



Leadership Practices Among Saudi Female Leaders in Higher Education

A Focus on Authentic Transformational Leadership

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ABSTRACT

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Leadership Practices Among Saudi Female Leaders in Higher Education
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Leadership literature suffers from a lack of indigenous perspectives and a heavy American and Western viewpoint. In a global world, with many cross-cultural interactions, it is important to contribute to diversity in research through more local perspectives, akin to ideas of *glocalization* and *indigenization*. With little research on educational leadership from the context of Saudi Arabia, its perspectives contribute to a broader understanding of leadership in different cultures.

The purpose of this study was to explore leadership practices among Saudi female leaders in public higher education based on authentic transformational leadership theory and the theoretical framework of The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership®.

This thesis combined qualitative and quantitative research methods. Empirical data was collected from 6 semi-structured interviews and 7 questionnaires. A thematic narrative analysis method was used, which enabled rich descriptions and theorisation of the findings. The sample included Saudi female leaders from the following positions: vice-deans, heads, and supervisors.

Research findings reveal that the participants define their leadership practices in accordance with authentic transformational leadership and The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership®. This particularly applies to the five practices in the following order: Model the Way, Encourage the Heart, Enable Others to Act, Inspire a Shared Vision and Challenge the Process. Participants describe authentic and admired leaders as honest and transparent, with firm core values and beliefs that confirm with their words and actions. In extension, the participants strive to embody these characteristics, indicating a conscious aim to align the core values and beliefs with their own practices. In addition, the findings endorse additional aspects to the theory in the Saudi context. Firstly, that values and actions in leadership practices are closely intertwined and influenced by Islam. Secondly, despite aspiring to lead exemplary and authentically, surrounding circumstances may hinder participants from implementing the preferred practices, resulting in risk-averse tendencies and less experimenting.

Finally, this study contributes to conceptualizing leadership practices and authentic transformational leadership theory in Saudi Arabia, by presenting a theoretical model that combines previous research with the new findings. Further research is suggested connected especially to organizational culture and its impact on authentic transformational leadership.

Key words: Saudi Arabia, female leadership, leadership, education, authentic transformational leadership, The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership®, indigenization

Through the narratives we understand the world...

Aminah Ottosdotter Davidsson

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ABBREVIATIONS, TERMS AND GLOSSARY

AUS	Australia
CAL	Characteristics of Admired Leader
cr	credit
HE	Higher Education
KSA	Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
TAMK	Tampere University of Applied Sciences
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UK	United Kingdom
US	United States

The following terms are used interchangeably:

Constituents, followers, subordinates, staff, and team members

Glossary of Arabic and transliterated Arabic words in order of appearance in the thesis

The closest meanings in English	Transliteration	Arabic
May Allaah exalt him and grant him peace	Salla Allaahu 'alayhi wa Sallam	صلى الله عليه وسلم
education, Islamic education, refer to p. 44 for detailed explanation	tarbiyyah	تربية
Intellectual knowledge, education	ta'leem	تعليم
fearing of Allaah	ma khaafatu Ilaah	مخافة الله
he/she fears Allaah	tukhaafi Ilaah	تخاف الله
Allaah is free from all imperfection	Subhaana Allaah	سبحان الله
The Great and Almighty	'Azza wa Jal	عز وجل
I ask Allaah for forgiveness	Astaghfir ullaah	استغفر الله

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Research topic

Saudi Arabia is currently going through many societal changes, much in line with Vision 2030, which is one of the country's largest national strategies in modern times. Instead of a mainly oil-driven economy, the government is strongly directing the economy towards a more knowledge-driven one, with much focus on the large youth population and their needs in terms of education and developing and securing future jobs. In 2020, young Saudis in the age group between 15-34 years old constituted 36.7 % of the total population (The General Authority for Statistics, 2020) while the age group below 25 years old constituted more than 50 % of the population (Saudi Vision 2030, 2020, p. 37). With this current large youth population, the need to create job opportunities for all young Saudis entering the job market has become increasingly more important. To do this, the government of Saudi Arabia has initiated the Saudi nationalization scheme also referred to as *Saudization*. It aims at giving Saudi nationals a fair opportunity, primarily in the private market, and thus reducing reliance on a foreign workforce (The European Relocation Association, 2018). Projects such as this, also go hand in hand with ideas of *localization*, *indigenization* and *glocalization* in terms of making the context more native in aspects related to for example, employment, business operations, curriculum, rules, and regulations, and making them more culturally and locally compatible to meet the needs of the local context.

In the middle of all this, leadership becomes crucial, to lead the way forward. One of the cornerstones of building a knowledge-based society is in the higher education (HE) sector. In 2018, there were 1.62 million students in HE in Saudi Arabia (Jamal, 2021). With this high number of students enrolled in HE institutes, HE leaders play a crucial role in developing their organizations, innovating for the future, and continuously supporting the development of staff and students. Based on a lack of research on educational leadership in Saudi Arabia, specifically in the English language, it is important to contribute with its perspective, to the otherwise to a great extent 'Western-dominated' research arena, with mainly US-oriented leadership literature. One aspect that calls for this is the cultural aspect

connected to sociocultural theory, that perspectives, ideas, and values related to leadership are culturally bound and are created, developed, and maintained in a specific social and cultural context. Like other countries and cultures, Saudi Arabia has its own unique cultural setting. One aspect that is unique for Saudi Arabia, which further emphasizes the need to localize research, is that government institutes are gender segregated. Hence, the public HE sector has separate branches for men and women while still being under the same umbrella in terms of for example governance and curriculum.

In the last decade there has been an increase in leadership related doctoral dissertations from Saudi Arabia, some of them pertain to leadership in HE and some of them leadership in general. A few of them have for example focused on different leadership styles, such as servant leadership and authenticity in leadership. Common between them is that they are conducted in either an exclusively male environment or by combining male and female participants from separate segregated organizations/offices. This reveals a gap, where the *female-only* perspective on leadership, from a *female-only* environment to a large extent is missing. The high number of women enrolled in HE, along with the high number of female-only organizations, call for the need for research in this environment.

In addition to the gap mentioned, there are no theoretical frameworks pertaining to leadership or educational leadership that have been developed specifically in Saudi Arabia or the Middle East. Thus, it becomes interesting to combine a theoretical framework from mainly Western-based theories with current research from the Saudi Arabian context, to further contribute to diversity from the perspective of female leaders in Saudi HE. Furthermore, in line with emphasizing the aims of the Vision 2030, this project further contributes to the development and prosperity of educational leadership in the region through localized research.

With a stance in authentic transformational leadership theory and a theoretical framework based on The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership® developed by Kouzes & Posner (2017), this study explores leadership practices among 6 Saudi female leaders in HE from three different branches at a public university in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Through a sequential mixed method research design, this case study includes a data collection process in two phases, starting

with a qualitative stage in the form of in-depth semi-structured interviews followed by a quantitative stage in the form of an online questionnaire. Furthermore, this study is rooted in a sociocultural perspective that beliefs and behaviours related to leadership practices are created and developed through social interactions in a specific context, which are well in line with Saudi Arabia's aim to localize job opportunities as well as their contents.

Due to a small-scale case study nature, this research cannot be generalized to include for example Saudi male leaders in HE, private HE institutions, or for that matter, the general population of Saudi female leaders in HE. Nevertheless, it can contribute to the extension of studies already conducted in this context, and further shed some light on Saudi female leadership practices considering authentic transformational leadership.

All things considered, this thesis aims at exploring leadership practices among Saudi female leaders in HE with a focus on authentic transformational leadership theory, based on the theoretical framework of The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership®.

1.2 Problem statement

Since the introduction of the King Abdullah Scholarship Program, under the rule of King Abdullah in 2005, Saudi Arabia has invested largely in education for its citizens, both nationally and abroad. As part of the ambition to build a universally competitive knowledge society through premium education, the kingdom has initiated several programs and projects. The Ministry of Education has for example completed three prominent projects called: The Educational Job List, The Virtual School and The Future Gate (Ministry of Education, 2021). Furthermore, other examples of Vision 2030 connected programs are the 'Irtiqaa' program, aiming at "engaging parents in their children's education" and the National Labor Gateway (TAQAT), ensuring "that the outcomes of [the] education system are in line with market needs" (Saudi Vision 2030, 2020, pp. 33, 36). Together with the large youth population entering HE, the demand for high quality education increases. Without a competent future workforce, the goals of for example Vision 2030 will

be harder to achieve. To be able to create and support that competent future work force, it is vital that the HE leaders are up to the task of creating and supporting the environment needed to meet with tomorrow's demands. This calls for an increased understanding of the leadership practices of Saudi leaders in HE in general and Saudi female leaders in HE in specific. Through more research on their leadership practices, a deeper understanding of the Saudi HE context and its competencies can be achieved, which in turn can help to develop and build a competitive knowledge-based society for future generations that Saudi Arabia is so clearly investing in.

1.3 Research relevance

To ensure the value of this research, its relevance was investigated in terms of *scientific relevance*, *social relevance*, and *practical relevance*. Each of the three components are presented below.

Scientific relevance and limited research

Firstly, the scientific relevance relates to identified research gaps in the topic of educational leadership in general and female educational leadership in Saudi Arabia in particular. Therefore, this research aims to contribute to filling these gaps and contribute to the debate and development in the field of education by drawing on authentic transformational leadership theory as well as contemporary Saudi Arabian context research.

According to Alvesson (2002), there is no lack of leadership literature, however, to a great extent "the academic work suffers from a heavily positivist bias and favours laboratory experiments or questionnaire studies that almost per definition neglect the organizational cultural context of leadership" (Alvesson, 2002, p. 95). Even though this was written in 2002, and since then there has been a greater number of research studies conducted in the Saudi context, there is still a lack of research in comparison with its 'Western-based' counterpart. This observation is supported by Hallinger & Hammad (2019), in their systematic review of synthesized trends of knowledge production from Arab societies in the field of educa-

tional leadership and management. Through their analysis of published work between 2000 and 2016, from nine leading international educational leadership and management journals, they identified 62 relevant articles. The review revealed that there was little representation of Arab situated educational leadership and management articles. Most were recent publications, revealing a lack of conceptual (proposing a theory or system) research, as most of the articles were empirical (aiming at answering explicit research questions) in nature. Furthermore, the authors point out the lack of more active efforts from the leading journals in the aim of diversifying and ensuring a broad representation to contribute to diversity in the field of educational leadership (pp. 20-32).

A recent study on authenticity in leadership by Algarni, (2018) partially aimed at filling this identified gap by presenting several theoretical and methodological contributions, as well as a definition of authenticity in leadership from the Saudi perspective (pp. 189-196). The study, which was conducted in six different private sectors in Saudi Arabia, does not include female participants, nor does it include the public education sector. Moreover, conversations with participants were done in Arabic. This supports a potential gap with limited research including Saudi female leaders in HE from the public sector, conducted solely in English. In addition, Algarni (2018), suggests six different dimensions for future research on authenticity in leadership. One of them relates to: "Behaviours & Practices of Authenticity in Leadership" (p. 186), which substantively connects to the topic of this thesis.

Social relevance and a need for a localized focus

Secondly, the social relevance relates to the need to promote localized research and cross-cultural understanding. In a globalized world, where organizations and stakeholders must work in an increasingly international arena, it is important to cater for cross-cultural understanding across borders and cultures as well as to encourage localization of context to maintain each culture's uniqueness. In this light, it is important to conduct studies in different environments to contribute to a broader understanding of leadership in different cultures. This is well in line with ideas of *glocalization* which is a linguistic hybrid of *globalization* and *localization*. In this thesis it refers to the idea of "blending and connecting local and global contexts while maintaining the significant contributions of the different cultural

communities and contexts” (Boyd, 2006; Khondker, 2004, as cited in Patel & Lynch, 2013, p.223). Considering this, the topic is socially relevant in the Saudi Arabian context as it can contribute to the development of local representatives and change agents who aspire to develop and add to the knowledge of educational leadership in the region.

The need for localizing research on leadership practices is supported by the findings of a large study, including surveying 16,637 people, from 43 different countries, between the ages of 18 and 30 years old. It was conducted by INSEAD’s Emerging Markets Institute, Universum, and the HEAD Foundation who investigated what Millennials want from work by looking closer at their “desire to become leaders, the importance of work-life balance, and the expectations around retirement” (Bresman, 2015). Their findings reveal that Millennials’ views on leadership and what they want from work, varied greatly across cultures. In particular, the study showed that the “kind of leader the Millennials want” varied to a greater extent across different cultures compared to “what they considered most attractive in the leadership role” (Bresman, 2015), which further emphasizes the need for more local research on perceptions of leadership in Saudi Arabia.

The need for more localized research also connects to diversity. Bearing in mind that this study only includes female leaders from a female-only HE environment, a gender approach may be suggested. However, according to Hoyt (2007), research on gender and leadership is mainly conducted in Western contexts, leading to a “culturally limited view of gender roles and the meaning of masculinity and femininity” (as cited in Schedlitzki & Edwards, 2018, p. 261). Instead, gender could be included under diversity, to balance out the current trend with more research on gender than on diversity (Schedlitzki & Edwards, 2018, p. 261). In this way, the social relevance of this thesis is more needed in terms of diversity than in terms of a gender perspective.

Practical relevance and recent societal changes

Since the discovery of oil in 1938, Saudi Arabia has evolved to a modern and industrialized society which has gone through rapid changes in a very short time. As a result, Saudi is going through a major cultural transformation, leading to new values and social norms as the people try to balance between the traditional and

modern customs. On its new path, the Saudi Vision 2030 serves as a compass for the future (see 2.5). This supports the practical relevance of this study as it can contribute to gaining an increased understanding of the current perceptions related to leadership, reveal potential areas of development, and contribute to the theory of authentic transformational leadership in general, and to the theory in the local context of Saudi Arabia specifically.

The following figure presents the identified gap that this research aims to contribute to.

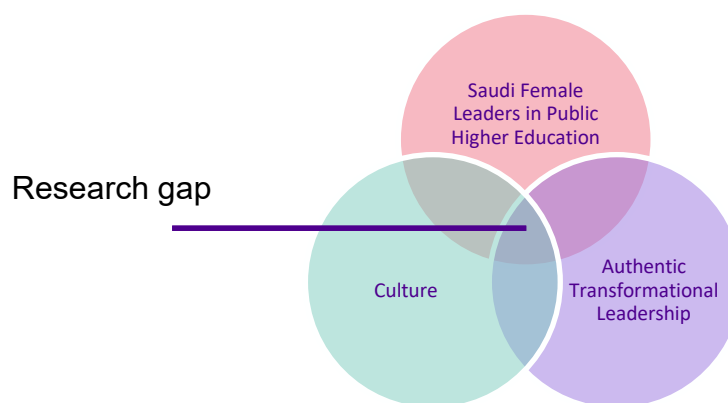


Figure 1. Research gap of knowledge, a continuation of identified gap by Algarni, 2018, p.3.

1.4 Research aims, objectives and questions

The strategic question that guides the thesis:

How do Saudi female leaders in higher education define their leadership practices in terms of authentic transformational leadership and The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership®?

The aims of the thesis are:

[1] to explore how Saudi female leaders in higher education define their leadership practices in terms of authentic transformational leadership and The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership®.

[2] to contribute to research and positive educational leadership growth in Saudi Arabia through knowledge and theoretical development,

[3] to support and enhance mutual respect and better cross-cultural understanding by adding to research involving female educational leadership in the Saudi Arabian higher education context,

[4] to contribute to research-oriented development work by combining previous theory and knowledge with new findings from professional practice in working life that can serve as a basis for future development projects.

The objectives of the thesis are:

1. Study the history and theories behind and related to leadership and authentic transformational leadership
2. Explore previous research on leadership in the context of Saudi Arabia
3. Build an interview schema and a questionnaire based on The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership® as a theoretical framework
4. To research and identify leadership practices among Saudi female leaders in higher education at a public state university, based on their own narratives, through in-depth semi-structured interviews and a questionnaire revealing perceptions and experiences
5. To thematically analyse the case studies and the collected data based on authentic transformational leadership theory and The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership®
6. Present the findings through the most common themes
7. Critically evaluate the findings and compare them with previous research
8. Suggest a theoretical model based on research findings to contribute to authentic transformational leadership style theory

Research questions

To achieve the above mentioned, this thesis will explore the following two research questions:

1. To what extent are participants using The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership® as part of their own leadership practices?
2. How do participants describe their *own* personal-**best** leadership experiences?

1.5 Theoretical framework - the five practices

The book *The Leadership Challenge*®, is a research-based leadership development framework compiled by James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner which is well in line with authentic transformational leadership. In their book, the authors present a conceptual model that they call **The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership**®. The five practices have been developed after many years of research in more than 100 countries among millions of participants. The conceptual framework is based on the gathered data from shared case studies of personal-best leadership experiences and in-depth interviews with leaders and constituents. In addition to the framework, the instrument LPI®: Leadership Practices Inventory® was also created. According to the LPI® normative database narrative, which presents the online research behind the Five Practices between 2005 and 2011, 77 % of the participants were from the US and the remaining 23 % were from more than 100 different countries. Among the top 12 respondent countries outside the US, Saudi Arabia was one of them (*The Leadership Challenge*, 2021). The respondents from the US displayed a significant greater use of all five leadership practices compared to participants from the rest of the world. However, the effect size was small, which revealed that the practice of the five leadership skills did not seem to differ much depending on national background (Posner, n/a), which makes it a potential framework to use for this thesis.

Each of the five practices are well connected with the descriptions of authentic transformational leadership and due to its framework nature, they can easily be used as a foundation for further research on the topic. Besides the five practices, Kouzes & Posner (2017) have also developed the subcategories of **The Ten Commitments of Exemplary Leadership**. These represent behaviours and actions that leaders can follow on their path to exemplary leadership (p. 23). Furthermore, the two authors hold that exemplary leadership practices is something that can be learnt and not something only a few people can master (p. 12). The five leadership practices and The Ten Commitments are as follows:

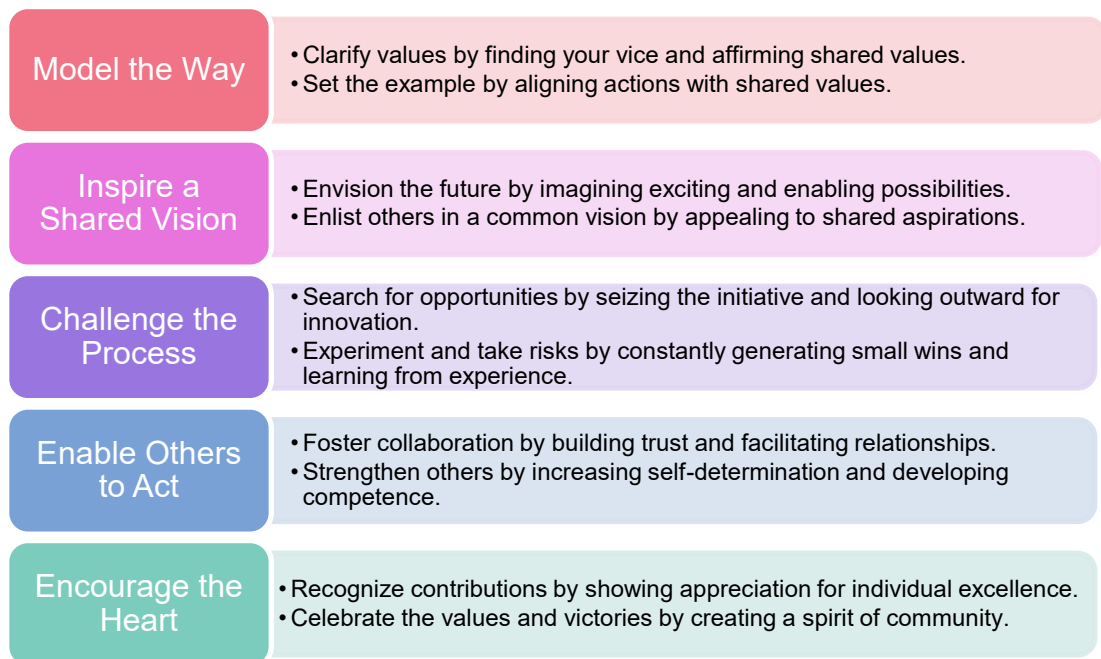


Figure 2. The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership® and The Ten Commitments (Kouzes & Posner, 2017, p. 24)

The first practice, ***Model the Way***, is rooted in leaders knowing themselves and *the values* that guide them as well as *setting the example* based on these values. By clarifying these values, leaders find their own voice (Kouzes & Posner, 2017, p. 14) and agency. This also connects to Hackman and Johnson's (2018) first theme related to the definition of leadership that '*leadership is about who you are*' (see 3.1.1). Through the core values, the leader not only knows the own self, but can also express these values and communicate them to others (Kouzes & Posner, 2017, p. 14). Hackman and Johnson (2018), link this ability to the leader's high level of *self-awareness* (p. 135) and important to point out is that the core values are not only at the heart of the leader's values, but also at the group's shared values. Through the shared values, it is easier for the leader to lead by example and encourage the way forward.

The leader's core values can also be connected to being *honest*, which was shown to be one of the main four characteristics of admired leaders around the world in Kouzes and Posner's (2017) research. In fact, honesty was the most important trait selected by respondents across the board (p. 33). Being true to oneself and knowing your own values is difficult without being honest. Furthermore, honesty can be connected to authenticity as in authentic transformational leadership mentioned in the literature review under 3.2.2 and 3.3.4. By being

honest and authentic, the leader models the way and comes across as both credible and reliable, and thus is more likely to earn the trust of the constituents (Kouzes & Posner, 2017, p. 35). Emphasizing that this *trust* needs to be ‘earned’, meaning that the leader ‘walks the talk’ and lives up to the own values and beliefs. Without that, the leader is less likely to earn any trust, nor respect, from the followers and could instead be perceived as uncredible. Moreover, authentic leadership is shown to have an extensive positive effect on followers and research supports that it “fosters feelings of self-efficacy (competence), hope, optimism, and resilience in subordinates” (Hackman & Johnson, 2018, p. 135).

