instances where several different cases are involved, since it allows commonalities in what participants report to be documented and, therefore, the building of theory. In this study, thematic analysis is appropriate as there are different cases (the individual deans from two cultural contexts), yet they all reflect on the same thing – their life histories, their lived experience, their 'figured worlds', and how their professional identity has been shaped by these. The identity framework proposed by Holland et al. (1998) is helpful in establishing the participants' 'figured worlds' as it includes reference to the "wider institutional and cultural discourses – not usually studied" (Riessman, 2005:3). Moreover, thematic analysis also helps to illuminate differences arising from cultural context and predispositions.

Thematic analysis is not, however, as straightforward as it might at first appear, as it does not represent a one-step process in which the researcher simply groups together reports of the same phenomenon. Rather, it must be appreciated that as that data is represented, there are several voices, story layers, and constructions. Scholars describe story-telling as 'multi-layered' and 'multi-voiced' such that in any written text, there are many commentators and many layers of meaning (see for example, McAdams and McLean (2013); Mercer (2007); Trahar (2013). Creaby (2016) adds to these arguments, referring to the concept of 'heteroglossia' - the multiplicity of voices (sometimes coming just from the one storyteller), - which occurs when people speak of themselves and thus become authors of their own stories. Consequently, as argued by Josselson (2011a), the analysis of an interview transcript represents another voice in the narration, involving a level of interpretation, and another layer of meaning. Every single aspect is interpretive, "as everything implies meanings" (Josselson, 2011a:38).

From this it can be appreciated that the thematic analysis that results is not an analysis of one or more individuals, but rather an analysis of a set of texts (interview transcripts); and as observed by Josselson (2011a:151), there are difficulties in the relationship between an individual and the text of his/her story as there are bound to be "gaps between the meanings of experience (the participant's understanding of his or her life) and the authority of expertise (the researcher's interpretive analysis of that life)". Consequently, the meanings suggested by researchers are the result of their interpretations of the texts obtained. What can be added, however, is that when the researcher is present and part of the original storytelling (even if purely as a listener), there is a better chance of his/her interpretations of the eventual text being closer to what the storyteller him/herself understood from the story, than when the researcher approaches a text that s/he has not previously been involved in.

Data Analysis: The Process

As indicated above, the analysis began during the data collection stage, beginning with the transcription of each interview immediately after it was conducted, and a process of reflection upon the process and the story obtained, before proceeding to the next interview. The element of reflection was undertaken by both the researcher and the interviewee concerned, and contributed towards the process of constructing the texts eventually obtained.

Braun and Clarke (2006) note that analysis starts when the analyst begins to notice, and look for, patterns of meaning and issues of potential interest in the data, and this may be during the actual data collection. Likewise, Gehart et al. (2007) suggest that analysis is present during the entire research process, and is not a separate activity that commences once data has been gathered. The analysis of a story, according to Josselson (2011b:228), "involves gaining an overall sense of meaning and then examining the parts in relation to it, which will involve changing our understanding of the whole until we arrive at a holistic understanding that best encompasses the meanings of the parts".

To clarify the process involved in thematic analysis, Braun and Clarke (2006:87) outlined a six-step procedure as follows.

Phase Description of the process, Familiarising yourself with your data:, Transcribing data, reading and re-reading the , data, noting down initial ideas., Generating initial codes:

Coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code.

Searching for themes: , Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme., Reviewing themes:

Checking in the themes work in relation to the coded extracts generating (level 1) and the entire data set (level 2), clear definitions and names for each theme.

Defining and naming themes:

Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells; generating clear definitions and names for each theme.

Producing the report:

The final opportunity for analysis. Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating back of the analysis to the research question and literature, producing a scholarly report of the analysis. Source: Braun and Clarke (2006:87)

This model offers practical guidance, and consequently, it was adopted as the process for thematic data analysis in this study. On a practical level, once the data were collected, they were transcribed, and although this was time-consuming, and often frustrating and sometimes boring, it did nonetheless, as indicated by Riessman (1993), helped me to familiarise myself with the data. Bird (2005:227) even argued that transcribing is "a key phase of the data analysis within interpretive qualitative methodology". For the process of transcription, oTranscribe web, which is a tool designed to make transcription easier, was used. In one window, I could navigate the audio file and text document with the keys on my keyboard. No mouse pad swiping and tapping was required. More importantly, oTranscribe is designed in a way that the data (the audio file and the written transcript) never leaves the computer where it is used, hence making it a perfect tool for maintaining informants' anonymity; and in this case, it was used on my personal laptop which is password-protected for security reasons, and accessible only by myself.

Since I was solely responsible for collecting and transcribing the data, I came to the analysis with some prior knowledge and some initial analytical interests and thoughts. However, regardless of this knowledge, I followed the advice of Braun and Clarke (2006), who argue that researchers must be completely immersed in their data so they can internalise it in terms of both depth and breadth. They recommend that the researcher repeatedly re-reads the data, continually looking for patterns, and meanings. Consequently, despite the volume of the data from both research sites (UK and Libya) and the time it would take to engage in constant re-reading of the transcripts, I did follow the recommendation of Braun and Clarke (2006:87), who argued that this phase "provides the bedrock for the rest of the analysis".

