

ARTICLE

# Management profession and culture in transition: A case of Oman



Suhaila E. Alhashemi

*Department of Management, College of Economics & Political Science, Sultan Qaboos University, Seeb, Oman*

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**Abstract** Transition management seeks to guide the gradual, continuous transition process of socio-political practices and steer the outcome of change to reduce the uncertainty as well as produce desirable social outcomes and enhance resilience during the transformation. Omani managers are in the phase of transition as Oman is going through transformation and change in all its sectors which pose many challenges facing those concerned with the management profession. The purpose of this paper is to address such transition by focusing on management development knowledge with special reference to images of managerial professionalism and the tension that may arise due to cultural issues. It also highlights on the importance of planning in the process of transition and change. Twenty managers from various sectors in Oman were interviewed between 2015 and 2016. The outcome revealed how Omani managers are in line with the changes and transition, within the framework of the national and organization's culture that focuses on social and interpersonal aspects in decision-making and relationships at work. What influences management and change process in Oman is the Omani subcultures and their backgrounds but they all agree that change is a vital element that needs to be taken into consideration and culture plays a powerful role in the process.

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## 1. Introduction

Management practice in Oman has been undergoing a major metamorphosis over the past few years. One cannot over-see the fact that rapid change has marked our civilization,

knowledge as the basis of a new world economy, globalization, as a dominant international trend, instant world community through split-second communications and market fragmentations. Something of a paradigm shift in favor of professionalism seems to have swept through the management community. At the heart of the new professional ethos is the recognition of the need for the quality of the managerial know-how along lines once compatible with the international state-of-the-art and sensitive to the

*E-mail addresses:* [suhila@squ.edu.om](mailto:suhila@squ.edu.om),  
[suhilaebrahim@yahoo.com](mailto:suhilaebrahim@yahoo.com)

socio-cultural context of Oman. This two-pronged quest is clearly reflected in this study highlighting specific barriers and the transition into an organizational society.

Loorbach (2010, p. 166) defines transition management as: "analytically based on the concept of transition as multi-level, multiphase processes of structured change in societal systems." Transition involves many aspects, as such the role of human resources manager has changed and shifted over the years with an indication of the shift toward a strategic champion role. This in turn effects the organization in the form of training and development programs, rewards, etc. Other changes have been noticeable in terms of employment, growth of direct communication with the workforce such as team briefings and meetings between senior managers and the workforce and that is perhaps the clearest trend (Loorbach, 2010).

Another trend is experimentation with new management practices. according to Loorbach (2010) four main areas of activity: appraisal and reward, involvement and participation, training and development and status and security. The author indicates that those practices are not new but are associated with change. Management development is part of the transition practices taken from Western theories, various approaches and philosophies used have all been under some changes. Management literature has recently acquired renewed interest in the conventional concept of 'organizational climate' under the label of 'corporate culture'. This concept has been on the rise since the 1970s. The term generally refers to corporate ethos, partly designed and partly spontaneous, which bestows meaning and purpose on organizational membership and shapes management practice in specific ways. It is an invisible but highly potent force that ties members together as a cohesive body in the pursuit of shared goals. It is true to say that an average Omani manager relies heavily on highly personalized and informal methods and styles in the management of his organization. However, members of the young generation realize the fact that some of the experience, attitudes and beliefs, which their elders hold, are not always reliable or adequate for them in their effort to shape the future.

This paper investigates the management culture in transition, an attempt to better understand the present position and future prospects of the Omani managers and the role of development in changing the current culture to be in line with Oman's 2040 vision. This was fulfilled by interviewing managers from various sectors in Oman. Twenty managers were interviewed between 2015 and 2016. Focusing on images of managerial professionalism and its major issues and influence on the transferability of managerial know-how, taking into consideration the Omani development plan that focuses on economic diversification, industrialization, privatization, and foreign investment with the objective of reducing the economic dependency on the oil sector, being in line with Oman's 2040 vision.

### 1.1. Aim of the research

The purpose of this paper is to address the issues underlying management profession in Oman and changes and transition that has taken place and is still ongoing. Since the researcher is living and working in Oman, she found it interesting to

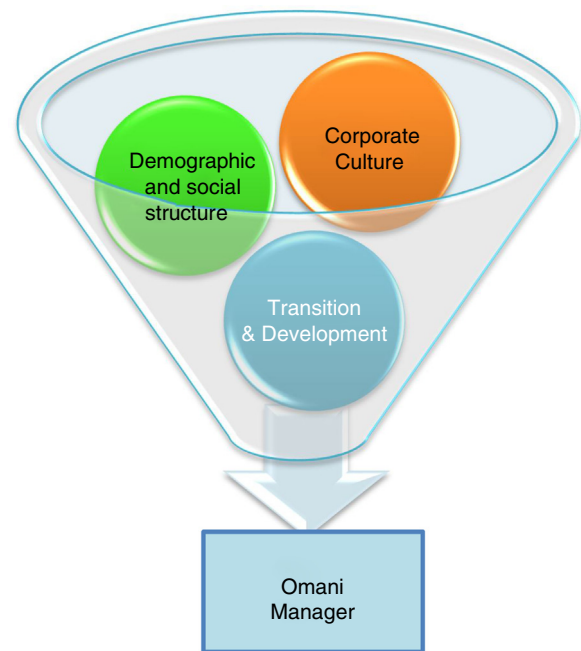


Figure 1 Aim of the research.

explore the changes and development that has taken place in Oman. The paper also seeks to investigate the role of culture in the process of such transition and challenges that face Omani managers with more accurate understanding of the forces and constraints relevant to the making of young management professional (Fig. 1).

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1. Culture and corporate culture

Contemporary definitions of culture looks at the notion of culture in terms of shared phenomena among members of a group with a common language, in a particular geographic region, during a specific historic period (Triandis, 1996). Morgan (1997) views culture as particular events, actions, objects and situations that are carried out in a unique way. According to Schein (2010), demands, expectations, and constraints originate from and are shaped by socio-cultural values, norms and mores, which have roots in a long history of traditions, religion, and popular belief systems. Hofstede (1980, p. 43) defines culture as "the collective mental programming of the people in an environment. Culture is a powerful socializing agent affecting not only members' perception of the world but their self-image as well (Hofstede, 1984, 2013).

Hofstede (1980, p. 45) describes national culture as "the common elements within each nation – the national norm – but we are not describing individuals." Most businessmen in the West, for example, regard acquaintance and discussion periods as opportunities in which they try to make their points quickly and efficiently. In the Far East and certain European countries there are reservations against such quick business meetings (Muna & Zennie, 2010; Harris & Moran, 1983). Looking at culture at the national level, there are some 'silent' languages of culture that adds on such as con-

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