The second practice, ***Inspire a Shared Vision***, connects to Hackman and Johnson’s (2018) other two definitions of leadership: ‘*how the leader acts*’ and ‘*what the leader does*’ (see 3.1.1). The visionary leader is both *envisioning the future* and *enlisting others* in a shared vision. Being visionary is perhaps one of the most important characteristics of the transformational leader as it provides followers with a sense of purpose and direction. This is envisaged in the vision, which “is a concise statement or description of the direction in which an individual, group, or organization is headed” (Hackman & Johnson, 2018, p. 117). A vision answers the *why* and therefore serves as the base of the organization. For the vision to be imperative, it must fulfil three criteria: It must be *realistic*, *achievable*, and *inspiring*; otherwise, it can have the opposite effect and followers may be dispirited and demoralized. Besides creating a foundation for the organization, a well-articulated vision also guides meaning, encompasses values, acts as a role model compass, and serves as a bridge between the present and the future (Hackman & Johnson, 2018, pp. 118-119). The time link is also described by Kouzes and Posner (2017) in their description of how the leader envisions the future:

The most important role of vision in organizational life is to give focus to human energy. To enable everyone to see more clearly what’s ahead of them, you must have and convey an exciting, ennobling vision of the future. The path to clarity of vision begins with reflecting on the past, moves to attending to the present, and then goes to prospecting into the future. The guardrails along this path are your passions — what it is that you care about most deeply. (p. 115)

According to Kotter (1990), an effective vision should not be too narrow and specific. Instead, it should leave enough room for people to take their own initiatives,

be relevant and yet provide enough guidance to move forward (p. 36). This connects to the next part of *Inspiring a Shared Vision*, which is to *enlist others*. Simply being visionary and envisioning the future is not enough to move an organization forward. Therefore, the vision for the future has to be in combination with what engages the followers and includes their hopes, dreams and aspirations (Kouzes & Posner, 2017, p. 119). Ultimately, this happens by communicating with the followers, motivating them, and lifting the shared ideals and values to higher grounds, making them possible for everyone. In this way, leaders “breathe life into visions” (Kouzes & Posner, 2017, p. 140), and through their charisma and passion for their job, they not only inspire themselves, but also others to excel at their profession (Hackman & Johnson, 2018, chapter 4).

The best leadership moments often happen in times of adversity, challenge, and change. In testing times, people tend to show their true faces and what they are capable of doing as well as not doing. Therefore, how leaders choose to deal with these situations often determine whether they are successful in their role. The third practice, ***Challenge the Process***, represents just that, and how the leader *Searches for Opportunities and Experiments and Takes Risks* while doing so. In their research, Kouzes and Posner (2009) describe how every single personal-best leadership story that they gathered included a moment of challenge in one way or the other. In some cases, change was brought upon the leaders and other times they sought it out themselves. What mattered the most was how well the leaders handled the situation and to what extent they seized the moment to innovate, be creative and challenge business as usual (p. 4). By seeking out opportunities, they were proactive and ready to meet new challenges. In fact, the studies showed that followers viewed proactive leaders, who took initiative, as more effective and better leaders, contrary to reactive and inactive ones (Kouzes & Posner, 2017, p.149, 151).

All in all, part of the success behind organizations led by authentic transformational leaders is seen in the leaders’ ability to be creative, innovative, and foresighted. They do not get too comfortable when things are moving forward, and the organization is successful. Instead, they present the ability to question the status quo, seek new opportunities and new solutions to problems. Studies show that everyone can think creatively, and the spectrum of creative people is wide.

However, there are three traits that creative people generally share, which are: “(1) they are hardworking and persevering, (2) they are independent and nonconformist in their thinking, and (3) they are comfortable with complexity and ambiguity” (Hackman & Johnson, 2018, p.113). Being creative also reaches beyond including only the leader, as authentic transformational leaders encourage followers to think creatively themselves by innovating, learning from failure and taking on a problem-solution approach. This further connects to the leader’s ability to *Experiment and Take Risks*.

Exploring new ways of doing things and preserving an openness to new ideas comes hand in hand with the leader’s ability to *Experiment and Take Risks* and enabling followers to do this in a safe environment. Without this explorative and accommodating nature, many opportunities will be lost. This is not to say that authentic transformational leaders act on an impulse or haphazardly, but rather that they do so based on mental toughness and stability. Kouzes & Posner (2009), portrays this skill in the following way:

Change can be stressful, so leaders must also create a climate in which people are psychologically hardy—in which they feel in charge of change. Part of creating a psychologically hardy team is making sure that the magnitude of change isn’t overwhelming. Leaders provide energy and generally approach change through incremental steps and small wins. (pp. 3-4)

By providing and encouraging a safe explorative atmosphere for followers, the leaders ultimately supports an environment for learning and growth, modelling the way by being learners themselves (Kouzes & Posner, 2017, pp 191-192).

Kouzes & Posner (2017), describe the fourth practice, ***Enable Others to Act***, at the heart of leadership as leaders do not achieve extraordinary achievements on their own; they do so in collaboration with others. By the leaders *Fostering Collaboration* and *Strengthening Others*, the organization can reach higher levels and followers achieve outstanding performance. At the centre of this lies *trust*, which is crucial for building the organization and everyone involved. For the leaders to be trusted, they must begin by trusting their followers. Furthermore, trust is seen as a precondition for catering for long-term relationships and collaborations. It sets the foundation for teamwork where each team member is valued, needed,

and listened to. In turn, a climate of trust will help build a climate of sharing, supporting, and learning from each other. Moving towards higher goals and achievements for the organization, leaders must nurture the team spirit so that team members feel that a joint effort makes all the difference. Thus, the leader must support everything that encourages trust, cooperative goals, reciprocity, and durable interactions, being it through the vision, procedures, projects, or work norms, to mention a few examples (chapter 9).

One of the key characteristics of authentic transformational leaders is their ability to communicate and to be interactive with the followers. Transformational leaders are excellent communicators, and they base their communication on the motives and needs of their followers (Hackman & Johnson, 2018, p. 116). Therefore, transformational leaders act surrounded by the followers and not from isolation in their offices. To support this two-way communication between the leader and the followers, it is important to nurture an environment where people feel listened to and where their thoughts, ideas and contributions are valued.

Ultimately, the key characteristic mentioned above is rooted in *Strengthening Others*, which is the second part of *Enable Others to Act*. Through empowering followers, the authentic transformational leader is sharing agency, giving everyone a voice, and encouraging them to own their work. It goes hand in hand with responsibility, accountability and ownership as followers will be more empowered to act on their own as well as making their own decisions (Hackman & Johnson, 2018, p. 122). By empowering others, the leader is sharing power and aiming at creating more leaders, contrary to more followers. Many authors connect this with the leader as a coach, coaching followers to reach their full potential by continuously developing in knowledge and skills. The authentic transformational leader does not feel threatened by sharing power, instead they thrive while doing so, as their ultimate goal is for everyone to succeed and excel.

The fifth and final leadership practice presented by Kouzes and Posner's (2017) research is to ***Encourage the Heart***. It is centralized around *Recognizing Contributions* and *Celebrating Values and Victories*. Indeed, people need to feel that they have a purpose and that they are making a difference in their work. Otherwise, especially when faced with challenges, giving up may be close at hand for

many and aiming for high achievements will be farfetched. The exemplary leader acknowledges this and sees the importance of *Recognizing Contributions*. “By paying attention, offering encouragement, personalizing appreciation, and maintaining a positive outlook, leaders stimulate, rekindle, and focus people’s energies” (Kouzes & Posner, 2009, p. 7). When setting high standards and having positive and high expectations, the exemplary leader shows faith in the followers and their abilities to excel. This cannot be done without some type of genuine and personal feedback together with recognition for their efforts. If the recognition is not genuine and anchored in individual achievements, they may come across as superficial and artificial. To avoid this, the exemplary leaders make sure that they get to know the followers at a more personal level, finding out what matters to them and what their needs are (Kouzes & Posner, 2017, p. 261). When getting to know the followers, it is also easier to see their contributions and bring them to surface.

As an extension to recognizing followers’ contributions, the exemplary leader encourages team spirit and strengthens the community by *Celebrating the Values and Victories* collectively. These public celebrations go beyond mere fun events as they also highlight and cherish the values and behaviours that are viewed as important and amiable (Kouzes & Posner, 2009, p. 7). Together, they build the organization’s story where role models are put forth as examples of the shared vision, values, and behaviours.

To sum up, The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership®, are about the stories we choose to live, and leadership is about the way leaders narrate and communicate that story. The exemplary leader makes conscious choices on that path. Does the leader’s story support what she is aiming for? Having everyone contribute to the story of educational leadership and ‘having a story worth telling’ will add to the richness of this field. In a global technical world, we are more in control of our stories and the opportunities of communicating them are numerous. In this sense, we should take ownership of our narrative by articulating our own story – not in the sense that we push our stories on others, but rather in the spirit of including others and having them share their experiences.

Appendix 8 illustrates the theoretical framework of this study including The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership® along with the subcategories of The Ten

Commitments as described by The Leadership Challenge (2021). Furthermore, figure 3 on the next page presents the connections between the strategic question, the research questions, the theoretical framework, and the interview questions. Each question is carefully designed based on the following:

1. the aim or the research question,
2. The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership®, and
3. The Ten Commitments that are stemming from the five practices.

Furthermore, Appendix 11 illustrates a more detailed summary of the research questions, the theoretical framework and the interview questions.

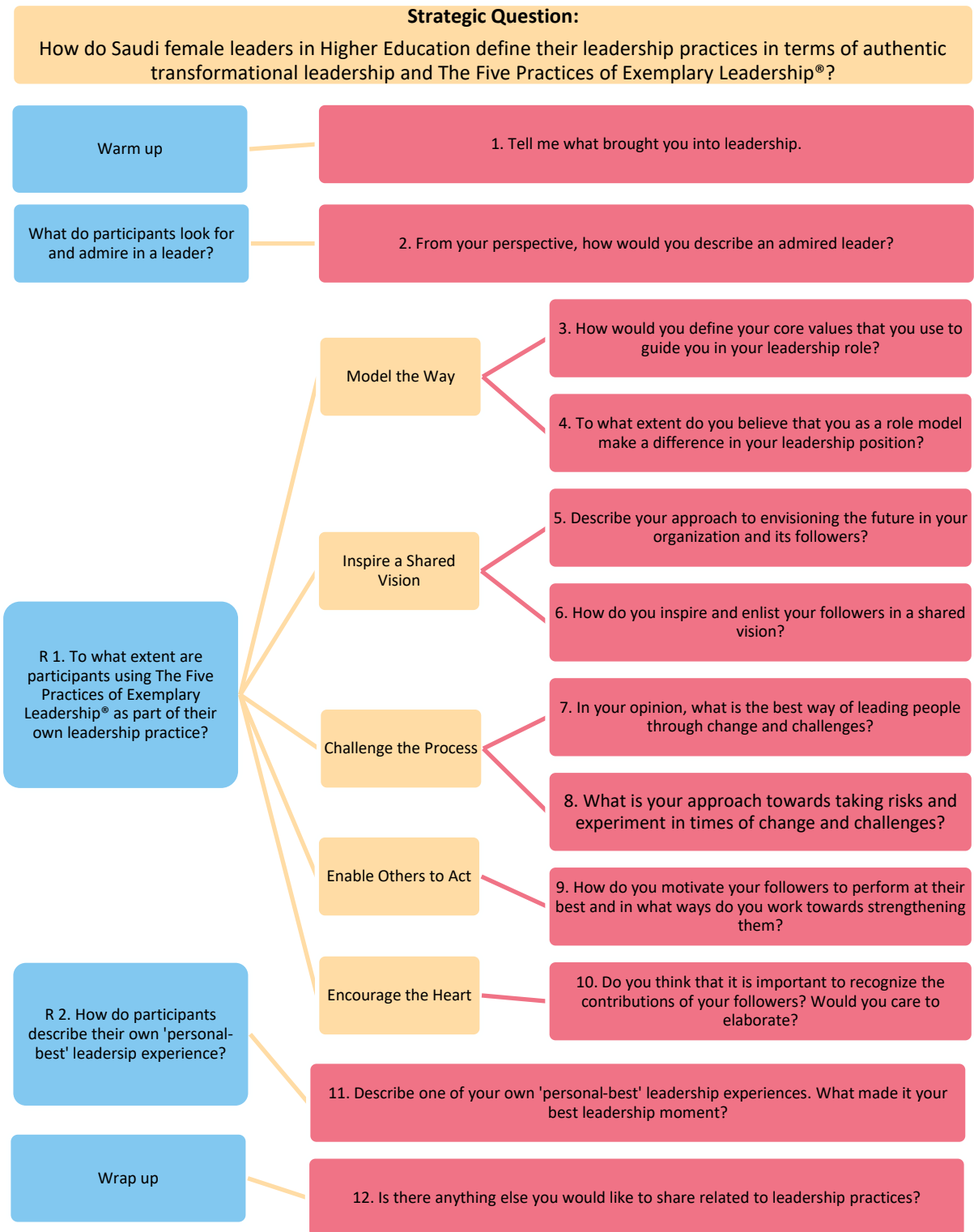


Figure 3. Interview questions based on research questions and the theoretical framework of The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership®.

1.6 Thesis structure

This thesis is organized into six chapters. The first introductory chapter includes a presentation of the research topic, the problem statement, and an explanation of its relevance. It also presents the research aims, objectives and the two research questions. Followed by this comes the theoretical framework of The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership®, as part of authentic transformational leadership theory.

The second chapter sets the scene of the study by briefly describing the population and culture of Saudi Arabia. It also presents the setting of public HE, with a special focus on female leaders. In the end, this chapter presents the case university and its leadership structure as well as the Saudi Vision 2030.

The third chapter consists of the literature review, divided into three parts: leadership, authentic transformational leadership, and leadership practices in Saudi Arabia. The first part describes definitions of leadership and their relationship to culture, communication, and education. The second part presents the theory of transformational and authentic transformational leadership. The third part presents the key features of: Islamic and traditional culture, educational leadership and its practices, and authentic transformational leadership.

The fourth chapter describes the methodology which guided this research by presenting its approach, philosophy, design, and ethics. Subsequently, it presents the data acquisition methods and the different methods of data analysis.

Chapter five is an extensive presentation of the qualitative and quantitative findings of the semi-structured interviews and the questionnaire. Its presentation follows the interview questions which are based on the theoretical framework. Findings are presented in their narrative form with evidence from the collected data.

The sixth chapter presents the conclusions and discussion of the findings by comparing them to The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership® and the theory of authentic transformational leadership. This chapter concludes by elaborating on the limitations of the study along with recommendations for further research.

2 BACKGROUND

The first aim of this research is to explore leadership practices among Saudi female leaders in HE in Saudi Arabia. As some of the international readers may not be familiar with the Saudi context and culture, this chapter will present some background information related to the following topics: the population and culture in Saudi Arabia, the cultural dimensions based on Hofstede's model, the Saudi public HE system, Saudi female leaders in HE, and finally the case university and its leadership structure. Setting the scene also supports the third aim, which is to support and enhance mutual respect and better cross-cultural understanding, especially as this cultural context is underrepresented in the leadership literature.

2.1 Population and culture in Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia is the largest country on the Arabian Peninsula in both geographical size and population. It also has one of the largest youth populations in the world compared to the population. Mid-year 2019, the population estimate in Saudi Arabia was 34,218,169 with most of the population being below 35 years old, and 25% of the population being below 15 years old (Ministry of Education, 2019). Besides the 63% Saudi nationals, consisting of ethnical Arabs descending from nomadic tribes, the population also includes 37% non-Saudi-citizen expatriates from many different nationalities. This makes Saudi Arabia one of the countries with the highest rates of residents born abroad (General Authority for Statistics, 2018; Cultural Atlas, n.d.).

The main Saudi Arabian culture is essentially traditional and conservative and ultimately influenced by Islamic beliefs and values which are guiding the social, familial, political, and legal lives of people. The Saudis are also known for their strong moral codes and cultural values found in "hospitality, loyalty and a sense of duty to support their community" (Cultural Atlas, n.d.). Personal honour and integrity also play an important role in the culture, along with the perceptions of what belongs to the public and private domain, which often leads to the Saudis being perceived as reserved by outsiders.

Connected to Islamic and national values, modest behaviour between the two genders is highly encouraged, which can be seen in some of the social norms. In-person communication between unrelated men and women is avoided and to give both genders their personal space, gender segregation is applied in for example schools, universities, banks, and government institutions. However, with many women joining the workforce the last couple of years, there is a visible shift in the face-to-face interactions, as it becomes more frequent.

Cultural dimensions

Hofstede's six cultural dimensions (6-D) model can serve as a model to distinguish certain cultural attributes in different nations, even though it does not represent the entire spectrum of national cultures. The six dimensions are as follows: *Individualism versus Collectivism*, *Power Distance*, *Uncertainty Avoidance*, *Masculinity versus Femininity*, *Long Term versus Short Term Orientation*, and *Indulgence versus Restraint* (Hofstede, n.d.).

According to Hofstede's 6-D model, Saudi Arabia is described as a *collectivist* culture with a high sense of loyalty towards the group, being it the family, the tribe, or the society. This connects to cultivating strong relationships, and all members are encouraged to take responsibility for the group (Hofstede Insights, n.d.). Catering for the own group makes social networking especially important together with knowing the right people and having the skill of switching and combining between the social and professional contexts.

Other elements of the Saudi national culture include *high-power distance*, with societal members being hierarchically divided. In societies with a large degree of Power Distance, the hierarchal structure needs no justification and is largely accepted by the members of the society (Hofstede Insights, n.d.). This can be seen, for example, in the hierarchical structure between leaders and constituents in Saudi HE (see 2.4). The high-power distance culture is also supported by Saudi Arabia being a *Masculine* society in which success and achievements are reached through competition and striving to be the best. Emphasis is put on quantity, equity, and high performance. Furthermore, Saudi Arabia has a *high level of uncertainty avoidance* and thus prefers to avoid uncertainties and stick to what is

considered secure. This can be seen in a high need for rules, (despite these rules not always being adhered to), a rigid system of belief and behaviour, as well as a reluctance in accepting innovations and new ideas (Hofstede Insights, n.d.).

Finally, the Saudi Arabian culture is considered *a short-term oriented culture*, where the past acts as a moral compass for the future and thus change is looked at with scepticism (Hofstede, n.d.). Instead of preparing for the future through long-term planning, everything has its own time and decisions are often taken quickly. This dimension also includes a normative approach with a strong need to settle absolute truths and at the same time value and respect traditions (Hofstede Insights, n.d.).

2.2 Public higher education in Saudi Arabia

In 2021 there were 29 state universities in Saudi Arabia (Ministry of Education, 2020). Public HE is free for nationals, residents, and external scholarship students. Due to the large youth population, the number of enrolled HE students is considerable. During the 2014–2015 academic year, there were 1,527,769 registered HE students in Saudi Arabia (Ministry of Higher Education statistics, 2017 as referred to by Shafai, 2018, p.10). Besides the free public HE, many Saudi students have also been granted scholarships to study in universities abroad as part of the King Abdullah scholarship program, which was established in 2005. According to Alamri (2011), the number of abroad Saudi students exceeded that of abroad students from “any other country in the world” (as cited in Shafai, 2018, p.10).

Most higher leadership positions are held by Saudis. The reasons for this, as summarized by Alogali (2018, referring to Shah, 2006; Smith, 2003), are first, the nation’s aim for self-reliance, and second, to maintain an Islamic educational infrastructure based on values and faith-consciousness (p. 23).

2.3 Saudi female leaders in higher education

There is some existing research on female educational leadership in HE in Saudi Arabia, although it is not extensive. A few examples of PhD dissertations, which include women, were made by Alogali (2018), Shafai (2018), and Alqarni (2019). Furthermore, according to Almudarra (2017), the lack of research also applies to female educational leaders in general education between elementary, intermediate, and high school (p. 43). Thus, investigating Saudi female leadership in HE becomes interesting not only to add to the indigenous perspectives in the literature, but also due to its unique segregated environment, with men and women working in parallel separate campuses. Due to the segregated public education system, there is an equal need for male and female teachers. For example, Almudarra (2017), cites a number of government resources related to this. One of them, from the Ministry of Education reveals that the number of female teachers in the country exceeded the male counterparts in 2014. Furthermore, the number of female graduates was reported larger than the male graduates in the 8th development plan conducted by the Ministry of Economy and Planning. And finally, referring to the previously large number of Saudi students studying abroad, according to the Saudi Press Agency (2012) as many as 34,000 female students were studying abroad in thirty-one different countries (as cited in Almudarra, 2017, p. 42).

Even though female leaders in HE is rare in the very highest leading position such as presidents and deans, there are a few female deans. However, this underrepresentation is not the case on the female campus, with vice-deans, heads, and supervisors all being women, as the segregated campuses requires this. An interesting point related to this female-only environment is shared by Almudarra (2017). After presenting research on women in leadership positions in western countries and how they are still underrepresented in leading HE positions, she reflects on the opportunities a female-only environment also provides. She states,

As such, Saudi Arabian institutions provide a female only space in which females lead females potentially free from the previously discussed negative attitudes towards women from males in the region. It also allows women to take up leadership positions which, due to societal, cultural and patriarchal attitudes they may not have succeeded in getting if competing against males. (p. 43)

This observation adds to the perspectives of possible positive benefits in terms of leading position opportunities for Saudi women, which can serve as a reflection point to gender ideas stemming from the west.

2.4 Case university and leadership structure

The case university is a public university located in Saudi Arabia. It consists of two main campuses, one for women and one for men. In addition, the university has several branches outside the main ones. Like most university structures around the world, each main campus is divided into several faculties, departments, and centres, offering not only degree programs and courses, but also centres of development and research, recreational activities, childcare, schools, hospital, clinic, and lab services, to mention some of the numerous facilities. As this thesis focuses on Educational Leadership, a brief breakdown of the basic hierarchical structure is useful (Figure 4). Related to the leadership hierarchy, the University President holds the highest position, directing, overseeing, supervising, and developing all the sectors and their various functions of the university. Following the University President there are several, both female and male vice-presidents, deans, vice-deans, deputies, and directors, all of them responsible for their own subordinate administrations. In turn, they are overarching the subordinate heads, supervisors, and coordinators. From this hierarchical structure, this study includes semi-structured interviews with 6 Saudi female participants and a questionnaire answered by 7 Saudi female participants from the following leadership positions, highlighted below: vice-deans, heads, and supervisors.

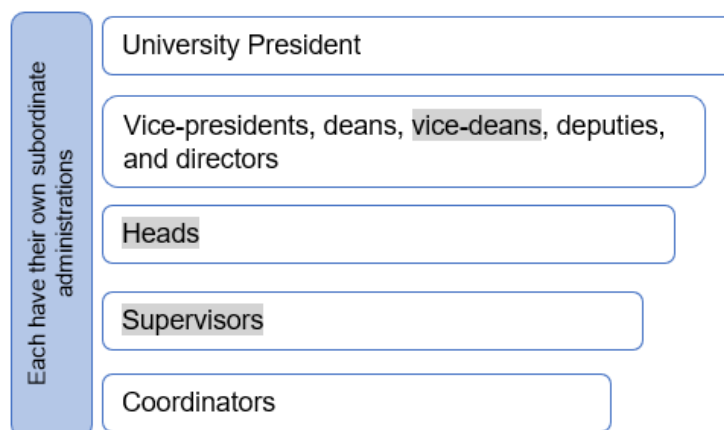


Figure 4. Basic leadership structure without subordinate administrations

2.5 The Saudi Vision 2030

As leadership is a main part of Saudi Vision 2030, a brief introduction is useful at this point. Vision 2030 is Saudi Arabia's national vision for the future launched in 2016. It is described as "an ambitious yet achievable blueprint, which expresses [the nation's] long-term goals and expectations and reflects [the] country's strengths and capabilities" (Saudi Vision 2030, 2020, p. 6). While recognizing the country's many strengths, the vision takes a clear stance in its main asset, the Saudi people themselves. In the foreword, written by the crown prince Mohammad Bin Salman Bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud, it says,

Our country is rich in its natural resources. We are not dependent solely on oil for our energy needs. Gold, phosphate, uranium, and many other valuable minerals are found beneath our lands. But our real wealth lies in the ambition of our people and the potential of our younger generation. They are our nation's pride and the architects of our future.