During this reading process, the initial ideas concerning the codes arose. This stage is considered vital because it is at this point when the data is organised into meaningful groups (Tuckett, 2005). It involved going through the entire data and identifying and grouping the interesting aspects which I thought might be the foundation of the recurring patterns (themes). Seidman (2013:120) states that "researchers acknowledge that in this stage of the process they are exercising judgement about what is significant in the transcript". Therefore, coding as Saldaña (2015) indicates, is not only labelling; rather it involves linking words with meaning and, therefore, "leads you from the data to the idea and from the idea to all the data pertaining to that idea" (Richards and Morse, 2012:154).

Once all the data had been coded and organised, the next step was to look for relationships between codes, between themes, and between different levels of themes. In some cases, some codes were considered as themes and others as sub-themes. In other cases, they were abandoned. This phase was crucial as I started to sense the importance of the individual themes. Commonalities were highlighted within each of the themes, and differences were also noted whenever they occurred.

Then, the themes were refined. I was able to distinguish between themes and non-themes. At certain times, I merged two themes into one, and separated one single theme into sub-themes. At the end of this stage, I was able to clearly see my different themes and sub-themes fitting together nicely and telling a story about the data.

From this initial overall structure, I defined the themes to be presented in the analysis and refined them, doing what Braun and Clarke (2006:92) describe as "identifying the 'essence' of what each theme is about (as well as the themes overall), and determining what aspect of the data each theme captures". In this phase, I also began to think about how to name these themes in a concise and sensible way so that they could be meaningfully presented in the final analysis. Although I had already accorded working titles to the themes, I aimed for greater precision in conveying their meaning. The final stage of the analysis was writing-up the story of my data which included some extracts embedded within the analytic to illustrate the story. This analytic went beyond data description and made arguments in relation to my research questions.

Conclusion and Recommendations

leadership in their formative years, although at that time they may not realise that this is what is happening. Nonetheless, they are capable in some way, and through the adoption of minor roles organising or directing the work of others, they acquire confidence and skills of persuasion. With such confidence they embark on careers which ultimately take them to the dean's position, whether those careers are lifelong experiences in academia, or begin in industry where other contributory experience is gained. So life history plays its part in developing identity as leaders. However, each individual's life history is a complex phenomenon and within that, the influence of national culture is paramount since the predispositions to behave in a certain way as a leader, and towards a leader do, at the same time, affect that way an individual discharges the role of leader once occupying it. Consequently, the role is accepted and played out against a backdrop of cultural, and implicitly, social, expectation.

Recommendations for More Effective Senior Academic Leadership

What emerges from the conclusions is a need for potential senior academic leaders (deans), and universities to be aware of five major points, although these differ in the two different cultural environments of the UK and Libya.

Despite the research being conducted in two very different cultural and political contexts, there is agreement among the participants that they had all enjoyed a degree of success in the role of dean, irrespective of whether they had purposefully applied for this, or been placed in it having been pressured to do so by others. This element of success testifies to the fact that the dean's role is a sophisticated one entailing a variety of tasks, the discharge of which presents those in the position with a genuine personal and professional developmental opportunity. Participants confirmed this in several ways, mentioning that they had 'gained knowledge', 'made a contribution', 'could give even more in another similar or more senior leadership role'. Hence, it is not an opportunity to be rejected without contemplating the potential benefits.

The notion of dean (senior academic leader) in today's university has evolved from that of twenty years ago, such that there is no limit to the amount of work expected of the role. Certainly, in Libya, the role is one of management and does not embody any power to lead a faculty in an academic direction as the degree of centralisation, and the continuous change in regulations, are oppressive and prohibit initiative in the realms of curriculum advancement. In the UK, there is still the opportunity to engage in academic leadership in the role of dean, but this takes careful time- and work-management on the part of the individual, as the job is characterised by a greater degree of managerialism than in the past.

The notion of accountability is greater in the Libyan situation than in the UK scenario, since Libyan deans are usually placed in their positions for political reasons and whether they want the post of dean or not, there are societal expectations of how they will perform. This is a source of pressure for Libyan deans, and should be borne in mind both for appointees, and university top managers when making appointment decisions. It should also be borne in mind that in the aftermath of the 2011 Revolution, Libyan infrastructure and society remains in shreds, and that all positions of responsibility and so-called leadership are difficult to perform well as there is a shortage of general resources, and the need to use one's personal connections to underpin the academic enterprise is very real.

The lack of preparation for the leadership aspect of deanship is another important issue in the Libyan context, although the UK deans also raised the desirability of more ongoing training initiatives. Clearly, universities should devote attention and resources to properly equipping deans with the required skills to lead, and should recognise that leadership training and professional development go hand in hand. Professional development via attendance at seminars, professional association meetings, conferences, etc., must be supported as this overall effort serves to enhance deans' professional identities. And formal training should be more specific and related to deans' particular faculties so they can see the relevance, and thus obtain better outcomes from the training.

The role of dean whether characterised as leader, manager, leader-manager, or manager-leader, provides a bridge between top academic leaders in an institution, and those lower down the scale, for example, Heads of Department. Consequently, the role requires an extremely good communicator who must be prepared to function as an intermediary.

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