Moreover, the Saudi Vision 2030 (2020) includes three main themes: a vibrant society, a thriving economy, and an ambitious nation. Leadership is an essential part of each theme and a few examples, especially related to education, can be highlighted. Firstly, the vision recognizes the importance of nurturing the younger generation from a collectivist view by firstly strengthening families and secondly empowering the society (p. 28-29). Part of this includes developing the character of the younger generation to include "fundamental values of initiative, persistence and leadership, as well as social skills, cultural knowledge and self-awareness" (p. 28). In addition, this also connects to investing in education and training "particularly in developing early childhood education, refining our national curriculum and training our teachers and educational leaders" (p. 36). A final example emphasizes investing in human capital toward leadership by working "towards building a broad talent base, so they may become leaders of the future" (p. 69).

3 LITERATURE REVIEW

This thesis focuses on exploring leadership practices among Saudi female leaders in HE considering authentic transformational leadership in light of The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership®. First, the research review looks at leadership and how it relates to culture, communication, and education. Second, it leads on to present the theories of Transformational Leadership and Authentic Transformational Leadership. Third, the literature review presents leadership practices in Saudi Arabia, specifically looking at Islamic and traditional culture influences, educational leadership in Saudi Arabia, Saudi educational leadership style practices, and finally, authentic leadership in Saudi Arabia. An overview of the literature review and its parts can be seen in Figure 5.

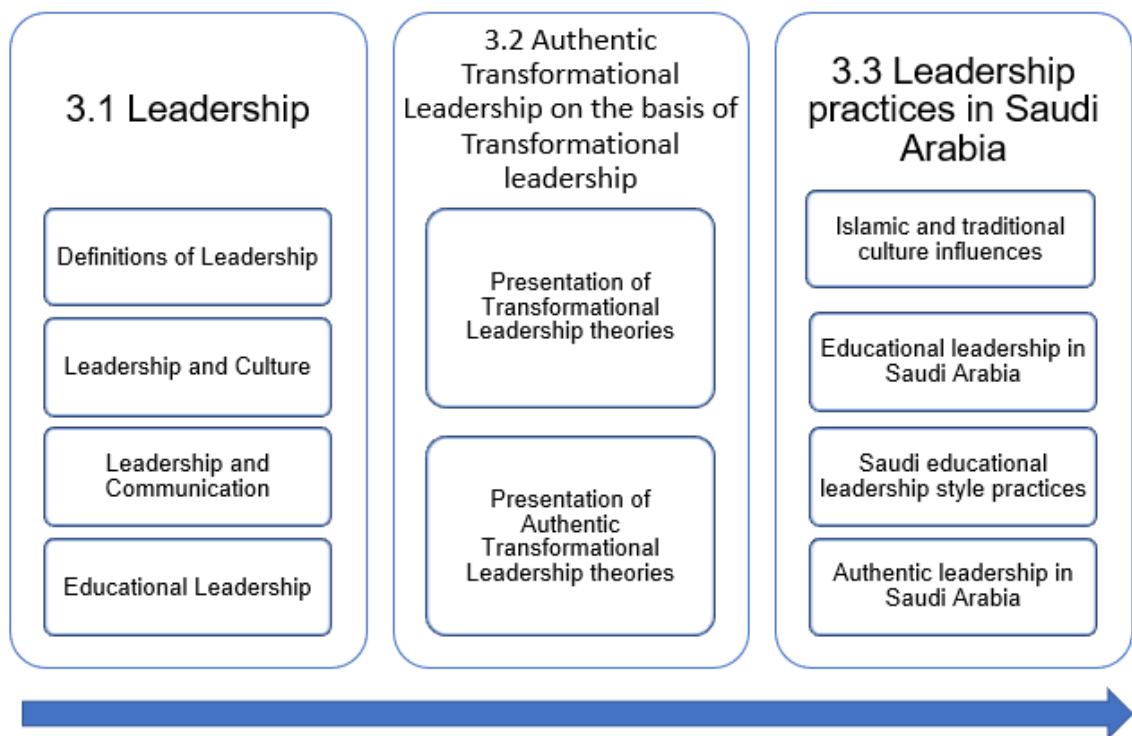


Figure 5. An overview of the literature review and its parts

3.1 Leadership

3.1.1 Definitions of leadership

Leadership continues to fascinate people around the globe and with the rise of varied internet platforms in a globalized world, the interest in leadership in different fields goes further beyond only leaders and researchers. Today, the amount of leadership literature, podcasts, videos, and social media platforms are numerous, and the audience seems to have expanded further to include new target groups through the perspectives of leadership coaching and self-development to mention some. In the jungle of leadership literature, it can be difficult to navigate between all the advice, recommendations, dos and don'ts. Allio (2013), described this extensiveness as an "endless avalanche" and an "appetite for leadership advice" and presented the following figures:

Amazon offers almost 60,000 different books on the leader and over 80,000 on leadership, a more than six-fold increase over the past ten years. Google cites millions of references to leaders and leadership, and their recent Ngram analysis shows that the term "leader" has appeared in the literature from 1990 to 2008 almost 50 percent more often than the term "manager" – and ten times more often than the term "follower." (p. 4)

Although these figures reveal an extensive interest in the leadership field, "academics don't even agree on what constitutes leadership or which leadership practices can be successfully emulated" (Allio, 2013, p. 4). Allio (2013), elaborates on a few reasons why it is difficult to define leadership. One of the reasons could be that leadership is elusive and it emerges and develops over time. Another reason can be that leadership is complex and that it depends on many internal as well as external forces, such as the expectations of the constituents, the organizational culture, and the surrounding environment (p. 5). A third reason could be the idea of leadership being linked to what it means to be human, rooted in that all human activity, in any society, links back to leadership in one way or the other (Hackman & Johnson, 2018; Kouzes & Posner, 2017, p. 12), further underpinning its diversity and complexity.

In terms of research, this rises the need to find aspects of leadership that are common across the board as well as the need to find local viewpoints. According to Yukl (1989), the various definitions of leadership share the aspect of “influence”, but otherwise they have very little in common (p. 253). Instead, the spectrum of definitions triggers “different meaning and lead to different lines of thinking, related to the context in which the term is used” (Alvesson, 2002, p. 93). Due to the multiple definitions of leadership as well as its varied nature, in terms of culture, settings, contexts, positions and personal characteristics, many researchers hold that there is no one-size-fits-all definition of leadership.

Alvesson (2002) describes the difficulty in defining leadership using a general and coherent term for that same reason, as the diverse settings give leadership a richness and complexity which is difficult to generalize. Furthermore, he explains that a general definition is not easily united with the complexity of attributing meaning through language as well as the complexity of categorizing and ordering social contexts. Instead, this supports the need to examine the meaning of leadership and how it relates to leaders from a local perspective, from a particular social group and environment (p. 93-94). Therefore, in an attempt to present a broad definition of leadership allowing room for local interpretation, and well in line with Yukl’s observation above, Northouse (2010) suggests the following definition:

“Leadership is a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal” (p. 3).

In line with leadership as a human interaction Kip Tindell’s definition is useful:

“Leadership is not something you do to people, but rather something you do with people” (as cited by Hackman & Johnson, 2018, p. 12).

Due to the broad definitions of leadership, some theoretical ideas are needed to direct this thesis’s examination of leadership practices to prevent them from moving in various directions, resulting in a too broad understanding (Alvesson, 2002). So, to open up for a local examination, some conceptualization is needed to identify perceptions and ideas of leadership among leaders. Hackman and Johnson

(2018), present four broader themes related to the definition of leadership, previously mentioned under the theoretical framework presentation (see 1.4).

[1] **Leadership is about who you are.** This theme evolves around the traits and characteristics of the leader and is focusing on the leaders as the centre of action.

[2] **Leadership is about how you act.** Stemming from the “the exercise of influence and power” (p. 11), this category focuses on who has power and influence over whom. Researchers such as Alvesson (2002) also connects this to the meaning-making process, viewing leadership as a “culture-influencing activity” where leaders are viewed as “agents working through culture as the medium and target of action” (p. 105).

[3] **Leadership is about what you do.** This perspective differs from the previous one in terms of its relation to constituents and their needs, or their ambitions to achieve a particular goal. It is about the impact the leader has on constituent’s behaviour as well as the process of activities and their achievements (Hackman & Johnson, 2018, p. 11).

[4] **Leadership is about how you work with others.** This theme focuses on the collaboration taking place between leaders and constituents in a united approach towards a common goal. It is a sort of partnership that is found in ‘servant leadership’ (p. 12) where the focus is primarily on serving others, “looking for others’ needs and interests before considering one’s own, empowering others to perform better, caring and serving others to influence them to achieve common goals” (Spears, 2010, as cited in Shafai, 2018, p. 32).

Based on leadership as a way of communication along with the four themes above, Hackman and Johnson (2018) conclude the following definition of leadership:

Leadership is human (symbolic) communication that modifies the attitudes and behavio[u]rs of others in order to meet shared group goals and needs. (p.12)

The various leadership definitions from various perspectives and contexts support the importance of a local approach as it “is important to be somewhat careful

in imposing a particular definition on leadership and instead be open to the meanings ascribed to 'leadership' by the natives" (Alvesson, 2002, p. 115). Thus, in line with Alvesson's ideas, the objective of this thesis in terms of leadership definitions "is not so much to develop very broad generalizations, but to say something of more relevance for a particular sector of organization or a kind of situation" (p.116). What does the art of leadership practices look like among Saudi female leaders in HE?

3.1.2 Leadership and culture

As pointed out in 3.1.1, ideas and perceptions of leadership is part of a social process and it cannot be examined without considering the culture in which it lives and grows (Alvesson, 2002, p. 94). This culture entails not only the organizational culture, but also other parts of culture such as national and local cultures. It can be described as an organic process where the existing culture determines and frames interactions between leaders and constituents, also connecting it to ideas of leadership based on communication. Thus, leadership and culture are closely intertwined. Schein & Schein (2016), picture this close link as "two sides of the same coin" (p. 1), describing how leadership emerges from the "dynamic processes of culture creation and management" (p. 1). The authors go on to describe this dynamic process from an evolutionary perspective, where leaders shape culture and culture shapes leaders (p. 2). The leader's ability to view and analyse the own culture, realise its limitations, and develop and adapt the culture is portrayed as the "ultimate challenge of leadership" (p. 2). It is also this consideration of culture which separates leadership from management and administration (p. 223).

Although this thesis highlights the link between culture and leadership, it is not looking at the detailed relationship between the two by using theories specifically related to culture and organizational culture.

3.1.3 Leadership and communication

According to Kouzes and Posner (2017, p. 26, 28), leadership does not happen in isolation or by leaders standing on their own. Instead, it happens in the relationship and interaction between human beings, in this case leaders and constituents, and both parties are equally important. For leadership to take place, this relationship involves leaders mobilizing “others to want to struggle for shared aspirations” (Kouzes & Posner, 2017, p. 26), which happens through communication. In line with looking at leadership as a social interaction process between leaders and constituents or individuals and groups, it becomes important to examine it from a communication perspective. Hackman and Johnson (2018), describe leadership as the core of human experience and therefore argue that it is best examined from the perspective of communication and creating meaning. In that sense, the study of leadership goes beyond the academics and is part of so much more. It is simply part of human life and there is not a day that goes by except that we are all in contact with leadership in one form or the other, through for example, culture, governments, religious communities, businesses, sports clubs, and education systems (pp. 2, 5). Furthermore, from a communication perspective, Hackman and Johnson view leadership mainly as a symbolic activity where words and behaviours are the leaders’ greatest communicators. In this sense, successful leadership comes hand in hand with “skilful communication” (p. 22), and the leader’s ability to master ways of communication combined with understanding the cultural context.

3.1.4 Educational leadership

According to Bush (2007), educational leadership gained more interest in the early part of the 21st century connected to the idea that the quality of educational leadership has a significant impact on school and student outcomes. Furthermore, he points out how effective and supportive educational leaders are linked to trained and dedicated teachers as well as an optimal learning environment for students. The difference from organizational leadership in general is that educational leadership is centrally focusing on the *purpose* and *aims* of education. Thus, in educational leadership, there is a significant importance of an existing

and close link between management and the purpose and aims of education. However, if there is an excessive focus on management, with too much emphasis on procedures and school operations, it may run the risk of undermining the purpose and values of education (p. 391). Nevertheless, depending on the context and situation of the school, there may be a more or less need for a managerial focus and therefore it is crucial for the educational leader to adapt to the needs of the school (Leithwood et al., 1999), being it with more management focus or with more visionary focus.

3.2 Authentic transformational leadership

Besides taking a stance in The Five Exemplary Leadership Practices® as the theoretical framework, this thesis is also taking a stance in authentic transformational leadership style theory. Many scholars view authentic transformational leadership as an extension of transformational leadership and therefore transformational leadership is presented first, followed by a presentation of authentic transformational leadership theory.

3.2.1 Transformational leadership – the root

Transformational leadership theories were mainly developed in terms of business and management theories of leadership (Robinson, 2016). It has its origin in the work of James MacGregor Burns from the late 1970s where he contrasted transformational leadership with transactional leadership based on Maslow's Hierarchy of Need (Hackman & Johnson, 2018, p. 100) (Figure 6). Burns connected transactional leadership to traditional leadership style where only the basic human needs in Maslow's model were fulfilled. The transactional leader focuses on the three basic needs of *physiological needs*, *safety needs* and *love & belongingness needs* (Hackman & Johnson, 2018, p.100-101). In exchange for the followers' performance, the transactional leader ensures that these three needs are met and thus the reference to a transaction or an exchange. The transformational leader takes it one step further and goes beyond those basic needs to also fulfil the higher-level needs of the followers. So, the transformational leader not only

secures the three basic needs, but also aspires to go further, with more focus on the individual followers and their higher needs of esteem and self-actualization (Hackman & Johnson, 2018, p. 101). According to Hackman and Johnson (2018), the transformational leader inspires followers to go beyond the mere transactional relationship by stimulating their higher-level needs ultimately empowering and encouraging them to achieve higher levels of motivation and morality. In this light, the aim of transformational leadership is not to create more followers, but rather to create more leaders, active moral agents (p. 101) and change agents (p. 105).

The original version of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs contains five needs from bottom to top: *physiological, safety, love and belonging needs, esteem, and self-actualization*. They are often illustrated as a pyramid and ranked in order. However, in Maslow's work from 1987, he updated and clarified this ranked order and instead explained that the order of needs is more flexible, depends on external circumstances or individual diversity, and that more than one need can determine behaviours simultaneously (Mcleod, 2020). Despite this, Maslow argued that the four basic needs, if not being met, they take precedence and therefore he referred to them as "deficiency needs" or D-need. On the other hand, the highest need of *self-actualization* is referred to as the "being-need" or the B-need and entails a stage of personal growth (Mcleod, 2020). The five needs have later been extended to include seven and eight needs, where some of them are linked to Maslow's own work and some to interpretations of it. The commonly illustrated pyramid of five needs is shown below:

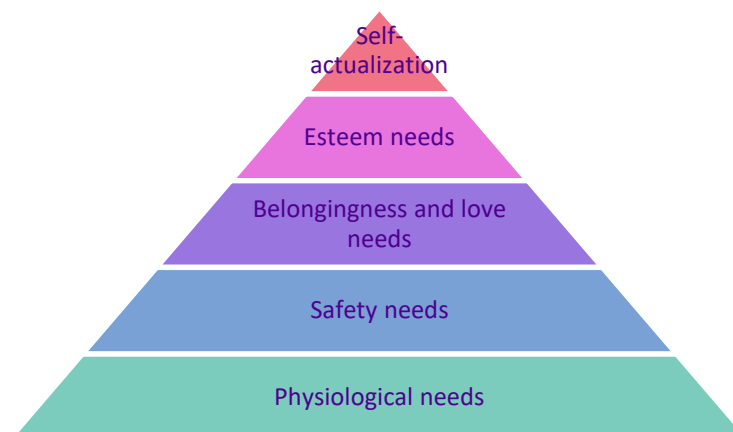


Figure 6. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

According to Bass and Steidlmeier (1999), most leaders portray both transactional and transformational leadership characteristics and seldom only portray one of the styles. Also, as described above, the transformational leadership style is an extension of the transactional leadership style. In that sense, when transactional and transformational leadership styles are discussed, it is in the focus of what main characteristics leaders display in the so called “defining moments” and what choices they make (p. 184).

3.2.2 Authentic transformational leadership – the extension

Some researchers claim there is a danger of transformational leadership being manipulative, narcissistic, deceptive and exploitative of followers (Joo & Nimon, 2014, pp. 581-582; Hackman & Johnson, 2018, p. 133). As a reply to this critique of transformational leadership being unethical, Bass and Steidlmeier (1999) extended the definition of transformational leadership to include authenticity, where the leaders, through their role, act as moral agents, uplifting followers, through legitimate means towards noble aims (p. 211). Some researchers refer to two different leadership styles instead of this combination, as in *transformational leadership* and *authentic leadership*. However, the two seem to have more in common than not, as proven in a study conducted by Joo and Nimon (2014), where they compare the two as separate styles in terms of how subordinates perceived the two leadership behaviours and concluded that the two styles were perceived similarly (p. 583). They recommend that leadership development programs focus on both, using a combined approach as the two are seen as complementary to each other, but not substitutable (p. 582).

McKee (2013), also examined the theoretical and empirical similarities between transformational and authentic leadership by looking closer at follower outcomes, stemming from each leadership style. The results supported the claim that the two theories overlap in the ethical dimension and revealed “the lack of perceptual difference between the two theories of leadership” (p. 104) and questions the need to continue further research on authentic leadership as a separate theory from transformational leadership. However, it should be mentioned that since

McKee's research took place, an extensive amount of literature has been published, addressing authentic leadership as a separate both style and theory. In light of these findings, this thesis will go in line with Bass and Steidlmeier's (1999) view of authentic leadership as an extension of transformational leadership as in *authentic transformational leadership* (see also Zhu et al., 2011), in contrast to its inauthentic version called *pseudo-transformational leadership* (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999, p. 184).

The authentic part of transformational leadership is explained as part of the ethical dimension of transformational leadership and it is connected to the behaviour of the leader, including the moral character, values and beliefs (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999, p. 184). To be considered authentic, the transformational leader must 'walk the talk' and present both inward and outward authenticity. By being consistent, reliable and genuine, the authentic transformational leaders focus on bringing out the best in people, not for the sole gain of themselves, but rather by calling for "a universal brotherhood", in service of others (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999, p. 187-188). Part of a leader being considered as authentic is connected to the relationship to *the leader's self*. This is further explained by Harter (2002), who connects this to the meaning of the term *authenticity* as referring to "owning one's personal experiences, be they thoughts, emotions, needs, wants, preferences, or beliefs, processes captured by the injunction to 'know oneself'", and "further implies that one *acts* in accord with the true self, expressing oneself in ways that are consistent with inner thoughts and feelings" (p. 382, as cited in Avolio & Gardner, 2005, p. 320).

In the literature on authentic leadership, especially those from a Western context, the idea of *authenticity* and the leader's self is presented as different from the definition of *sincerity*. Sincerity "refers to the extent to which one's outward expression of feelings and thoughts are aligned with the reality experienced by the self", and "is therefore judged by the extent to which the self is represented accurately and honestly to others, rather than the extent to which one is true to the self" (Avolio & Gardner, 2005, p. 320). From this perspective, authenticity does not include its relationship to other people, but only relates to the leader's sense of the own self. This view of the authentic self, as separate from sincerity, is specifically attributed to a Western view on authenticity as discussed by Algarni

(2018, p. 88) (see 3.3.4). Even though the perception of the authentic leader's self is viewed aside from other people in this view, it does not mean that the authentic leader does not consider others per se. On the contrary, they are "deeply aware of how they think and behave and are perceived by others as being aware of their own and others' values/moral perspectives, knowledge, and strengths; aware of the context in which they operate; and who are confident, hopeful, optimistic, resilient, and of high moral character" (Avolio et al., 2004, p. 802, 804).

Beddoes-Jones (2013), also views authentic leadership as connected to, but extending beyond transformational leadership. She takes authentic leadership one step further by clarifying its definition and suggesting a model of theory, looking at the cognitive and behavioural aspects of authentic leadership. She concludes in a four factors model (Figure 7), where the two factors of Self-Awareness and Self-Regulation are connected to the Psychological Self, and the two factors of Ethical Virtue and Ethical Action are connected to the Philosophical Self (p. 69). In extension to this, she argues that authentic leadership only takes place "when there is an overlap between the philosophical self and the psychological self, i.e. within a leader who is both self-aware and highly ethical" (p. 69).

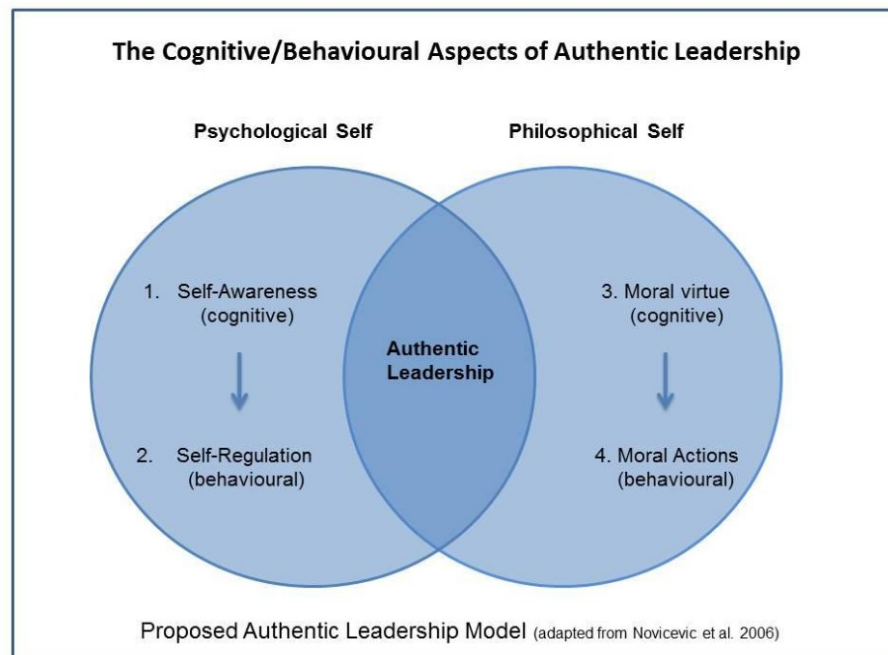


Figure 7. Proposed model to Authentic Leadership by (Beddoes-Jones, 2013, p.70)

The following is a brief summary of the four factors as described by Beddoes-Jones (2013, p. 70-71):

Self-Awareness is the cognitive aspect of the Psychological Self. It includes an understanding of “our own cognitions, emotions, beliefs and values and how these influence our mental and emotional states” (p.70). It also constitutes an awareness of others and the effect and impact that our words and actions have on other people.

Self-Regulation is the behavioural aspect of the Psychological Self. This factor acts as an extension of the leader’s own self-awareness as a “conscious and deliberate control of our thinking and our emotional and mental states”, as well as “managing our energy levels”, and “our behaviours and being a positive role model for others” (p. 71).

Ethical Virtue is the cognitive aspect of the Philosophical Self which includes “our ethical and moral principles” and “our internal sense of honesty and integrity” (p. 71). Furthermore, it “includes believing that a leadership role includes an ethical responsibility to others; our peers, followers and subordinates, as well as to the wider community” (p. 71).

Ethical Action is the behavioural aspect of the Philosophical Self. This means to actively display “moral and ethical integrity in our decision making and subsequent actions that are consistent with our moral and ethical virtue in all professional spheres” (p. 71). It also involves sharing and openly “displaying our ethical beliefs with others” as well as showing “moral courage” (p. 71).

3.2.3 What people look for and admire in their leaders

As part of developing The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership®, Kouzes & Posner (2017) also investigated the expectations that constituents have of leaders and what characteristics they look for and admire in a leader. After extensive analysis of this data, the two authors present twenty attributes of an admired leader referred to as Characteristics of Admired Leaders (CAL) (Appendix 9). Out

of the listed twenty attributes, most people from their studies want a leader with the following four characteristics:

- Honest
- Competent
- Inspiring
- Forward-looking (pp. 30-31)

When presenting this data around the world, Saudi Arabia is not specifically listed. However, United Arab Emirates (UAE), a close neighbour in culture and location, is represented in the data. Based on the four characteristics listed above, people from the UAE ranked them in the following order:

1. Honest
2. Forward-looking
3. Inspiring
4. Competent (pp. 30-31)

All these four characteristics fall under the traits of an authentic transformational leader, as presented in 3.2.

3.3 Leadership practices in Saudi Arabia

Supported by the close link between culture and context, leadership needs to be examined in the light of its context. The following section presents several previous research findings related to leadership practices in Saudi Arabia in general and to educational and authentic transformational leadership in specific. Many of the studies are conducted by Saudi natives themselves.

3.3.1 Islamic and traditional cultural influences

As mentioned under 3.1.2, culture and leadership is closely intertwined. In the case of Saudi Arabia, this connection is visible in the relationship between Islam and traditional culture, and the formation of leadership practices. According to Alogali (2018), many of the “underlying beliefs informing the educational structure

[in Saudi Arabia] are rooted in the national faith of Islam” (p. 22-23). Shah (2006), further explains this connection that in “Islam, association between religion, knowledge and teaching creates a discourse of educational leadership which elevates teaching/learning to a sacred duty of the highest order” (p. 366). This way, the leader is also taking on the role of a teacher, serving as a role model, leading towards “knowledge and righteousness” (p. 366), and “faith, piety and moral values as fundamental aims of education” (p. 370).

Shah (2006), further illustrates this relationship between Islam, knowledge, and education for the Muslims, in the way that Islam includes every feature of human life and that through knowledge, they can lead the path to righteousness and serve as valuable societal members (p. 368). Bearing in mind the collectivist goal in the Saudi society, education and its leaders take on a larger role than in individualistic societies, such as in many western countries. However, even though Saudi Arabia, like many other Muslim nations, embody this special connection between religion and education there are many similarities to Western leadership theories. Shah (2006), explains:

In spite of a philosophical uniqueness located in faith, Islamic notions of educational leadership share significant aspects of different leadership concepts, propounded in the Western literature. Similarities can be perceived across certain dimensions of Islamic notions of educational leadership and the leadership concepts such as reflective, transformational, ethical/moral, collaborative, dialogical and 'servant leadership'. (p.373-374)

A recent study on servant leadership among Saudi HE leaders, conducted by Shafai (2018), support these ideas. Her study reveals, although participants did not show knowledge of specific leadership styles and servant leadership style in specific, that “they appreciated the principle of serving others and providing help” (p. 161). The study also supports previous examples of a close link between religion, education and leadership as the participants frequently quoted the Prophet Muhammad ‘Salla Allaahu ‘alayhi wa Sallam’¹ (May Allaah exalt him and grant him peace) when giving examples of ways of serving and being helpful to others (p. 162).

¹ صلى الله عليه وسلم

3.3.2 Educational leadership in Saudi Arabia

According to both Hallinger & Hammad (2019, p. 20) and Sellami et al. (2019, p. 5), there is a lack of research on the perceptions of educational leadership from an Arab perspective. In an attempt to fill this gap, Sellami et al. (2019) conducted a study investigating how Arab educators and education specialists in the Arab region, with a focus on Qatar, define educational leadership. Their study, like this study, builds on socio-cultural theory and the view of discourse as social practice which is socially and culturally bound. As part of their research, more than 30 challenges were highlighted related to aspects within education. One of them related to the “lack of research exploring the definition of educational leadership and the terminology used to define this concept from an Arab perspective” (p. 5). It specifically relates to the word of *education* in Arabic and whether it refers to *tarbiyyah*² or *ta’leem*³.

Tarbiyyah may be defined as “the ideal approach in developing human nature, both directly through a method of verbal or visual communication, or indirectly through providing a role model, according to a specific curriculum that employs certain means and mechanisms in order to facilitate positive change” (Islamic Studies Resources, n.d.). Moreover, tarbiyyah is often linked to Islamic education. According to Shah (2016), tarbiyyah is

a complex synthesis of moral, spiritual, intellectual, and social development, understood in relation to the primary aim of Islamic education towards tawhid or oneness with God both in this world and beyond death. Central to the notion of tarbiyyah is the human responsibility to seek after and draw closer to God. We not only acquire intellectual knowledge (ta’lim) through tarbiyyah; we actively participate in its development, and are thereby transformed morally, spiritually, intellectually, and socially. (As cited in Pedder, 2016, pp. 375-376)

Besides *intellectual knowledge* mentioned above, ta’leem, also means *education* in Arabic as presented in Almaany English Arabic Dictionary online (n.d.). This same dictionary entry also shows how both tarbiyyah and ta’leem are used to

² تربية

³ تعليم

describe education in its various forms with multiple definitions and associations, which further supports the challenge of a common term and definition to describe education. In addition to the two words' different definitions, they are also used differently in different Arab countries, which according to Sellami et al. (2019) "has resulted in a conceptual and theoretical confusion as well as concomitant educational practices" (p. 5). Despite this confusion, most of the participants in the study conducted by Sellami et al. (2019) agreed that the main role of the educational leader is in line with the meaning of 'tarbiyyah' as educational leadership is seen to go beyond the school/learning context. In this sense, the educational leaders, like the parent, is seen as a role model, fostering not only the educational aspects of knowledge, but also those related to nurturing and developing good character traits and religious spirituality (pp. 12-13).

The meaning of words in a specific social and cultural context, as in the examples above, becomes especially important when education concepts, curriculums and policies are 'imported' from, for example, the West, an aspect also pointed out by Sellami et al. (2019). In their research, they highlight several studies which reveal the tendency of using a copy/paste culture of Western theories on educational leadership among policy makers worldwide without considering the cultural context in which it takes place. Furthermore, they problematize the usage of Western-based theories in a non-Western environment as it often overshadows the "Arab perspective and understanding of educational leadership" (p. 7). This further supports the importance of localizing research to identify and build theories suitable for a more specific context. These observations are also made by Romanowski et al. (2018) who problematize globalization through educational borrowing and explain how it has led to reducing education to a mere product and service sold globally (p. 19).

In line with localizing definitions of education and educational leadership, many researchers refer to the process of *indigenization* as key to adapting educational leadership practices to the local culture and its needs. Sellami et al. (2019) connects this adaptation to the importance of enabling the process of localizing the theoretical and practical understanding of the concept of educational leadership:

This demands that opportunities are provided for indigeneity to be expressed. In the context of the discourse of educational leadership, it is important to consider indigenous Arabic terms for education and leadership, noting the similarities and differences from Western discourse while avoiding the frequently made assumption that meanings are the same. We must acknowledge that there is no homogeneous definition and understanding of educational leadership and that each indigenous nation or community will have their own views and understandings. (p. 7)

Going back to the findings of Sellami et al. (2019), that a majority of the participants connected educational leadership to the meaning of Tarbiyyah, one can see a possible clash between using the concept of educational leadership based on Western definitions. As pointed out under 3.3.1, Islam, knowledge and education is closely intertwined in the Saudi context. On the contrary, Western education theories promote secular education systems where there is a clear distinction between the state and religion. Therefore, in the Saudi context, the educational leader caters for both secular and religious knowledge and thus nurtures not only competent citizens in terms of intellectual knowledge, but also in terms of spirituality and the holistic nature of the human being.

3.3.3 Saudi educational leadership style practices

The past decade, a few new studies on educational leadership in specific have been conducted in Saudi Arabia. A common denominator between them firstly relates to ideas of management and leadership, and secondly to ideas of transactional leadership style practices. In several studies, a tendency for Saudi leaders to take on a managerial and transactional approach to leadership has been observed (Almudarra, 2017; Alogali 2018). Therefore, it becomes important to present a clear distinction between management and leadership, to compare with participants' views on the authentic transformational leadership style later in the data analysis.

In the extensive literature on leadership and management, the two are often presented as one and the same. Managers are referred to as leaders and vice versa. However, there is a clear distinction between the two and even though a manager may well take on the role of a leader, it does not mean that by default (Hackman

& Johnson, 2018, pp. 11-12). There are similarities, differences as well as overlaps. Management is primarily described in terms of maintenance and leadership in terms of change (Cuban, 1988, p. xxi). This is also well in line with Leithwood et al.'s, (1999) explanation of managerial leadership as rational, with a focus on "functions, tasks and behaviours" (p. 395), as well as with Kouzes & Posner's (2017) description on leadership as "inextricably connected with the process of innovation, of bringing new ideas, methods, or solutions into use" (p.148).

Almudarra (2017), points out that the centralized education system in Saudi Arabia forces leaders "to implement government directives rather than lead through visionary activity and innovation, to process and action elements rather than decide upon a direction, and thereby seem to be more managerial in their approach" (p. 35). She goes on to describe their role as primarily "functional", "managerial" and "transactional" (p. 35) and argues that the centralized system limits the leadership style options for Saudi Arabian leaders as the transactional leadership style is "facilitated by the hierarchical, somewhat autocratic, and curriculum-based education system" (p. 37). In addition to the centralized education system, Alogali (2018) points out yet another reason for a more managerial approach tendency among Saudi educational leaders. Due to the Saudi Arabian cultural values of "high uncertainty avoidance, respect for tradition, and extensive bureaucracy" (p. 27), a transactional leadership style is encouraged and more valued (p. 28).

In addition, research by Shafai (2018), shows that Saudi HE leaders relies heavily on authority and power in their practices at the same time as aiming at providing good service for the different stakeholders and the department. Moreover, they mostly exercise formal authority, even though they support using moral authority as well. However, towards the idea of using moral authority only, participants expressed concern that it may be viewed as a sign of weakness and loss of control over people (162-163, 170). The study concludes that more leadership development is needed, that leaders need more support from top leaders to use other leadership styles than the traditional one, and that the HE system needs to be reformed to better allow educational leaders to practice different leadership styles (p. 163, 165). Lastly, the author advises a shift in leadership practices from formal

authority to leaders possessing the ability to motivate workers by being empathetic, supportive, and good listeners. This way, there will be more focus on the employees themselves and not only on their performance (p. 162, 166).

3.3.4 Authentic transformational leadership in Saudi Arabia

Research shows that the meaning of *authenticity* in the Saudi context is directly linked to and influenced by Islam. A recent study conducted by Algarni in 2018, is one of the few which investigates the concept of authenticity in leadership in the Saudi context. His study sheds light on the meaning of authenticity in the Islamic culture by both comparing it to that of Western and Eastern perceptions, as well as investigating its meaning from a Saudi perspective. His study gives evidence for both similarities and differences to the Western and Eastern literature on authenticity in Leadership.

Algarni (2018) argues “that the Islamic perception of authenticity lies in between the perspectives of western and eastern cultures” (p. 92; Musah, 2011, p.69). He explains how western cultures mainly “perceive authenticity from an individualist perspective” (p. 88), and how the eastern perspective mainly focuses on authenticity from a collectivist approach, attributing it “mainly to social and interpersonal relationships” (p. 88). Both are different from the Islamic perspective of authenticity, which is defined “as being true both to the self and to others (p.88), resulting in a combination of the intrapersonal and the interpersonal perspectives. Thus, the view on authenticity, as both an intrapersonal and an interpersonal concept, links back to the authentic transformational leader’s view of the own self, as he found that “truth and honesty in Islam include truthful intention and behaviours towards your own self as a Muslim as well as to all people, including non-Muslims” (p. 89).

To understand authenticity at the intrapersonal level, Algarni (2018) explains it through the concept of *intention* and *accountability*, and how both connect to “the individualist self-concept of authenticity in Islam”. Firstly, he describes the Arabic concept of ‘*niyyah*’, which means *intention*, and its connection to the individualist view:

To understand authenticity from the Islamic perspective the role of niyyah [intention] and being faithful to God must be taken into account, as it signifies being real, true and genuine. The concept of niyyah in Islamic literature indicates the inner purpose of each deed and it is considered to be one of the major concepts in Islam (Rafiki et al., 2014). Accordingly, authenticity in Islamic culture begins with the self as having a truthful and clear intention towards everything. The concept of niyyah is an intrapersonal and individualistic issue that occurs in the self independently of others, so being authentic from the Islamic perspective includes expressing niyyah and being faithful to Allah by being true to the self and others. In other words, you are authentic because you genuinely believe in authenticity. (p. 89)

Secondly, Algarni (2018), goes on to describe *accountability* and how it relates to authenticity in the Islamic culture at an intrapersonal level, from the individualist self-concept: “As an authentic Muslim one should not only have the right niyyah [intention] but also be accountable” (p. 90). In turn, the concept of niyyah and accountability extends to an interpersonal level through a collectivist view:

At the same time, an authentic person is also an integral part of a group, such as the family, an organisation, society or the whole Islamic nation, and respects the group by acting ethically. This represents the collectivist aspect of authenticity from the Islamic point of view. (p. 90)

This combination between the individualist and the collectivist concepts is also supported by (Musah, 2011): “Individualism and collectivism from Islamic viewpoint are not two opposite concepts but are two intertwined precepts complimenting and enhancing each other” (p. 69).

Thus, “authenticity in Islamic culture is derived from both intrapersonal perspectives as expressed by the individual’s choices that come from true niyyah [intention] and from accountability, and also from interpersonal perspectives such as the need to treat others ethically” (p. 92). Figure 8 below illustrates the above stated relationship and how it relates to the Western and Eastern perspectives.

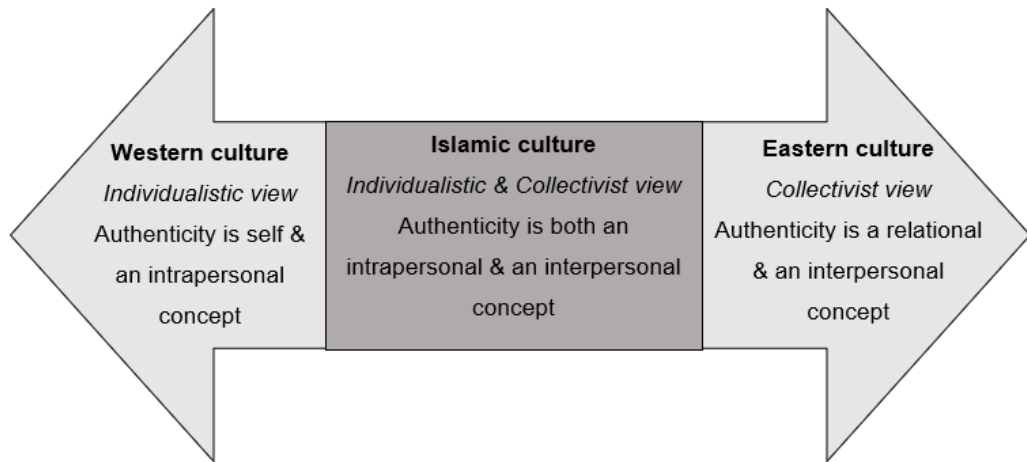


Figure 8. Islamic View of Authenticity in Comparison with Western and Eastern Cultures (Algarni, 2018, p. 92)

Algarni (2018) concludes in a definition of authenticity in leadership from the Saudi context:

Authenticity in leadership is a self and relational construct that embraces a pattern of leader behaviours consisting of self-awareness and being an exemplary leader who acts in the interests of his organisation and shows a humble attitude as well as being transparent and just with followers, taking care of their development and building a positive relationship with them. (p. 191)

4 METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the methodological choices that were made. It begins with describing the fourth aim of this thesis and its connection to research-oriented development work. Second, it leads on to present the research approach and its philosophy, design and considered ethics. Third, these are followed by a presentation of the data acquisition methods in terms of the semi-structured interviews and the follow-up questionnaire. Finally, this chapter describes the data analysis methods, including the transcription process, the thematic narrative analysis method and how it was applied to both the qualitative and the quantitative data.

4.1 Research-oriented Development Work

In a global, digital, and continuously changing world it has become increasingly important for organizations to remain up to date, flexible and innovative to stay competitive on the market. To do this, development work is key as it will help organizations adapt to change, evaluate current scenarios, analyse trends for the future, prepare for the future challenges and opportunities, as well as innovate and not fall behind. Societies have become increasingly knowledge driven, relying heavily on the increase and flow of information. This is where HE organizations play an increasingly important role, being bridges between knowledge and society.

To prevent organizations from being stagnant in their practices, it is important to seek new knowledge through **research-oriented development work**. The difference between *scientific research* and *research-oriented development work*, is mainly related to the aim of the research. If the aim is solely to produce new knowledge about a specific topic, such as a theory, this is labelled as scientific research. On the other hand, if this aim also includes a goal to improve, innovate, and solve problems in an organization, the research is linked to professional practice in working life as well. In this sense, data collection in research-oriented development work considers theory and practice combined.

Considering this difference in research, this thesis took the initial methodological approach of research-oriented development work as it aimed to contribute with new knowledge about leadership practices among Saudi female leaders in HE, with a focus on authentic transformational leadership, by combining previous theory and knowledge with new findings from working life experiences. In extension, it aimed to contribute to a broader understanding of leadership practices in general and among Saudi female leaders in specific. This new knowledge can then serve as a basis for future development projects.

4.2 Research approach

Through the method of **abduction** (also referred to as *retroduction*), this research moved back and forth between the *deduction* method (theory to data) and the *induction* method (data to theory) of theory development as described by Saunders et al. (2019, p. 155). This thesis firstly elaborated on the theory compared to the data, by taking a stance in authentic transformational leadership theory and the theoretical framework of The Five Exemplary Practices of Leadership©. Secondly, it explored the data found in terms of the theory by deductively exploring what emerged from the data compared to previous research. This approach was chosen in order to leave more freedom of interpretation and thus honouring the voices of the participants in the best way.

4.2.1 Research philosophy

This study is rooted in a **sociocultural view** of leadership practices on the basis that human cognition is developed through interactions with our surroundings, including other people, objects, and experiences. “Therefore, human cognitive development cannot be separated from the social, cultural, and historical contexts from which such development emerges” (Johnson 2009, as cited in Wang et al., 2013, p. 298). When this social interaction takes place, learning and development can happen. In turn, this thesis was also grounded in the idea that human cognitive development occurs at two levels, as described by Vygotsky (1978), “first, on the social level, and later, on the individual level; first, between people

(interpsychological) and then inside the learner (intrapsychological)” (as cited in Wang et al., 2013, p. 298).

On this basis, the research philosophy of this thesis took a stance in the idea that leadership practices are created and developed in a social context, through interactions with the surrounding people, language, culture, beliefs, values etc. Therefore, each individual leader is shaped by her own background and experiences, ultimately building the individual leader based on the complexity of what guides her beliefs and practices.

4.2.2 Research design

Through an **exploratory descriptive research design**, this thesis firstly aimed at *exploring* and *understanding* leadership practices from the theory of authentic transformational leadership as well as from previous research on leadership practices in Saudi Arabia. Secondly, it aimed at *describing* the nature of the personal perceptions of leadership practices among participants and discovering what themes emerge and how they relate to the theory and previous research on the topic in Saudi Arabia. With semi-structured interviews, using the method of abduction described earlier, the research design opened for qualitative findings, adding to both the thesis’s exploratory and descriptive nature. In addition, with a follow up survey, room was given to follow up interviews with additional questions.

4.2.3 Research ethics

The researcher took special care to follow “the principles that are endorsed by the research community, that is, integrity, meticulousness, and accuracy in conducting research, and in recording, presenting, and evaluating the research results” (The Finnish National Board on Research Integrity TENK, 2022). To do this, it was imperative for the researcher to uphold a self-reflective practice throughout the project in line with the recommendation of Erlingsson & Brysiewicz (2017). As everyone has a history of experiences, or so-called pre-understandings, that colour off on our way to view and interpret our surroundings, a self-

reflective practice was applied to minimize any unconscious direction of the analysis based on the researcher's own assumptions, opinions, and beliefs. To ensure a non-bias content analysis, the researcher carefully balanced between being aware of the pre-understanding and at the same time utilizing it to enable a deeper interpretation of the data (p. 95). For the sake of transparency, it becomes vital at this point to mention that the researcher is non-Saudi and has worked in HE in Saudi Arabia for eight years now.

Furthermore, in line with Saunders et al. (2019), the self-reflective practice was also necessary to safeguard ethical research principles, such as

maintaining integrity, respecting others, avoiding harm, not pressuring participants, adhering to informed consent, ensuring confidentiality and anonymity, and practicing responsibility in analysing data and reporting findings. (p. 233)

Prior to commencing any data collection, the researcher took careful ethical considerations towards the methods of gaining access to primary data. This study included two types of data access, which Saunders et al. (2019, p. 234) refer to as traditional access and Internet-mediated access. This study included the traditional type through person-to-person interviews and a questionnaire, and the Internet-mediated type by using emails, instant messaging, and virtual access to the questionnaire. Furthermore, the researcher gained access to intended participants from a single organisation, in this case a Saudi state university, with participants from three different faculties.

When commencing the data collection process, the researcher first applied for permission to collect data with the organization itself. Formal research ethics committee approval was granted prior to initiating the data collection. After approval, intended participants were invited to take part by sending them an invitation email which included an invitation letter with a brief description of the topic, purpose and details surrounding the interview and the questionnaire. It also included the audio data security procedures, the participant consent form, a summary of authentic transformational leadership, and the interview questions (see Appendices 2, 4, 5, 6). Several intended participants responded and whenever questions were posed, the researcher made sure to respond transparently and

swiftly to establish both credibility and a good rapport early on. Invitees were also informed that participation in the study was voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time.

Careful attention was taken to communicate and assure confidentiality of the data and anonymity of the participants and the organization. Methods of collecting and storing data was communicated with the participants, especially related to the recorded audios and any details that could be traced back to the interviewee, such as names of people, positions and places, specific events and occasions that could be connected to the participants, or any specific characteristics associated with a specific individual. In case of any questions related to specific details arose, the researcher checked with the participant whether the detail could be included.

To further safeguard the data and the anonymity of the participants, only one document with original details was kept solely by the researcher. In that document, all participants were given pseudonyms which were used throughout the project. Moreover, for the questionnaires, the participants were given a code to represent themselves, instead of using their names. Consideration was also taken for any sensitive details that were mentioned in the interviews. To ensure anonymity in this regard, these details were not included in the transcriptions. Whenever a name, position or similar was mentioned, it was replaced with for example [name of person] or [name of position]. In addition, all collected data that included original names, voices, and signatures, were deleted at the end of the project, like initially promised. Finally, biographical information was presented without names to ensure that these details cannot be linked to the presented data in the result chapter.

4.3 Data acquisition methods

Using a **sequential mixed methods research design**, this thesis combined qualitative and quantitative research methods where the data collection process involved different phases with one method followed by the other to allow an expansion on the initial findings (Saunders et al., 2019, p. 182). The first phase

comprised of a qualitative method followed by a quantitative method, which is a research design method referred to as *sequential exploratory*.

The initial qualitative data collection stage comprised of primary data from semi-structured interviews (Figure 3, Appendix 6) with 7 Saudi female leaders in HE, from 3 different departments, at a Saudi Arabian state university. The intended participants were all in current leadership positions from one of the following three positions: vice-dean, head, or supervisor. 26 intended participants were initially contacted, and 9 of them chose to join. Later, 2 of them were unable to continue due to external circumstances and chose to withdraw participation. Due to the interviews taking place during the Covid-19 pandemic, participants were offered to conduct them online, through the virtual platform called Zoom. Out of 7 interviews, 5 were conducted face-to-face and two were conducted using Zoom. Furthermore, 5 of the interviews were audio recorded and for the other 2, the researcher took detailed notes with many direct quotes. After the 7 interviews, the researcher chose to disregard one of the non-recorded interviews. The reason for this was because of the many times this interview was interrupted by different people coming into the office where the interview took place. Due to that situation, both the interviewee and the researcher lost the flow of the conversation, which led to the interviewee losing track of her ideas and the researcher losing track of her notes. In addition, with different people coming in and out of the conversation, there was also a possibility of the conversation taking a different direction compared to the other interviews. The interviewee may for example have answered the questions differently in a more private setting. Bearing this in mind, the researcher did not deem the interview material valid enough to be included and compared with the other interviews in the analysis.

Following the qualitative data collection stage, a follow up questionnaire was sent to the respondents' emails with a link to an online questionnaire (see Appendix 7). Most questions, except the biographical background questions, were written as follow up questions to the already conducted interviews. The questionnaire included multiple choice questions and open-ended questions.

Semi-structured interviews

All interviews in this study were semi-structured. According to Saunders et al. (2019), a semi-structured interview is a style which is 'non-standardised' and often used in qualitative research due to its opened, yet focused approach. In semi-structured interviews, the interviewer starts off with a list of predetermined themes or key questions that are related to these themes, which serve as a guide in the interview. As part of a realist focus, this structured approach opens for the interviewer to systematically explore, analyse, and compare the interviewees' responses, ultimately revealing the underlying reality and structure of what is examined (p. 437).

To further ensure the benefits of a semi-structured style, all interview questions were rooted in the two research questions as well as the theoretical framework of The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership® to provide a strong link between the theory and examined practices (see Figure 3, Appendix 11). 12 questions (Appendix 6) were created for the interviews and the researcher took a conscious approach towards the content, structure, and order of these questions. For example, the questions were ordered in such a way that the interviewer could gradually go into more details by initially asking a warmup question, and next ask a more general question, to later move on to more detailed questions related to the theoretical framework. To conclude the questions, care was also taken to end the interview on a good note as well as allowing room to add further to the conversation.

Moreover, the researcher also considered the abductive approach (see 4.2) to the research themes when formulating the interview questions as suggested by Saunders et al., (2019, p. 438). This meant on the one hand to consider the theory behind The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership® and authentic transformational leadership practices, and on the other hand to explore and add to these as derived from the data.

4.4 Data analysis methods

4.4.1 The transcribed data

Firstly, the recorded data of 6 hr 26 minutes was transcribed using the software program Scrintal, resulting in 98 pages of transcribed text. After the automatic transcription was completed, the researcher listened to the recordings while comparing it to the transcribed data, and whenever there were discrepancies, these were corrected manually. Attention was drawn to the use of punctuations to show the flow and pause of the conversation. Further, no words were left out, allowing the exact narrative to take shape, making sure the focus was not only on what was being said, but also in the way it was said. This way, the atmosphere of the interviews could be kept, even if the stress and intonation of the pronunciation was only audible. As the original form of the transcribed data was used during the analysis, the narrative flow of the conversation was kept intact. Furthermore, each transcribed interview also contained the researcher's part of the conversation. This way, all the interview questions were included, helping to analyse the material related to the interview questions as well as their connection to the research questions and the theoretical framework.

Even though the original form of the transcriptions were kept intact during the analysis, when presented in this thesis, some words were excluded or altered to improve readability in line with *intelligent verbatim transcription* (Streefkerk, 2021). Such words included repeated words, irrelevant fillers such as "you know", "uhm" and "like". In addition, to improve readability, some words were added, or grammar mistakes fixed. In these instances, this was highlighted with [].

4.4.2 Qualitative data analysis

This research used a **thematic narrative analysis method**. According to Saunders et al. (2019), a thematic narrative analysis combines a thematic and narrative analysis which keeps the data's narrative intact and at the same time allows the researcher to identify common themes within and across the narratives. It

focuses on the content of the narratives and *what* they are about. This approach is recommended when the researcher commences the study with a predetermined theoretical framework on which to base the analysis (p. 675-676). It also helps “to develop an explanation that evaluates the application of prior theory to your data as well as being grounded in these data, while preserving the integrity of your narratives” (p. 675). Through a thematic narrative analysis, the researcher can explore and derive rich descriptions and explanations from the data that can open up for theorisation based on derived common themes, topics and patterns (p. 651, 660). The following procedures are proposed by Saunders et al. (2019) and served as the basis of the qualitative data analysis method of this thesis:

- Familiarise yourself with your data
- Code your data
- Search for themes and recognize relationships
- Refine themes by revisiting and testing propositions
- Evaluate your findings with your chosen approach (pp. 651-661)

The thematic narrative analysis process of this thesis

Initially, an analytical focus was used, where the researcher used a thematic analysis to derive common themes, topics and patterns (Saunders et al., 2019, p. 651). Each interview question was analysed one by one across the board, linearly, for all participants. This made the data more manageable, and it was easier to derive themes and topics under the same question. The first question was included to introduce the background of each participant and in a few cases, themes from the first questions were transferred to the other derived themes.

As each question was analysed linearly, the researcher annotated and underlined in the transcripts. These notes were later included in a brief handwritten summary where notes from all individual participants, for each question, were included. Identified themes, topics and patterns could then easily be collected on an electronic canvas board for each individual question. This helped to categorize and find patterns. After this process had been completed for all the questions, as well as all the extra questions that were posed as part of the semi-structured nature, the notes and summaries were compared to the two research questions.

As part of the thematic narrative analysis and research philosophy, the analysis used an abductive approach (see 4.2). This approach meant moving between deriving themes from the data set, comparing and linking them to previous research. Derived themes and relationships were coded using words or set of words related to an identified topic or pattern. Through these themes, the researcher could continue the analysis vertically, analysing all the interview questions collectively. During this stage, themes, topics, and patterns were compared, combined, and narrowed down to reveal predominant themes and sub-themes that could later be compared against the theoretical framework. There was no limit to the number of codes used, but as part of the sequential analysis, related codes were finally grouped together or subcategorized based on the theoretical framework as well as from the research context (All these steps followed the description of Thematic Analysis of Saunders et al., 2019, pp. 651-660).

Finally, the themes and sub-themes were compared against the strategic question and the two research questions to build the foundation of the conclusions. The researcher sometimes chose to present the predominant themes and sub-themes in figures to enable an easier overview. Combined, these figures also gradually built up to present the final suggested model of theory for the Saudi leadership context.

4.4.3 Quantitative data analysis

The quantitative data consisted of a follow-up questionnaire. The focus of the questionnaire was: to collect biographical data, to explore participants' leadership practices and their views of an admired leader, to explore the meaning of authenticity as well as allowing respondents to share their ideas connected to the Saudi context. The questionnaire consisted of both multiple-choice questions and open-ended questions.

Following Saunders' et al.'s (2019) chapter on quantitative data analysis, the analysis of all questions was initiated by downloading the data in an excel sheet. The biographical data included numerical data which was presented in a table for a good overview of the participants' background (p. 659, 583). Then, the other

multiple-choice questions were analysed and when needed, the primary data was quantified to allow a quantitative analysis (p. 564, 624). This data was analysed, compared, and linked to the theoretical framework, and interpreted to help answer the research questions (p. 567). To illustrate the findings, different analytical aids were used which involved selecting appropriate tables, graphs, and figures. In some cases, this included ranking numerical data in frequency of occurrence, to allow a deeper analysis in for example the graphs (p. 583).

In addition to the above, the data analysis of the open-ended questions also followed the method of a thematic narrative analysis as described in 4.4.2. Like the data from the interviews, findings from the answers were presented as themes, supported by quotes from the narratives. To enable comparisons, existing codes and themes derived from the interviews were used when possible (p. 624).

5 RESULTS

This chapter presents the collected findings of the semi-structured interviews and the online questionnaire (Appendices 6 and 7). Firstly, the general lead-in findings of both the qualitative and the quantitative data are presented in a summarized form. After that, all discovered themes and patterns are presented in order of the interview questions (from questions 3-10) that were based on the theoretical framework of The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership®. Each of these findings is supported by relevant quotes from the interviews. Some of these quotes needed more introduction than others, depending on the conciseness and cohesiveness of the narrative.

5.1 Biographical information

Table 1 below describes the biographical data of the participants. All the participants are Saudi nationals with PhD degrees as well as other higher degrees from mainly the UK and the US. The table also reveals a variety in age and years in leadership positions. Moreover, it shows that more than half of the participants did not conduct any leadership training *before* they commenced their leadership role. However, this changed, and the data reveals that a majority took part in leadership training *after* joining their leadership position. Nevertheless, two participants have not received any leadership training.

TABLE 1. Biographical information

	Nationality	Age	Years in leadership	Highest degree	Training in leadership BEFORE Y/N	Training in leadership AFTER Y/N	Degree/s outside of KSA	Place of study outside of the KSA
1	Saudi	45-50	5-10	PhD	Y	Y	PhD & MSc	UK
2	Saudi	40-45	0-5	PhD	Y	Y	PhD	UK
3	Saudi	60-65	10-15	PhD	Y	Y	PhD	US & AUS
4	Saudi	55-60	20+	PhD	N	Y	PhD & MSN	US
5	Saudi	40-45	0-5	PhD	N	N	PhD & MA	UK
6	Saudi	35-40	0-5	PhD	N	Y	PhD & MA	UK
7	Saudi	35-40	10-15	PhD	N	N	PhD; MA; BA and 2 Diplomas	US

5.2 The road to leadership

Most of the participants were already employed at the university and began their leadership path at the university by being promoted. Besides their high educational qualifications, they were noticed for some of their special qualities and were encouraged by a superior to take on a leadership position. Some of these special qualities were linked to specialities in their field, but most of the participants also relate how they were noticed for certain qualities that stood out from the crowd in terms of innovation, sharing ideas and putting forth suggestions. In addition, others were noticed for their student-centred approach and high level of empathy towards the students. Common for all participants is that they have worked their way up, which can be seen, not only in their educational background, but also in their journey as staff at the university. Only one of the interviewees was actively recruited from outside of the university. They commonly refer to determination and being resilient as important factors on their journey together with fate, as part of their Islamic beliefs. Most participants did not actively pursue a leadership position and had not considered it before being approached. Only two of them connected their leadership path as something starting already at a young age, displaying leadership qualities already as a young child.

The interviewees share many different reasons for choosing to accept the leadership position offer. The older participants refer to being among the first Saudi women to join a leadership position at the university and describe how they were actively encouraged to act as role models for other Saudis based on their special qualities. Others connect their choice with a strong sense of responsibility for the community and their field, while others connect their decision to curiosity and a wish to contribute to change. Another returning reference is also the importance of family. One of the participants chose to leave her well-paid hospital job to move into academia because it would allow her more time with her family. Another, chose to turn down the first promotion offer, also referring to the importance of family.

5.3 The admired leader

5.3.1 The admired leader from the qualitative data

The second interview question was: *From your perspective, how would you describe an admired leader?* The answers to this revealed the foundation of the interviewees' reference points prevalent through all the interviews. The reference points connect to ideas of leadership as a relationship with yourself and with others, both at an intrapersonal level and an interpersonal level, and the skill of balancing between them. Five main categories were discovered:

1. The leader's self,
2. the leader and her team,
3. the leader and her work,
4. the leader and her students, and
5. the leader and her community.

Based on these categories, the participants mainly described the admired leader in terms of the *leader's self*, *her work*, and *her team*, as well as the skill of balancing between them. Firstly, the admired leader was described from the perspective of the leader's self, pointing out *qualities* related to devotion, good character, self-awareness, willingness to improve, and integrity. *Devotion* was related to both Islam and good character, connecting the leaders not only to themselves, but also to their teams, work, students, and community. Devotion was first and foremost linked to Allaah and Islam, setting the foundation of the beliefs and values. This was later reflected in the description of the admired leader's dealing with the people, work, and community. By being devoted and dedicated to them, the leader will serve them in the best way.

In addition, the admired leader was described with several *positive character traits*, such as being courageous, innovative, creative, willing to embrace change and taking action, as well as being passionate with what you do. Furthermore, being humble, polite, hospitable, and gentle were described as admirable char-

acteristics along with a student/patient-centred approach. To cater for these characteristics, the leader should be selective and surround herself with good people who will support and advise her.

Self-awareness was connected to the admired leader knowing herself, being open to/listen to feedback, and be *willing to improve* and develop. Furthermore, the participants expressed the importance of the leader believing in herself and being proud of her achievements. It was also emphasized for leaders to hold a high level of *integrity* by being honest, transparent, having respect for religion, traditions, and culture, and caring for their own people.

Secondly, the admired leader was described in terms of her work, mainly focusing on *professionalism, being visionary* and *goal focused*. Connected to professionalism, the leader should be knowledgeable, qualified, and know how to *take a lead*. Part of professional behaviour was also not to take things personally and to work smart, but not hard. Significance was also given to the leader's goals and vision, which should be clearly communicated to the followers. The achievement of these goals was further connected to whether a leader was considered successful or not.

Thirdly, most of the described traits of an admired leader were associated with the relationship to the team. Four main categories emerged from the descriptions: *communication, staff-centred, to accept mistakes, and non-discrimination*. Communication with the team was described as key, mainly connected to the goals and the vision as mentioned earlier, but also in terms of working side-by-side with the followers. This gives evidence to a staff-centred approach where the leader listens to others actively and is open to their feedback. A leader who does not listen to the followers and dismisses them, was not considered a "real leader" as this attitude "breaks relationships". The admired leader was instead described as showing appreciation and recognition of team members' work.

Moreover, the admired leader encourages and motivates followers to lead themselves through their own work, not working *for* the leader, but rather working creatively towards a common goal. This staff-centred approach was also defined through a humanistic view, where the admired leader is open to and accepting of

mistakes, not treating staff like machines. The participants expressed the importance of helping followers recognize their mistakes, learning from them and finding ways to deal with them. Furthermore, in line with the humanistic view, the admired leader should not discriminate between team members, and the interviewees emphasized the importance of being accepting and tolerant of differences and to be open and caring to all kinds of people.

Finally, the admired leader was described in terms of how well she balances between the leader's self, her work, and her team. Here, one of the interviewees particularly addressed Maslow's pyramid, emphasizing the leader's ability to balance between catering for the staff's needs at the same time as considering the goals and the outcome.

5.3.2 The admired leader from the quantitative data

In addition to the qualitative data derived from the interviews, the questionnaire, that was conducted after the interviews, also added to the participants' views on the characteristics of an admired leader. A list of 19 characteristics was presented (Figure 9), and participants were asked to choose the seven most important characteristics of an admired leader, ranked in order from 1-7. The list was taken from Kouzes & Posner's (2017, p.30) list of 20 characteristics that people look for and admire in their leaders (Appendix 9). Mistakenly, the twentieth characteristic of *independent* was removed from the questionnaire and therefore not included in the list presented to the participants.

Caring	Broad-minded	Cooperative	Loyal
Inspiring	Dependable	Determined	Intelligent
Imaginative	Honest	Forward-Looking	Mature
Competent	Supportive	Courageous	Ambitious
Fair-minded	Straightforward	Self-Confident	

Figure 9. List of 19 characteristics that people look for and admire in their leaders (Adapted from Kouzes & Posner, 2017, p. 30)

From the questionnaire, 7 top characteristics emerged: *supportive*, *competent*, *straightforward*, *inspiring*, *honest*, *determined*, and *intelligent* (Figure 10). Furthermore, looking at identical ranking numbering across all the answers from the top 6 characteristics, 6 main characteristics were revealed (*competent* for both ranking 1 and 2, and *honest* and *straightforward* shared ranking 3): *competent*, *honest/straightforward*, *supportive*, *determined*, and *inspiring* (Table 2 and Figure 11). In particular, the characteristic of being supportive was selected identically by many participants both among the top 7 and as ranking 4. Comparing between both figures, 6 main characteristics are prevalent: *competent*, *honest*, *straightforward*, *supportive*, *determined*, and *inspiring*. Interestingly, 3 of these characteristics are the same as the top 4 admired characteristics presented under 3.2.3: *competent*, *honest*, and *inspiring*. However, the order of importance is different from both the general results of CAL and the specific results from the UAE.

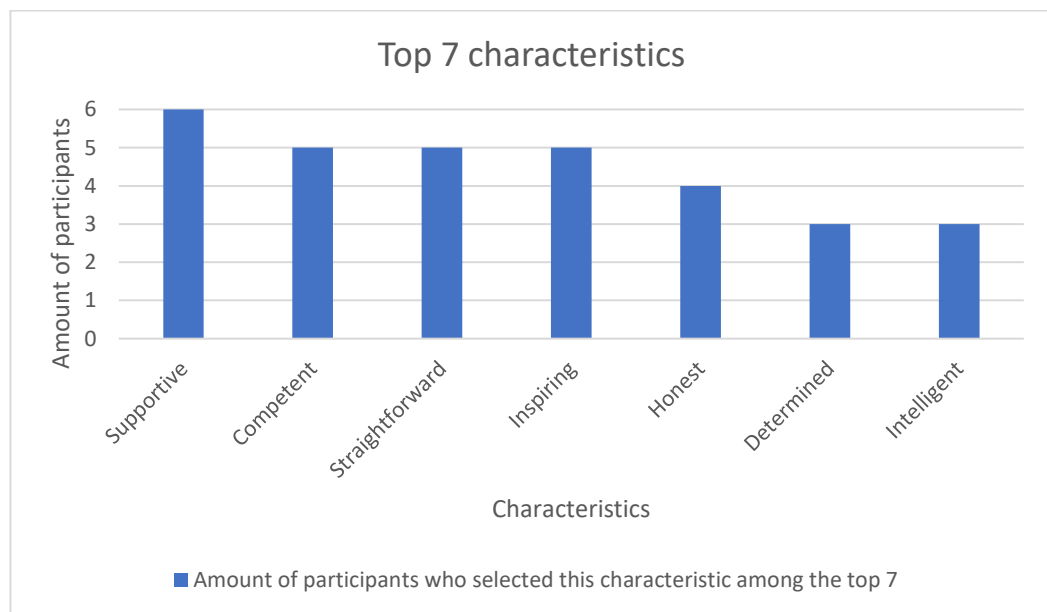


Figure 10. Top 7 most admired characteristics in a leader

TABLE 2. Participants and their ranking of the most important characteristics (from 1-7) of an admired leader

Top 7 Characteristics	Participants and their ranking of the most important characteristics (from 1-7) of an admired leader						
	Fatima	Reem	Sama-her	Ja-waher	Haifa	Noura	Maha
supportive	4	3	4	4	5		7
competent	1		2	1	2	6	
straightforward	3	5		2	3		1
inspiring	6	6			6	2	6
honest			1	3		3	4
determined		2		5		5	
intelligent			3		4	1	

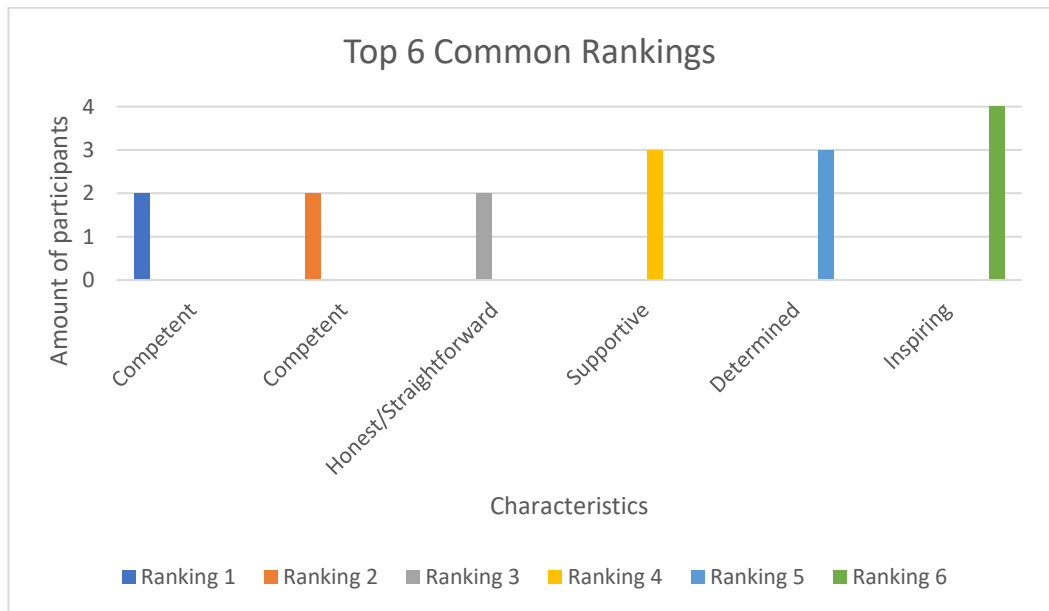


Figure 11. Top 6 admired characteristics in a leader combining top characteristics with common rankings across all participants' answers.

Connected to the characteristics found in an admired leader (Figure 9), the participants added several characteristics that they thought were missing from the list, especially related to the Saudi context (Appendix 10, Table 3). The following were pointed out: *authentic, transparent, consistent, humble, possessing sincerity and social intelligence, as well as being a capable decision maker.*

Furthermore, as a follow up to the various characteristics, the participants were asked to describe themselves with 4 of them, ranked in order of priority from 1-4. Collectively, being *honest* and *straightforward* were the two most common traits.

Remarkably, the respondents chose the same nine characteristics for the remaining most common: *supportive, competent, courageous, cooperative, ambitious, loyal, intelligent, broad-minded, and fair-minded*. Many of these characteristics are also represented in the data, dispersed over the five practises (see 5.4).

5.3.3 Main positive influencers in their leadership role

From the questionnaire, participants were also asked to choose their three main positive influencers and the data below shows the three most common ones: *a colleague, a friend, and a close family member* (Figure 12). Noticeably, all top three people are from close relationships to the participants.

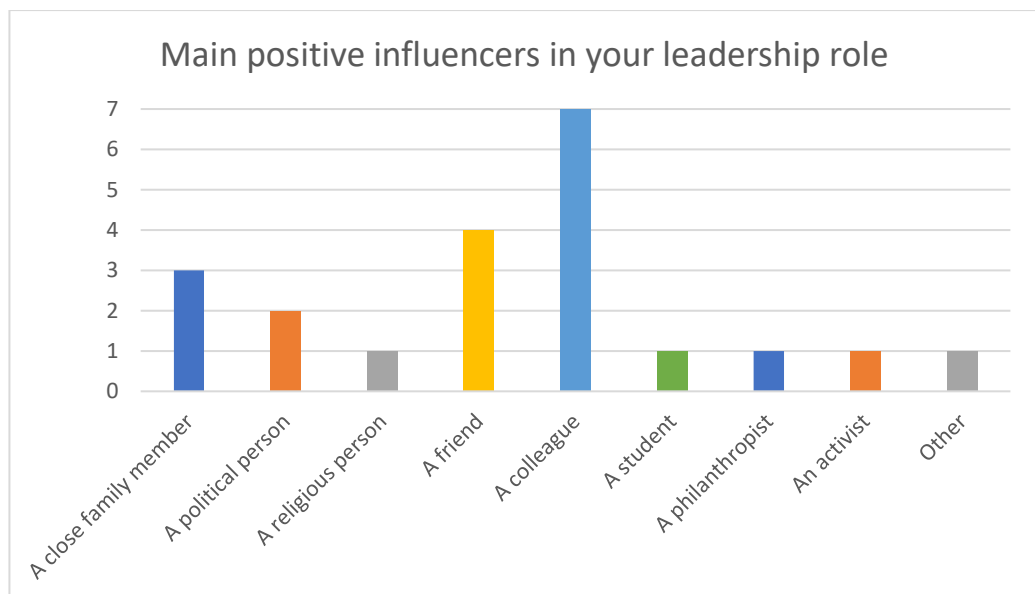


Figure 12. All 7 participants' choice of main positive influencers in their leadership role after selecting three each.

Ways of inspiration through the influencers

After selecting the three main positive influencers in the questionnaire, the participants were asked to share in what ways these three main influencers inspire them in their leadership role. The open-ended answers are presented below in Table 4.

TABLE 4. Ways of inspiration

Q: In what ways do these three main influencers inspire you in your leadership role?	
In different ways! For example their speech, the way they deal with people, the way [they] deal with different situations, and the way they think and act.	Guidance in my teaching career after I left the clinical practice as a specialized [medical profession] paving the way that was full of legislative, [financial] and political challenges
They [taught] me to be humble (philanthropist), courageous (colleague) and caring/supportive (student).	I don't really. Mostly they believe in me. They saw/see something in me that I might not [have] seen.
straightforward - loyal- determined -courageous	To be strong, independent and [helped raise] my self-confidence.
From the religious person, I learned patience. From the political person, I learned that it is important to develop decision making skills, especially to make decisions in critical times. From my colleague, I learned about the importance of persistence and hard work.	

The replies above indicate that the participants were mainly influenced in terms of character traits or how to act. Moreover, the influencers served as guiding and supporting role models through their traits or behaviours, ultimately connecting to values held in high esteem by the participants.

5.3.4 Open-ended answers in the questionnaire

Four more open-ended questions were posed in the questionnaire related to authenticity and leadership in the Saudi context. All answers are included in appendix 10 and a summary of the findings is presented in this passage.

Authenticity in leadership

To investigate the participants' views on an authentic leader in general and in the Saudi context in specific, two questions were asked (Appendix 10, Tables 5 and 6). Across the answers to the first question, many of the participants agreed that an authentic leader is the one who **is honest and transparent, with firm core values and beliefs that confirm with the actions and words of the leader**. In addition, one participant connected this *firmness* to the leader being *steadfast*, even under pressure, and contrasted this to what constitutes an *inauthentic* leader in her view. She wrote,

They do not change their core values and beliefs for the sake of those around them and [they] stay steadfast under pressure. Flexibility is not bad but change to please others or [not] hold onto one's position is unauthentic.

Besides the above description, the participants connected an authentic leader to several traits, such as being trustworthy, broadminded, inspiring, imaginative, supportive, genuine, straightforward and trying to make a difference. It should be noted here that many of these traits were part of a previous question in the questionnaire, which could have affected this single reply. Moreover, one participant connected it to the “values of education” through “practice and creating opportunities for national citizens out of nothing”.

The next question related to the authentic leader in the Saudi context and the answers were all in line with the above-mentioned findings of the authentic leader in general. In addition to these, the answers revealed an extension of the authentic Saudi leader in relation to the followers. Firstly, this was expressed in terms of “communication skills” and bringing “out the best in their followers”. Secondly, this was described connected to achievements and goals, and the leader’s ability to solve problems. Thirdly, the authentic Saudi leader was also portrayed as “a teacher” and “a mentor” who “lead[s] by example”.

Leadership in the Saudi culture and context

In continuation to the question about the authentic Saudi leader, two more questions were asked related to the Saudi context (Appendix 10, Tables 7 and 8). The first question considered what aspects of the Saudi culture the participants felt influenced them the most related to their leadership practices. The answers were well in line with the data above on an authentic leader, with a specific emphasis on “respecting the religious, cultural and ethical values of the Saudi culture”. Additionally, the previously mentioned connection to the followers was highlighted through the leader being “supportive”, “helping and caring for others”, and leading with “consistency”, “heart and vision”. “Diplomacy” while doing this was also stressed, so as not to “swim against the current”. Two of the respondents pointed out two aspects associated with “change” and “Americanized” leadership. They wrote,

The Saudi Culture experiences a rapid change. Therefore, you need to be always ready for changes as a leader because change brings a lot of duties and tasks to be considered.

I think being supportive and thinking in terms of being a team are positive aspects from our culture, but sadly I feel that [this] is being slowly eroded via people adopting a more 'Americanized' individualistic, selfish approach to leadership.

The second question considered Saudi female leadership and aspects the participants would say to those who may be unfamiliar with the Saudi context and culture. Collectively, four themes come to surface, *characteristics*, *gender*, *challenges*, and *the future*. Firstly, the Saudi female leader was described as a “highly responsible, skilful, professional”, who is “educated, goal oriented” and “dependable” with “a lot of potentials”. She was also portrayed as “a fighter” who is “extremely determined to prove herself, especially in a society that is originally male dominated”, leading on to the second theme about gender. Thirdly, this connected to challenges regarding not feeling “fully trusted”, and that “their efforts need to be looked at seriously irrespective to gender issues”. The final theme, which was also the most common theme of this question, linked to “the future”, “women empowerment” and optimism. One of the participated reflected on this and wrote,

The pre-golden age of female empowerment. What female leaders do now will determine the role of women in leadership in the future.

5.4 The application of the Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership®

From the interview schema, question numbers 3-10 were created based on The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership®, including The Ten Commitments, as the theoretical framework (Figure 3, Appendix 11). This part of the result chapter presents the findings related to each of the five practices and how they relate to the first research question:

R 1. To what extent are participants using The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership® as part of their own leadership styles?

5.4.1 Model the Way

Two questions were used to investigate to what extent the participants use the first practice, *Model the Way*, which is rooted in the leader knowing herself and *the values* that guide her as well as *setting the example* based on these values: *How would you define your core values that you use to guide you in your leadership role? To what extent do you believe that you as a role model make a difference in your leadership position?*

The interviews revealed rich qualitative data related to the first practice. This part of the analysis supported the finding of five main categories, also presented in 5.3.1, and how they connect to ideas of leadership as a relationship both at an intrapersonal level and an interpersonal level, in addition to the skill of balancing between them: *The leader's self, the leader and her team, the leader and her work, the leader and her students, and the leader and her community.*

Core values

In line with the ideas of Kouzes & Posner (2017, p. 14) and Hackman & Johnson (2018, p. 135), the leader expresses her core values through self-awareness and knowing herself as well as by expressing them and communicating them to others. The participants' narratives primarily take a stance in *the leader's self*, expressing the leaders' own core values, serving as the foundation on which they also act. Predominantly, these core values were described as part of the personal beliefs, which also included religion, as Noura described Islam as a way of life:

You make sure that you do not do anything, say anything that goes against my personal beliefs, because for me that extends [to] religion. It's the way of life. It's like a system of beliefs that extends, just spirituality.

Besides Islam, the personal beliefs were also connected to background, family values and upbringing. Jawaher expressed this when she said:

It comes always from your family. It comes always from your religion. It comes always from your upbringing. /.../ We have a great respect for the elderly. And this is something that I grew up with. /.../ And of course, you have to have a good, kind heart [and] attitude towards the children and in between you have to deal with those adults and

with your people. So, I could see that I have my values from my parents, my background.

In this sense, the core values related to Islam and ethics, and included themes such as *honesty, transparency, fairness and doing what is right*. Noura continued to express this:

Also, everything that you do, you make sure that you are ethical. You make sure that you are fair.

Also, in line with this, when speaking about her core values, Haifa said:

I think fairness is number one. Transparency number two. /.../ I think maybe third will be sympathy. Sympathy, understanding, being a good listener. I think these are the values that I ... fighting for what's right.

Many of the participants expressed how their core values stem from a belief in Allaah connected to an eagerness to do good deeds both out of gratitude to Allaah and out of fear of Allaah. The importance of gratitude was expressed by Jawaher when she stated:

You need to appreciate those people who install guidelines, you need to create a sense of gratitude. This is the best way. Gratitude. If you don't have a gratitude of what you are, of the blessing that Allaah provide you. So, what is the meaning of life? /.../ And you know, you need to do this because if you don't count your blessings, Allaah will take them away from you.

Noura elaborated on the Arabic words 'ma khaafatu llaah'⁴ (fearing of Allah) and 'tukhaafi llaah'⁵ (he/she fears Allah), which she translated to "fear of God". When explaining what these words meant to her, she emphasized that "it's a higher position" of beliefs that guides her in her actions and serve as the basis for her ethics, which stand over, for example, the fear of people. She went on to explain this further:

Noura: I do things because I fear God, I don't fear people. So, I worry about God.

⁴ مخافة الله

⁵ تخاف الله

Aminah: So, would you connect that to honesty?

Noura: Honesty, fairness, ethics being again. This is what I mean by being courageous, by standing up for what you believe in.

Noura went on to narrate a personal experience in this regard, where she was faced with a dilemma between a student and a staff member. She explained that the easiest thing to do would be to agree with the colleague. However, as she realized, after extensive investigation, that the student was right, her fear of God guided her in her decision:

I just wanted to make sure that whatever I did was the right thing to do. So, it was the fear of God more than the fear of what consequences that I might have professionally, what consequences I might have on my relationship with my colleagues.

In addition, from Noura's narrative, her "fear of God" both guides and controls her choices and actions:

[As a leader] you have powers, so you're able to do certain things. But you have to pause and say, 'No, I can't do this. I'm not supposed to do this. I have to do this'. Probably even with [me] tak[ing] the rather difficult route. But you know, this is the right thing to do. So, you do it.

Going back to the discovered themes of honesty, transparency, fairness and doing what is right, several observations from the data was made. First, honesty was often expressed both related to *the leader's self* and *the leader and her team*. It was emphasized for the leader to be honest with what she does, not to lie, to keep to her word, and not to hide the truth from the followers. This in turn, was closely connected to ideas of transparency and catering for openness with followers, which was expressed to bring about *trust*. Reem explained this when she said:

It is to be honest with what you do and to make the followers aware of the things related to transparency. So, it means to show the real situation, not hiding the truth. /.../ And this will help the followers to trust you. This will bring about trust. Because if they hear from others, something that you may be concealing, they will lose trust in you.

Furthermore, transparency was related to being clear and straightforward with the team members, making them aware of what is going on, what to expect and where the leader stands. Jawaher shared a learning lesson from her own mother:

Be honest, clear. That's what my mother said, 'Dori', that means to be straightforward. You have to be 'Dori', and you have to be transparent. /.../ You just have to put it right. Don't hide, just put it in a simple word.

Another adjunct to transparency was in terms of justification. This was expressed by Maha when she spoke about the importance of the leader being transparent, but not in terms of justification, but rather in terms of information:

This is a value for me also, honesty, [being] transparent. I will tell them everything. I'm not justifying, no, but transparent[ly] telling them. We're doing [it] for that reason, but not justification. If I leave it to justification, we will sink, because the leader is the leader, [and] a leader has to take a decision to be bold sometime. And this is me. I'm bold.

When emphasizing the importance of transparency, Haifa pointed out a dilemma that may happen. She said,

Sometimes transparency can backfire on you, especially if people are not, I wouldn't say, aware or understanding or open minded. It can cause you problems.

The next theme of fairness and doing what is right, was often connected to fighting for what is right, especially in terms of other people's rights and recognizing others' work. Haifa and Reem shared the following:

If I believe in something, I would fight for it. If it's for me, I wouldn't. But if on behalf of somebody else, I would stand up for them.

For example, if there is an idea from a team member, you need to recognise that this is the team member's idea and not your own idea, and you need to recognise people's different roles and ideas.

Other reoccurring themes when speaking about core values, were *teamwork*, *professionalism*, and *empowering others*, which are further connecting the leader

to her relationship with others. The importance of teamwork was especially expressed by Fatima:

At the end of the day, we're working together. It's like a teamwork. And in my work, I don't feel I'm just leading others. No, we are just one family. It's either we succeed together, or we fail together, because even if it's the failure of one person, that means the whole team failed.

The relationship between the leader and her team further extended to the theme of professionalism connected to the leader and her work. Through professional behaviour, the leader was thought to uphold good work ethics particularly related to receiving consent from followers to participate in work related tasks, allowing staff to voice themselves, and again, recognizing their work. Professionalism was also conveyed by the leader being knowledgeable, organized and a good planner. This extended to the leader's ability to take on a holistic and non-bias view, by following rules, procedures, and regulations. Another aspect of professional behaviour pertained to the leader's ability to stay professional when being provoked, by not taking things personally, keeping calm and not doing anything out of character, like overreacting and becoming emotional.

The final theme of empowering others was often mentioned in connection to the leader helping others grow, specifically with a staff- and student-centred approach. Overall, the participants communicated the importance of helping and supporting others evolve, progress, and to know the best about themselves and the skills that they can develop, eventually leading them to performing better and doing a better job. In extension, the leader herself will also grow because of helping others. Fatima described it like this:

Helping others know the best about themselves. And bring them to, not only the limit of their potentials, but also to discover the things that they can develop. /.../ So, it's always [about] helping others evolve, develop, progress, /.../ [and this] is part of my development as well. So, if I helped them develop, then that means I develop as well, because the final product will be better as well. This is my core value. Work together, develop together, have a better result together.

Doing this with staff and students was seen as an investment as they will be the future leaders one day. Maha elaborated on this:

[If] you are an admin or a teacher with me, I invest in you a lot. /.../ The people who are working in my team, they have to be better than me. Because one day they're going to be leader[s] themselves, and they [will] have my way and their own way.

The leader as a role model

To find out about underlying ideas to the leader as a role model the following question was posed: *To what extent do you believe that you as a role model make a difference in your leadership position?* Surprisingly, most of the interviewees indicated that this was a difficult question. Some possible reasons for this were stated by Reem, Noura, Maha, and Haifa.

How can you measure the effects that you leave on others?

This is a very difficult question to answer. I mean, I hope that I'm a good role model. I'm not doing this to be a role model. I'm not doing this because I want everyone to see what I'm doing and to follow my ... I'm not doing it to be a role model.

Honestly, I haven't [thought] about this question.

I mean, I don't know if it's OK for me to see myself as a role model. I mean, I aim to be a role model by implementing the values that I talked about, but I'm human [in] the end.

However, as the conversations went on, the participants started reflecting on the leader as a role model mainly in terms of their teams, but also in terms of themselves and their work. Reem expressed how she can see the reflection of her own behaviour in the followers and their own actions by looking at their reactions *to*, and their feedback *on* her own behaviour. Through their feedback, Reem described how she can understand her role for them and the way they see her. Reem extended this answer and how she tries to measure herself as a role model, not only in terms of the followers, but also in terms of herself, when she said,

Do I feel good about what I did or not?

The relationship to the followers was prevalent in all the interviewees' responses to this question. The nature of being a role model is always in relation to other

people in one way or the other, but what was evident from the data, was the idea of the followers mirroring whether the leader is a successful role model or not. In line with Reem's response. Haifa said,

I would like to be optimistic and say I make a lot of difference. Realistically, I think I'm okay. I've been told that I've dealt with it fine. So, this is just the people around me telling me that I'm doing well. I think I base it off that. As long as I have my core values, that have done nobody any harm. I have been transparent. I've been honest. I have been fair. Then that's fine. But then the assessment comes from the people you're working with.

Haifa continued to emphasize this vital connection to the feedback from the followers when she said,

If I implement these values and somebody comes up to me and says, 'We're happy with what you're doing', then I think that's for me, goal achieved, in a sense. But if they don't come up to me, then I always think, 'Have I done it right?' Somebody has to tell me that I've done it right, because there are no guidelines. There's nothing to tell you that you are a role model unless somebody comes up to you and says, 'I'm really happy with what you've done, or I like the way you've done this or you handle this'.

Other responses clearly connected to whether the leader 'walks the talk' or not, connecting the leader's behaviour to both her values and actions, in line with the previously mentioned core values of honesty and transparency. Fatima explained this viewpoint when she reflected on herself as a role model,

I make a difference by actions. I try to emphasise this. Okay, I start with words. But, if you just keep on saying stuff, but not putting it into action, that is not leading others. That is not being a role model. To be a role model, you have to put the values in front of you and your team, and not only to put them and to highlight them, but to put them into action as well. If you start practising them, the whole team will follow you. But if you just keep on talking about values, but not putting them into action, no one would care about them. They will know that they are just ink on paper. Nothing is happening beyond this. But, if you start showing them that you believe in your values and you're doing what you believe in. Then you are a role model. You are a real leader.

Collectively, the participants signified the importance of the leader displaying certain characteristics to be considered a role model, such as being *dedicated, determined, persistent, patient, enduring* and *perseverant*. Linked to these characteristics, the idea of the leader *making sacrifices* to achieve something emerged.

Jawaher's story of personal and financial sacrifices for the betterment of the students, the university, and the community, ran like a thread through her interview. One example of making sacrifices happened when she initially embarked on her leadership journey. Having a successful job at a well-known and prestigious hospital, she gave it up to join the academia. Her reason for this is clearly linked to her being requested to act as a role model for other Saudi women, as she was one of the first Saudi women to earn an MA degree in her speciality and there were very few Saudi women employed in the academia at the time.

Furthermore, Jawaher's narrative is a bit different from the other participants as she has been in leadership for much longer. Her story is that of a pioneer, leading not only herself through diversity, but also her followers and her students. Jawaher shared her PhD story and the path towards achieving it. She described going through the ordeal of combining work with studies and family, as well as paying for her PhD, accommodation fees and abroad travels from her own pocket. Jawaher shared,

I was a role model, in a sense, how to get into a system because I went through all the odds and had a degree without being sent by the place here. I paid for my tuition. I only you know, administrative wise, I was helped by the head of the department and by the dean. /.../ Being a role model is how to endure, how to communicate.

Like Jawaher, Noura also touched on this when she expressed that she hopes to leave a mark and set a good example in the program and in the students.

I'm doing this because I do believe in the programme. /.../ I believe [in] our students and I want to make a difference; I want to make things. I do want to leave a mark if you may, but I don't think about it in terms of 'I'm so great, I'm a role model to other people'.

Finally, the concept of the role model was also linked to Islam and faith as a leading light in the sense that Allaah sends good people your way as a guiding

light, which further extends to them being role models and examples to follow. Jawaher referred to a particular friend who stood by her before and during her PhD journey and described it like this:

And she took care of me at the beginning. /.../. Such a kind and honourable work that she had direct[ed] me. So, this is what you are, you are a guiding light because [of what] some other people had guid[ed] you through. /.../ ‘Subhaana Allaah’⁶ [Allah is free from all imperfection], Allaah send[s] good people [to] your place, at your way, to direct you.

5.4.2 Inspire a Shared Vision

The second practice, *Inspire a Shared Vision*, connects to the leader *envisioning the future* and *enlisting others* in a shared vision. Two questions were used to investigate this: *Describe your approach to envisioning the future in your organization and its followers? How do you inspire and enlist your followers in a shared vision?*

The approach to envisioning the future

To begin, several different visions were presented collectively by the interviewees, such as Vision 2030, the University Vision, the Department Vision, the Committee Vision, the leader’s own visions, and the visions for staff and students. The visions mentioned, related mainly to the visions of the university, the students, and the staff members in terms of aiming for the university to take a leading role and to be at the forefront of research in the region. This would be achieved by continuing to develop the university, adapting to future needs, and by nurturing equality as part of it being a public university. Furthermore, the vision in terms of the students, related to nurturing the next generation and preparing the minds of the students for what is yet to come, as they will be the leaders of tomorrow. To be able to accomplish the visions of the university and the students, the importance of carefully selecting staff members, who will cater for this development, was pointed out by several participants. Connected to this, not only the im-

⁶ سبحان الله

portance of knowledge was emphasized, but also the importance of values, beliefs, and good character. Combining the many examples mentioned above, the participants displayed a *holistic approach* to implementing the different visions by utilizing them to create a sense of purpose and direction for followers and students. This approach was shared by Maha when she stated,

My way is that I took our country[‘s] vision for the future. And then I took the university[‘s] vision of the future. And then the third way, I took the institute[‘s] vision of the future and the branch that I’m in. And I’ve seen the resources that I had, and I aligned this for [a] plan or for [a] blueprint. And then, I picked [a] committee and [a] head of the committee and I explained to them, /.../ I show[ed] them where it’s leading. And where is the goal and all that. Every time I told them you’re the leader of the future, I’m not going to be in that chair all the time. You’re going to take the second step, so don’t think now and [only] this goal, [but rather] think global and think huge. But at the same time, you’re not going to take the stairs all in one step. [Instead, you take it] step by step by step by step.

In addition, Noura emphasized how this holistic approach included all the different stakeholders and for the leader to *trust her intuition* when she said,

For example, you have faculty members, you have admin staff, and you have students. I do believe that you need to empower each and every one in that you listen to them, and you take their suggestions, their concerns or questions /.../ whatever feedback in any form, you take it into consideration when you’re actually making a decision. But at the same time trusting your own self and your own abilities and that gut feeling of doing what’s right for the organisation.

Another aspect of the holistic approach to envisioning the future pertained to the leader *being a realist* by basing her visions on knowledge. This way, the leader will not be in a state of delusion and can instead envision things that are realistic. Reem explained,

Knowledge is power. So, if you know what is going on behind the scenes related to the job, then you also know how you will act accordingly. Because if you don’t know what’s going on behind the scenes or what’s happening on the top management, you may have a wrong vision. You may end up being shocked about the reality of things.

Fatima highlighted the importance of envisioning the future and viewing it as a *way moving forward*. She explained,

If you are envisioning the future, that means you want to be a better person. You want your organisation to be in a better place. This won't come with just sitting satisfied with what you have. You have to have ambition. You have to have something for the future. Something to dream about. Something to think about. That will bring improvement to your organisation.

For the vision to not simply stay a dream, Fatima also emphasized the importance of connecting it to *self-reflection*.

To me, it's all about reflection. You reflect on your practise, and then you start to envision the future. You start by having a long-term plan, the strategic way of thinking. So, you have long-term plans and short-term plans, all based on reflection on how you experience things. How you perform things. How the procedure of your work went on.

Fatima further connected the practice of reflection to finding *potential areas of improvement*, that could be part of envisioning the future.

No matter how good you perform, there is still a space for improvement, to improve what you're doing. There's no such a thing that is called perfection. But there is such a thing that can be called a better way to perform things, even if you're performing well. /.../ You can ask all [the] stakeholders around you /.../ [because] if you ask people about how you did, then you will find the areas that need improvement. And don't just stay rested and believe that 'Well, I'm doing well. My evaluation is okay'. Still, there is a space to improve your work. This is how I see envisioning the future.

Jawaher connected envisioning the future with *the core values, the mission, and the vision of the place of work*. She said,

It comes from the place you work in. When I was in the hospital, the aspir[ation] [was] to get more Saudis to work in clinical practise, in general. /.../ Here [at the university] I continue to carry on the things I heard from the system, the core values, the mission and [the] vision of this place, to be a leading establishment.

Moreover, Jawaher went on to link the above to encouraging *diplomacy* among staff and students, as in conducting yourself wisely with good manners. She gave

an example of a situation when the organization had to decline a clinical practice offer which was unsuitable. While doing so, she emphasized the importance of declining the offer in a respectful manner, linking it to religion. She explained,

I like that diplomacy is very high. /.../ You don't say 'No!'. You say, 'Thank you very much. Indeed, it is a good opportunity for our students to practice...' /.../ So, in a diplomatic way, this is one of the things that we have. And I think this comes for our religion also.

A final aspect that Jawaher shared connected to the importance of *nurturing a non-discriminating environment*. Speaking to new staff members, she narrated,

You are little professors of the future. So, you have to be a good role model for the students. You have to be polite, because we are a [name of organization] that has a lot of non-Saudis. So, you have to be respectful. /.../ We don't want to invest on being national or not national, first-class citizen, [or] not. Though it's coming, but we don't do this.

Haifa's reply to this question evolved mainly around the challenges a leader may face when envisioning the future in her context. She explained how she needs time to consider her decisions, which is not always possible. She explained,

Everything is done by telephone, and they want instant answers. I don't do instant. For me, I have to think. I'm a thinker and then I'm a doer and they like [immediate] answers. /.../ If I can criticise it, here. It's not done very systematically. It's not very transparent, so they don't tell you what it entails.

Haifa gave another example of how it can be difficult to envision the future because "positions are tied to people", "so if the person changes, then that position changes". In her view, this leads to inconsistency, unnecessary changes, and waste of human resources. She said,

The person comes in, changes the whole staff, changes the whole system, all of this, and then they suddenly leave. And then the next person has to come in and they change the system, they change the staff, they change the group, and this is what happens. And I don't think that's sustainable. I think, you will waste all this training that has been put into these groups. [It] is gone in a couple of years because you left as a leader.

Inspiring and enlisting the followers in a shared vision

As concerns the next question on how the participants inspire and enlist the followers in a shared vision, several themes emerged connected to *the leader's self* and *the leader and her team*.

The first theme related to the ways in which the leader communicates the shared vision. Here, the importance of *communicating clear goals* was pointed out. Fatima said,

Make the goal or the goals, if you have more than one goal, make it clear to them.

In line with this, Noura extended this to also include *consistency* and *commitment* and said,

You have to be consistent, and you have to be committed. /.../ So, you have to make sure that you are going to do something, that there is a clear action plan that you are going to follow.

In continuation to clarity, Reem pointed out the need to also communicate the visions and the goals *wisely* with the followers. Related to this, she shared an example of a situation when she had heard of a major merge that was going to take place between different units and committees at her work. She explained,

But now, when you have this knowledge from the top management, you have to share this knowledge wisely with your own team, and you have to make sure that you include and give them a positive envision of the new situation, to make the followers involved and to enable them to have an insight, going back to the transparency. But on the same hand you need to share wisely. It's wise sharing because you can't share everything. You need to avoid panic in your followers. And sometimes you need to wait a little bit and you make sure that you share the things with the followers that are related to their positions, so that they don't start feeling anxious about, for example, losing their position at the workplace.

In extension to communicating the visions and goals with clarity and wisdom, Maha connected this to the difference between the leader justifying them at a personal level versus a professional level when she said,

If you take it scientifically, professionally justifi[ying]. Show them the goal. Show them, why are you doing this? /.../ Making them, not believe and follow MY way. But understand why the institute or why the method or why this is done this way. It's not a personal opinion, personal preference, but no, this is the correct way of doing it now.

By this she meant that a leader must justify the visions and the goals at a professional level instead of at a personal level because a personal justification or explanation does not hold water.

The second theme connected to the leader inspiring and enlisting the followers by *working side-by-side* with them. Haifa expressed it in this way:

When they see the leader working as hard as they are, I think it makes them feel better, and aspire to do more for the unit or for the place of work or whatever. /.../ So, I think working alongside them and them seeing you, not just sitting on the chair and enjoying the perks that come with leadership position. [But] that you're actually down with them and getting your hands dirty and working with them. /.../ So, I think that makes them feel okay, that we're not working FOR someone. We're working WITH someone, and I think that's an important difference.

The third theme related more explicitly to *the leader and her team* and the ways in which the leader inspired followers in a shared vision through the subthemes of *support, self-development connected to teamwork, and nurturing an environment of openness and growth, where making mistakes is part of development.*

Firstly, supporting staff was usually expressed in terms of *empowering* and *encouraging* them, and by *recognizing their contributions*. Jawaher emphasized the importance of creating an inclusive environment when she said,

Equality is something also very [important]. Empowering the poor, empowering the coloured, empowering people from all walks of life. We have a black faculty member. We have Asians. We have [names of different Saudi Arabian tribes]. And we have someone from Turkish descendants. /.../ So, we want to keep that culture inclusive.

Noura expressed this empowerment in terms of involving the followers and *considering their "voices", "opinions" and "feedback"*. She said,

Make sure that you involve them [the followers]. They are involved in the construction of the vision of where to go, the objectives of what, whichever issues that we are going to face. /.../ Validating the process through them. /.../ [And then involving them in the] evaluation of whatever the process, the end result, everything should involve those who are going to be affected by whichever decision or whichever objective or whichever vision that you set out to achieve.

Haifa described another part of supporting staff and pointed out the significance of recognizing their contributions. She shared a narrative of one of her subordinates who presented her with a report that she wanted Haifa to sign as the author of the report. Haifa explained,

I wouldn't put my name on it. /.../ I'm not [going to] lie and say that I've done something that I didn't. But part of it is like I'm taking away all the hard work that she's done. If she's written this report and I'm taking credit for it, then I'm kind of stealing something from her, and it's not, it's not fair. You have to give credit where credit is due.

Secondly, on the path towards inspiring and enlisting the followers under the umbrella of a shared vision, a focus on each individual team member emerged from the data. The importance of teamwork was pointed out, but for the teamwork to be successful, each individual team member must thrive first. Fatima said,

It all starts with the individual and then it affects the team. For the team to improve, we need to work on the individuals.

This individual work was then linked to the practice of building *self-awareness through reflection* by both Fatima and Jawaher. Fatima described,

It all comes with reflection. You have just to sit down and to reflect upon what you did, upon your strengths and weaknesses as well. So, try to feed your strengths by improving them, adding to them, and try to work also on your weaknesses, whether as a person or as a team or as an organisation.

As for Jawaher, she did not use the word *self-awareness* explicitly, but she shared a narrative of how she aims to nurture *openness* and *flexibility* in her students by being open to different perspectives and experiences. She described how the new students had set their mind on a speciality and therefore they were less open to trying other specialties in the medical field. She said,

At their level, they are clinical (name of medical profession), we respect their wish that they in the future are going to be in, for example, OB and Gynae or paediatric nurse or whatever. But at this level, you are in with us, not yet specialised. You need to be open. You need to be resilient. You need to be adaptable. /.../ And then they start to communicate and reflect, and I add up to their knowledge.

The final subtheme that emerged under supporting staff is *accepting mistakes*, which can be seen as a continuation of nurturing self-reflection and openness. In turn, the practice of being open to mistakes and accepting mistakes was also linked to Islam. Fatima described how she sees making mistakes as part of development,

I make this very clear with anyone that I work with. It's okay to have or to do mistakes. We are human beings at the end of the day, the most important thing with mistakes is you have to recognise them, and then you have to ask yourself why this happened and then start from there. Start to, think about how to avoid having the same mistake again. If you have another mistake, that means you're improving, you're moving ahead. /.../ So, it's okay to make mistakes. Don't be afraid of mistakes but be afraid of ignorance of mistakes.

Fatima continued to also link this practice to Islam when she said,

Even in our religion, we believe that Allaah, 'Azza wa Jal'⁷ [The Great and Almighty], accepts mistake[s]. And He would love us to just say 'Astaghfir ullaah'⁸ [I ask Allah for forgiveness] and then move on. We're not angels at the end of the day. So, we have to put this also into practise in our work. /.../ Be strong enough to take the responsibility of your mistakes and move on by avoiding them in the future.

Inspiring and enlisting others was also described as challenging for the leader, especially in terms of *bureaucracy* and the *need to practice small talk*. Haifa explained,

I don't like bureaucracy. I'm an introvert. I'm not good with small talk, which seems to be the biggest thing in leadership. They like to small talk, and they like to, I don't know what you call it in English, but in Arabic, it's niceties, something like that. So, you have to be always smiling and asking [about] somebody's children, and it's not me.

⁷ عز وجل
⁸ استغفر الله

Haifa continued to elaborate more on how aspects of work culture can hinder envisioning the future.

I don't fall into the same pattern as everybody else here, so I find it difficult.

5.4.3 Challenge the Process

The third practice, *Challenge the Process*, pertains to how the leader *searches for opportunities* and how the leader *experiments and takes risks* while doing so. Two questions were used to examine this: *In your opinion, what is the best way of leading people through change and challenges? What is your approach towards taking risks and experiment in times of change and challenges?*

Considering the first question, a few of the interviewees thought it a difficult question. One of the reasons for this was explained by Fatima when she said,

It's a really difficult question because [during] these difficult times [pandemic times], with challenges and changes, it's really hard to deal with them yourself, let alone leading others.

Fatima's statement above also give evidence to a self-awareness that is connected to understanding other people's situation, which in turn also opens to seeing their needs. In line with this self-awareness, also comes the understanding that *change is inevitable*. Reem said,

Change is a must. For any organisation, change is a must and because I believe that remaining the same is actually failure. There has to be a dynamic, so that you are enabling and encouraging change.

Most responses took a clear initial leader perspective, beginning with what the leader herself could do to lead the way through changes and challenges. Building on understanding the situation, Noura pointed out the importance of the leader being *knowledgeable* and *having a clear picture* of what is going on. To achieve this, the leader needs to be sensitive towards what is happening in the team. She explained,

If they have concerns, if they have complaints, you have to listen. It's your job to listen, because most of the time, these are very valid concerns and fears and anxieties and everything. Making sure that they know that you are listening and that you are going to take their consideration into action, but also be strong enough, and confident enough, and have the necessary knowledge to tell them why changes are happening and so forth.

After having a clear picture of the situation, Noura and Fatima went on to explain the importance of *getting the followers on board* through transparently communicating what is needed with them. Noura continued,

Transparency is very important, even in those changes that are not going to be pleasant or not going to be popular, you have to be transparent. /.../ And the way you present it as well, it's very important. You have to be very clear in terms of what you want them to do, why you want to do it, and how you want to do it. And the timeline as well of the changes and everything. So, they have to know what's going on basically. And also, if they believe that you believe in it, even if they don't believe in it, at least they know that you are doing it because there's a purpose behind it.

Fatima explained,

We need to know more about the change or the challenge that we as a team be facing. So, if we understand these changes or challenges, that will make our duty way easier, because you understand. But, if you want to bring a change or if you want for your team to overcome a challenge, but you don't educate them on this, you will be working alone, because they don't understand. They will just follow your instructions, but blindly, they don't know why they are doing this. /.../ If they understand, they will help you and you need the help of everyone during difficult times.

As a continuation to the initial process of knowledge and transparency, Haifa, Reem and Maha emphasized the importance of getting everyone involved by *wisely* and *gradually* presenting the change or challenge at the same time as *encouraging* them, especially when facing resistance. Haifa said,

I think not presenting too much change at the same time. So maybe going step by step. So, changing little things as you go along and tak[e] their opinion.

Reem continued,

You have to provide the followers with enough information and in an encouraging environment. By you doing this, by being honest, because some followers, to be honest, will not be creative. They only want you to present a plan that they need to follow. So, in a way you need to encourage them to participate and number one, plan the change and for the change to be a success, others have to contribute.

Maha gave an example that happened to her during the Covid-19 pandemic when two teachers refused to teach online due to not having enough technical skills. Maha went on to explain how she gradually guided them through the process, making sure that they had the support they needed. She narrated,

I had two teachers [who] are really old, early teachers. /.../ And they [said] 'No, we cannot succeed. We're not so high tech [people]'. I told them, for example, you're using your smartphone, you're using Zoom. [So,] I break it down to the terminology that they're used to. I break their fears. Also at the same time, /.../ I get them lots of workshop, professional workshops, and I guide them. I coach them a lot and I put people with [more] experience with the least experience[d,] in a group, coaching each other, and [this will help them] know[ing] that they're not alone in that change.

When faced with changes and challenges Haifa pointed out the importance of staying *realistic* and focusing on what is possible. She said,

So, saying this is what we can change, and this is what we can't change. So, let's work on what we CAN change.

Jawaher addressed this question from a different perspective than the other participants when she answered it from the stance of *initiating change* as a response to challenges. When sharing the narrative of her long journey in the medical field, there is a clear conscious approach to initiating change in view of developing the medical profession. She kept pointing out the importance of education and knowledge to fight of ignorance, stigmas and other challenges and she described education as “a guiding light” and “a steppingstone”. Moreover, her first two words to answer this question were “science” and “education” and after narrating the many challenges that her profession and faculty have faced, she said, “and this is where education comes”, emphasizing the importance of education to tackle

challenges. Along with spreading knowledge and awareness, she added several characteristics to go hand in hand with that when she said,

So that will help, being resilient, being adaptable, being able to learn and to connect [to] what has change[d] through the years in the health system. [And] important [is also] staff development, [and to] continue to develop yourself.

Fatima also used the similitude of “light” to represent knowledge and making sure that all subordinates are in line with it when she said,

We as leaders need to bring everything to their conception, to their recognition. It's like putting some light on something.

In contrast, Fatima used the similitude of “dark” to describe the opposite when she said,

If they are just kept in the dark, they don't know anything about you, your vision, your goals, your plans. Then, you will be working alone, giving instructions to blind people who are doing every small thing under your supervision. And this is not leadership, at all. But it's the opposite when you tell them about your plans, the change, or the challenges that you have. Why you're doing this. And then, from there, they can work.

According to Fatima, this strategy will not only “enlighten” them but also help them *work independently* through any other obstacles or challenges, ultimately empowering them and creating trust between the leader and her team. She explained,

And even if they are faced with some situation that you did not educate them about, they know the general concept. They know the general plans. They know the general strategy of the organisation. They can work independently. They can make decisions themselves on the situation, even if you are a bit far away from the situation. But you can trust them, because it's like you're generating new leaders who can lead the situation, because in every situation, they won't need to go back to you because they understand the general idea. They understand where you are heading. They won't move away from where you're guiding them.

As the interviews took place during the Covid-19 pandemic, many participants referred to this experience as one of the challenges that they have had to handle.

Reem spoke about the pivot to teaching online during this time and stressed the value of being *creative* and *innovative* when she answered,

It's about seeing alternative ways to change and finding new ways. So, when these shifting things to online happened, it was probably one of those changes where you have to encourage others to improve their technical aspects or their technical skills. And also improve and find innovative ways of achieving the goals.

Maha also referred to the pandemic and pondered on it being both a change and a challenge when she said,

At the same time, this is, I don't know, change or challenge. Corona time, it's both.

She went on to describe several challenges that she and her team faced in the past year. First, Maha had to build a part of the faculty from scratch, with very little resources. Second, her faculty lost many staff members in one go. And third, all activities had to move online at the beginning of the pandemic. As she described the situations, a few different approaches can be derived which run like a thread through her narrative. To begin, the challenges that they faced seem to have ignited more creativity in terms of problem solving. Maha's connection to her staff was evident as she continuously narrated how she encouraged them and how the followers asserted through the challenge. One of the first things Maha did was "*involving the teachers*" when she asked them,

And I told them, 'Do you want to experience working in admin work on top of your work?' Some of them volunteer, and I told them you could withdraw any time you feel [it's] hard.

A second thing she did was to find *the best woman for the job*. She explained,

And some of them came forward to me and I sat down and explained to them. And I asked them certain questions, 'Like, what's your hobbies and what you want to do?', and see what person fits for what.

In this way, Maha managed to encourage staff members to volunteer at the same time as she built on their good qualities. A third approach was that she made sure to *listen to the team members* during the challenging times. She said,

I'm a leader that like to be in communication with all the staff and [listen] to them, not giving them everything they want, but hearing them. Sometimes, if you [listen to] a person, it's calms them down, right?

When faced with the other challenges, the team had built a strong bond to the extent that when some followers were forced to leave their jobs for external reasons, they didn't do so abruptly, but instead finished their work without pay. Maha narrated their reaction,

'We want to finish with you, work with you'. Even teachers, they [said], 'We will finish teaching the students because it's Sunday, the exam!'. And at the same time, I told them, 'If you're teaching, this is not legal, not ethical. I don't have something to pay you'. And they said, 'No, we want to do it because this is our work!', because they know the vision.

Taking risks and experiment in times of change and challenges

The next question, which linked to the leaders' approach towards taking risks and experiment in times of change and challenges, was one of the few questions that all the interviewees answered only briefly. However, most participants described themselves taking a *careful and calculated approach* towards taking risks. Haifa described herself,

I'm risk-averse by nature. /.../ I'm not, I'm not very good with risk. And the only risks I would take is calculated risk. I think. So, if I am going to take a risk, it has to be calculated. I would prefer not to. I prefer somebody else to take the risk.

Noura said,

I am, unfortunately, I'm not that much of a risk-taker. Whenever I wanted to do something that would be considered risky, I really, over think it, over study it, I do my homework. /.../ I don't like taking risks because the kind of job that you do involves other people. So, you don't want to do something that could have a negative effect on them. I could take risks when [it] involves me personally.

Reem said,

I'm not a person who takes risks. I only take risks if needed. /.../ I like to be on the safe side.

Fatima also described a calculated approach towards risk-taking, but more from a scenario planning perspective. She answered,

It's a kind of brave, but careful approach, so try new things, but you have to study before you try them. Study what you're doing. Okay, we will take this risk. We will try new things, but we need to /.../ take a careful approach towards risks that we have because we can't live without risks. It's better to plan for risks beforehand, before being faced with them. So, try to avoid being in situations where you need to deal very quickly with some risks.

Only Maha had a different approach when she described herself and said,

I like to take risk[s], and I like to take challenge[s], a lot. /.../ if the challenge or the risk that I'm taking [is] for the student[s]' benefit, [and] not for [a] person or personal advantage, I'm bold and I'll take it.

A possible reason for the participants describing themselves as risk-averse was expressed by Haifa when she said,

And I think here, especially here, I think the consequences are too high. If you make a mistake, you're crucified for it basically, and it's just easy for people to blame others.

Moving on, even though the participants were not keen on taking risks, they continued to describe their approach to risk-taking and experimenting. In line with Haifa's comment above, Reem explained the importance of *collective decision-making* to both handle the challenge and to avoid blame. According to her,

It's about engaging your team and making them aware of the process and the plan, and by you being transparent with them, you are involving them in the process, and you don't want to hide anything from them. And, because you don't want them to blame you afterwards and saying that it's all your fault when something has failed. So, in this sense, it's about the transparency and having a shared decision, being in a shared decision-making situation.

As part of the calculated risk-taking approach, Fatima spoke about the importance of *foreseeing the risks*, to be better prepared for them. She mentioned the example of how her university had set up an online platform long time before the pandemic, which enabled a swift move to online teaching. She explained,

The next day, we were able to start teaching online. It was a big challenge for many institutions. Education institutions all around the globe, not only in Saudi. That means there is a kind of planning ahead that took place, like years and years before the pandemic.

Most responses focused on risk-taking in their answers, except for Noura who pointed out a difference between taking risks and experimenting when she said,

I do [experiment], but again not on a large... It depends again on what we're experimenting. But I usually do want to experiment with new things. I do enjoy doing new things, taking the initiative. Initiatives in terms of improving and everything.

5.4.4 Enable Others to Act and Encourage the Heart

The fourth and fifth practices from The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership® are *Enable Others to Act* and *Encourage the Heart*. They firstly connect to the leader's application of *Fostering Collaboration* and *Strengthening Others* and secondly to *Recognizing Contributions* and *Celebrating Values and Victories*. Two questions were used to investigate this: [1] *How do you motivate your followers to perform at their best and in what ways do you work towards strengthening them?* [2] *Do you think that it is important to recognize the contributions of your followers? Would you care to elaborate?* Due to the respondents' answers overlapping between these two practices, they are presented together in this section.

Interestingly, when asked the first question related to the fourth practice, *Enable Others to Act*, the participants also spoke about the fifth practice, *Encourage the Heart*. It became clear, from the data, that the interviewees saw a close link between the two, and that the path through enabling the followers to act went through encouraging their hearts.

Like the other practices, the participants continued to elaborate on their leadership practice from the perspective of leadership as a relationship. For these two practices, the answers focused mainly on *the leader's self* and *the leader and her team* and how the leader *balanced* between the two. Haifa expressed this when she said,

I think walking that balance between hands on and hands off. /.../ I think it's the balance between giving them enough freedom to be creative or do what they want. And then at the same time giving them some kind of parameter where they can work within.

Maha described another aspect of this balance by altering between a *personal* and *professional relationship* with her staff. She explained that when she notices one of her followers is lacking in something professionally, she usually suggests for her to conduct some related training. If the person does not show much interest, she moves on to encouraging her at a more personal level. She said,

If I see some professional things that [a] person is not doing well, I [suggest to] them [a] workshop /.../ Sometimes, if I see them resistant or not attending the workshop, I try to be the leader [and say]. 'Attend this workshop with me, come with me [to] this workshop!' So, I work in the personal and professional.

Fatima expressed how it can sometimes be *challenging to motivate staff members*. She said,

Dealing with people, it's not easy. And especially knowing that different people have different psychology. Motivation in itself is something really hard to deal with, especially if people don't have intrinsic motivation.

Fatima continued to elaborate on the aspect of motivation, and in line with Maha's reply above, she emphasized the importance of connecting with the team members at a personal level. She explained,

The best way, personally for me, is to know more about the person in my team or in the organisation, and to understand how to turn on the motivation within them. Because [for] some people one word is enough for them to get motivated. And [with] some people you have to work hard. And, sometimes you need to change their place, sometimes change the duty, to get the best out of them. /.../ Sometimes, taking them outside to drink a coffee, for example. Building a kind of strong bond with them.

In the same manner, Haifa elaborated on knowing the followers by the leader having *an observant eye* as well as *picking the right person* for the job when she said,

If looking at people, observing them, talking to them, listening to them, you might discover things that will help you position them in, or putting them in, the right position and revealing their creative side or revealing their strength.

Noura pointed out the significance of the leader being both “consistent” and “committed” when it comes to motivating the followers. She said,

You have to be consistent, have to be committed, and also just keeping it alive, keeping their motivation alive by again, consistently giving them feedback, making them feel good.

To proceed, motivating the followers also required *believing* and *investing in them and their skills*. Noura described how she tells the team members,

I believe in you, and I'm willing to invest time and effort to improving your skills.

However, the interviewees did not only emphasize the need to motivate staff in terms of encouraging and supporting them, but also pointed out the importance of balancing this with the possible *consequences of not performing well*. Noura said,

And sometimes you do have to highlight the consequences of not doing well. So, it's not always, 'Ah, you're doing great!', and so forth, but again remind[ing] them that if they don't do well, not in a terrible, menacing way, but this is what's going to happen if you don't submit the report on time. /.../ Like just making them aware of the whole situation in terms of transparency and /.../ what I expect from them.

Besides communicating what is expected with the subordinates, Maha associated this with encouraging responsibility and holding them accountable when she said,

I give them a job description. And I [tell] them, 'This is your job description. This is what comes from me. This is what comes from the

university. This has come from the kingdom, but I want you to develop it more'. /.../ And they sign it, they approve it, and if they approve it, I'll take it. And then I hold them accountable for it.

Appreciation and recognition

Many ways of recognition and celebrating successes were mentioned by the interviewees. Most refer to what has been mentioned above in terms of words of praise, gratitude, and appreciation, privately as well as publicly, but others included, evaluation, certificates, honours, awards, nice text messages, gifts and dinner or party celebrations.

Reem pointed out that “money matters” to encourage the followers to perform at their best. However, she also said that money “doesn't last for long” and that “appreciation and recognition last longer”. According to Reem,

Words matter, and by being polite and respectful in the way you deliver orders to others you can avoid bossing them around. You are sort of encouraging them and showing appreciation and recognition for their work.

Most participants believed recognizing the contributions of the subordinates was crucial to encourage them to perform at their best. To describe this, Reem also shared an anecdote from a leader she admires who has won a best leader award. When asked why he won the price, he referred to the team and said, “Well, I have a smart team”. Reem gave this as an example of how important she thinks it is for the leader to be “courageous and recognising the efforts of the team members” contrary to taking all the credit to herself.

Maha elaborated more on appreciation and recognition connected to words when she said,

I feel appreciating is rewarding in some way. /.../ If I give them gifts, this is not ethical in work. I believe this is not ethical. This is making them materialistic. And the goals, reaching the goals, this is motivation and appreciation and as humanity I don't know [if] this is me or everybody, but humanity, if you appreciate them in words, they give more.

For these words to be perceived as genuine, Fatima points out that,

You have to make it very specific that you recognise something very particular about their performance. Even if it is a small thing, even if it's just in a small part of what they did, they will appreciate that you are recognising the effort. It's not about only the outcome or the product. It's about the effort that they put. So, whenever you recognise it, the next time they work, they will remember how you recognised their contribution. They will do better, not only to get this kind of recognition from you. But also, it's part of, them being happy about how they perform.

In turn, Fatima described how this recognition will have an *impact on the whole team* when she concluded,

It's for the success of the whole team. If you keep on recognising the effort, that means the whole team will grow. The whole team will perform better.

In addition to *the leader and herself* and *the leader and her team*, Jawaher was one of the participants who also focused on *the leader and her community*. By taking a more localized approach, where she specifically mentioned *strengthening the Saudi community*. She described,

I think the best thing is to put the problem as it relates to you as a national Saudi.

She went on to connect this to her profession in medicine and how she has seen catering for the nationals and the local needs, lacking. In the past, most staff in the Saudi hospitals and the medical faculties were non-Saudis. This sometimes posed a problem for the patients and staff could not connect well with the patients as they needed interpreters and did not have a good understanding of the Saudi culture.

I thought that this is something we lack here. We need to relate to our own problems, our own selves because we don't have our own [medical profession]. We used to have an interpreter, in every ward that they take into, that shifts with us and those interpreters there are some of them they're nice and good, and they pour their heart. And some of them they are just barely doing the job. So, I keep installing this principle. Those are nationals. Those patients [are] your national[s]. The [patient] could be your nephew. This patient could be

your neighbour. /.../ This is what I use, investing in your nationals, in your community, in your problem[s].

Amid sharing ideas of how to motivate and encourage staff to perform at their best, Haifa brought up a dilemma that can occur when it comes to recognition for those who do not perform well. She expressed,

It will become tricky when you have those really laid back, let's say not lazy, but really laid-back followers, if you want to call them. And then how are you going to recognise something when they haven't done it? And they see everybody else being recognised? I think what's being done here is that they get recognised anyway. For me, that kind of lessens the value of the recognition that the others have got. So, I find it very difficult to tell them 'Hey, good job!', when they haven't done a good job.

Haifa continued to reflect on this challenge and pointed out that it can lead to diminishing the recognition if all are treated as “winners”. She continued,

I think it's steals something away. I think it's just same thing with the students. If you give everybody a participation trophy, when this is the style now, so even the students who fail, you say, 'Oh, good job, good job'. This is the kind of American way, I think, of telling people like 'there's no winners now'. I don't know if you've noticed this, but in American football and things in schools, they don't have winners and losers. They just have winners. /.../. So, you don't want to hurt their feelings, that kind of thing. So, all these people who are failing, you're not telling them that the're failures, you're telling them, 'Good job, well done!'. But then I think that you're stealing from the people who actually put in the hard work and worked, and you're kind of making them equal, and it's very, very bad. I think even you're giving this false hope because life is tough and then you're not recognising the other parts' effort. So, I find that part difficult.

Haifa shared a possible reason for unjustified recognition sometimes being given when she connected it to a part of culture. She explained,

It's a face-saving society. Face, very face-saving kind of community, very collective. We all are one, that kind of thing. Not very individualistic.

Even though all the participants described the importance of catering for teamwork under previous practices, Haifa pointed out another observation related to recognition and how it possibly connects to who is to be blamed. She said,

Unless they've started adopting the American way where this person is the greatest person ever, and it's just one person. Um, so team effort is weirdly recognised, I think, in my opinion. I think it's, it's always one person, but it's teamwork. But he's the boss of the team or he is the leader of the team. I don't think he or she should get any more recognition if it was actual teamwork. But then I also realised that in this setting, where I'm talking about, if something goes out, then that person is the only person to blame. So, this is, I think, where this recognition comes from, because it comes with blame. So, the group or the team wouldn't be blamed. It will be the leader of the group blamed. So, if he's or she is blamed, then they have the right to be recogni[zed].

5.5 Personal-best leadership experiences

The second research question investigated how the participants describe their own personal-best leadership experiences. This question was based on Kouzes & Posner's (2017) research on leaders' "Personal-Best Leadership Experiences—experiences that they believe[d] are their individual standards of excellence" (p. 11). From the anecdotes and findings of this thesis, seven themes could be derived, presented in order of frequency below and across participants in table 9. Instead of presenting examples from the data for each theme, each personal story was summarized for each participant, one by one, supporting the findings of the seven themes whenever applicable. This allowed the personal-best narrative of each participant to stay more intact as part of the thematic narrative analysis.

Themes in order of frequency:

1. Personal characteristics that are admired and valued
2. Personal achievement – a stage of development
3. Positive impact on others – making a difference
4. Actions connected to values
5. Professionalism – maintaining a professional stance in a challenging situation, yet catering for the well-being of others
6. Personal reflection
7. Envisioning the future

TABLE 9. Themes in order of frequency and participants

Theme	Fatima	Reem	Jawaher	Haifa	Noura	Maha	Total
Personal characteristics	X	X	X	X	X	X	6
Personal achievement		X	X	X	X	X	5
Positive impact on others	X	X		X	X	X	5
Actions connected to values		X	X	X	X	X	5
Professionalism		X			X	X	3
Personal reflection	X		X				2
Envisioning the future			X			X	2

As seen in table 9, all the participants narrated an event that mainly led to some type of personal impact, achievement, or reflection. In addition, this extended to their relationships with others through either the leaders' *value-connected actions*, *the positive impact on others*, *how the actions related to professionalism*, or *how the experience contributed to envisioning the future* in some way or another. Many of the narratives depicted an experience that happened before holding today's leading position by highlighting what shaped them prior to being leaders. Thus, the participants described leadership as moving beyond titles.

Fatima's story

Fatima described a specific experience that she had as a university student, studying for her PhD. Her narration showed how she had a positive impact on the other students and how it *made her reflect on her own experience*. She also described how it was a *mutual positive relationship*. She explained,

I was appointed as an [name] programme mentor. So, I was a mentor for the newcomers. That helped me, actually to build a relationship with the new students. So, that gave me the chance to help them, give them advice, and kind of reflect on my own experience as well. The good thing, or the good part of it, was that they kept the same good mentorship relationship with me.

Fatima continued to elaborate on the positive impact the experience had on others and how she connects the experience to her view on leadership. She said,

What makes it a special experience for me was their comments. /.../ I remember in my last year, one of them came and said [interviewee's

name], 'I just would like to thank you because you made me continue and keep on [with] my research'. /.../ 'You helped me to recognise what is good in each and every chapter. Other people told me what is hard about the chapter. But you told me about what is good about the chapter. So, you helped me, keep on going and continue with my research. Otherwise, I would drop like years ago'. So, I felt that was one of the good experiences that I have on leadership, because it's not about having a position. Still, you can be a leader without a position, by having, even if it's a small effect on others, but it's a good effect. Then you are a leader, and you can make other people also leaders. By spreading this kind of leadership attitude.

Fatima concluded by adding to her description of a good leader. She explained,

Leadership means helping other, helping, leading others to the right path. Not to be in a position. Because some people are in positions, but they are not good leaders. They don't know how to help others be on the right track and do the right, or the difficult things in an easier way, for example, or to understand what are the strengths of other people. This is simply to me at least, the concept of leadership.

Reem's story

No direct quotes were taken from this part of the interview with Reem due to it not being recorded, and therefore the findings are presented as a summary. Reem's anecdote described an event when she had been assigned a major leading role for a crucial and confidential event. Under her, she had been assigned a team, and a right-hand assistant. The whole event required all staff to be energetic and move around at a high pace. For various reasons (that could not be included in this thesis), the assistant was not able to keep up with this required pace. This made the task more difficult, as Reem had to not only lead the event, but also do the job of the assistant. Due to the high-stake level of the event, Reem was faced with a professional/ethical and emotional dilemma. What choices should she make to move forward?

Reem decided that the success of the event took precedence over the likelihood of the assistant feeling hurt. So, she contacted the higher management and explained the situation. When asked for her suggestions on how to solve the situation, she recommended another assistant that she believed to be up for the task. Even though Reem took this decision, her story also showed how she took careful attention to address the situation with the first assistant, revealing a level of emotional empathy on her part. By comforting, encouraging, and praising her for the

things she did well, Reem balanced the situation, which made a big difference for the first assistant. At the end of Reem's narrative, she explained that what made the experience one of her personal-best ones, was the fact that she felt she "did the right thing" to be able to complete the task and at the same time balance the situation with the first assistant.

Jawaher's story

Jawaher's story evolved mainly on how different experiences in the past have developed her at a personal level and its impact on her leadership role. This especially connected to how she aspired for change in her field, and how she envisioned the medical profession in the future Saudi Arabia. She narrated two main examples, the first being the instances when she for various reasons had to visit different hospitals in different countries. She said,

| It was every time I go and visit the hospital.

Each time she did that, she reflected on her experience and what she could learn from it. She said,

| You wanted to envision the profession [for it] to be as a leading profession for the young females coming from [the] science stream. That was all [on] my mind for years and years. Seeing the power of this profession. When I went for summer training in England when I was [in] fourth year, and I saw how dynamic the [name of profession] and the British Healthcare system.

During the different visits she noticed how the medical staff were natives of that country and how they seemed to genuinely care for their own people. This made her question,

| The American University in Beirut, they have Lebanese [medical staff]. Why? Why can't we have our own, this is? /.../ This is where I saw the [medical staff], how they treat their own people. How they are very nice and diligent and sweet to their own people. Why the [medical staff] here, they snap at our people?

Secondly, Jawaher explained how different obstacles taught her different life lessons. She shared an anecdote from a time when it was difficult to get hold of certain medical books. To buy her own copy, she used to exchange valuable jewellery with other medical staff, who were visiting Saudi Arabia. She narrated,

I used to exchange my jewellery with foreign [medical profession], so they can give me their books before they leave.

Furthermore, Jawaher shared her first experience travelling to London and working in a hospital there. Coming from a different society, it was a new learning experience for her, and she reflected on it and described it as “an eye-opening experience” “that allows you to grow up”. Through Jawaher’s story, she shared how different experiences have shaped the leader she is today and how they have coloured the visions and aspirations she has for her medical field and the Saudi people.

Haifa’ story

Haifa narrated a specific situation when she had to speak on stage for the first time, giving a thank-you speech to her team. Haifa described how this was outside of her comfort zone, and how the wish to recognize the hard work of her team members drove her to dare. Through this, she also felt a personal achievement. She narrated,

It was a very small personal achievement for me, whether it's leadership or not. But being on stage, I'm an introvert. Like I said, speaking publicly is not one of my strengths, and having the motivation, because I wanted to recognise them so much, I kind of pushed myself to go on stage, so I kind of faced my fears head on. But the reason was because I wanted to recognise them so much.

Haifa also connected the wish to recognize the work of the team to the desire to genuinely thanking them, connecting her actions to her values. She said,

When that person listens or hears their recognition, they would know that it was heartfelt, and it was genuine. /.../ I really wanted to hone down on a specific thing that each person did. So, they know that I was listening. I was seeing them. I knew that they worked hard, and I was genuinely appreciative of what they did.

In the end of the story, Haifa explained how the experience had a positive impact on others. She explained,

I think the cherry on the cake is at the end when one of the volunteers just came up to me and said, 'Next year, can I join the [name] officially?' /.../ And they knew they were doing it for free, and just coming

up and say, 'Yes, we want to join your team'. Then I think that's a sign of achievement that you've done something.

Noura's story

Noura referred to a story she had narrated earlier in the interview (see 5.4.1) describing an occasion when she was faced with a dispute between a colleague and a student. Noura accounted for the situation and said,

Probably in that specific situation where I decided to support the student and to make sure that she was treated fairly. I think that was the best moment for me.

From Noura's narrative it becomes evident how she connected her actions to her values and how she felt it was a personal achievement when she saw the positive impact it had on the student. She also connected it to being professional as she made sure to act based on evidence. She said,

Noura: *I knew it was the right thing to do, and I did my homework. So, I had the documents, the regulations that supported the student and supported my standpoint. I was willing to fight for her. I was very happy that I was willing, that I was not only willing, but I wasn't afraid to fight for her. And at the end, I was very happy. That again, you've achieved the result, it is not just talk, you've actually done something. You made a difference. And what she said afterwards. You know, it was very nice. It was very touching.*

Aminah: *The student?*

Noura: *It was very nice. Yes, it was sincere. It was real. And you are reminded why it's worth it. Why it's always important to do the right thing.*

Maha's story

Maha was the only participant whose narrative connected to six of the discovered themes of personal-best leadership experience. In a long narrative, Maha shared an anecdote that took place just before the Covid-19 pandemic. It so happened that Maha had arranged training for her staff on how to teach online despite resistance from them, as it would result in extra working hours to take part in the training. With a sight on ensuring high quality for the students, she stood her ground. She explained,

I want[ed] to introduce them to the blended classroom /.../ [as] you never know, sometimes rain [can affect the circumstances. So,] you need to have another means of teaching. So, I had insisted, and they [were] against it a lot. /.../ I almost bailed down, but I said no.

Maha's action showed that she could stand against the initial negative feedback for the betterment of the students, revealing a stance of professionalism from her side as part of envisioning the future for her organization. However, the negative feelings turned to positive ones after the pandemic hit and the pivot to online teaching was a fact. This gave Maha a sense of personal achievement and making a difference for others. She narrated,

But the 'thank you' that I heard afterwards, it was to the point that sometimes, 'See!' It was [like] bragging [about] it. But I shouldn't be. But I was really, honestly, thank[ful] for this situation. I didn't know what to call it. Fate!

I think that bringing this challenge and what do you call it? The question moment? Yes. To see the impact, even if another person carr[ies] on the development, you know [that] you took the step. Yes, it's really rewarding.

At the end of the conversation, Maha expressed how she likes to study relationships in leadership and how she is using Maslow's hierarchy with her team. She said,

I like relation in leadership. Meaning that, 'Know your team [and] Maslow's hierarchy!'. Why? Because I want to reach creativity and goals. I don't want the goals to be rich, but I want to the goals a bit further. A bit of the development.

6 CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents the main conclusions derived from this study. First, it revisits the two research questions and the theoretical framework of The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership®. These are presented together with an overview of the derived themes for each practice (Appendix 11). A discussion follows about the findings related to the five practices and the narratives of personal-best leadership experiences. Simultaneously, these findings are discussed in view of authentic transformational leadership. The chapter ends with an explanation of some of the research limitations followed by suggestions for future research.

6.1 Revisiting the research questions

This thesis investigates how Saudi female leaders, in HE, define their leadership practices in terms of authentic transformational leadership and The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership®. The two research questions are as follows:

1. To what extent are participants using The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership® as part of their own leadership practices?
2. How do participants describe their *own* personal-**best** leadership experiences?

The theoretical framework of The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership®:

- Model the Way
- Inspire a Shared Vision
- Challenge the Process
- Enable Others to Act
- Encourage the Heart

6.2 The Saudi female leader and her leadership practices

Because both the qualitative and the quantitative data are rich in content, many derived themes and patterns emerge. To enable an easier overview of this extensive data, most findings are discussed and followed by a figure, which summarizes the key findings.

6.2.1 Leadership practices as a relationship

The findings of this study support ideas of leadership as a relationship and a social communication activity to create meaning (Hackman & Johnson, 2018; Kouzes & Posner, 2017). The participants frequently narrate anecdotes where they have been interacting with their followers, communicating, negotiating, encouraging, and supporting each other etc. This emphasizes that leadership is a complex activity (Alvesson, 2002) and that this sample group cannot be seen to represent all Saudi female leaders in HE. Rather, their narratives depend on more than just their positions and titles, as their stories also depend on factors such as, culture, organizational culture, education system, education background, stakeholders involved, resources, and policies, to mention some.

As mentioned in the results section (see 5.3.1), the findings reveal five main categories related to educational leadership practices as a relationship. This supports the findings of Beddoes-Jones (2013) and Algarni (2018) that aspects of authentic transformational leadership include both the cognitive/behavioural concepts and the intrapersonal/interpersonal concepts. Besides revealing these concepts, the findings also show the significance the participants give to *balancing* between the five different relationships through the four themes of definitions of leadership stated by Hackman & Johnson (2018) (see 3.1.1). By balancing between these relationships consciously, it could be suggested that the participants adapt their leadership practices depending on the *type* of social interaction, *cultural aspects*, as well as the *situation* itself. Furthermore, as suggested by Algarni (2018), balancing between these relationships can also be connected to the Islamic culture taking both an individualistic and a collectivist view to authenticity

(see 3.3.4). Figure 13 below displays the five main categories of educational leadership, how they are interconnected and how the leader balances between these relationships. Moreover, the figure describes the close connection, not only to the leader herself, but also between the outer categories.



Figure 13. The five categories of educational leadership as a relationship

6.2.2 The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership

Practice 1: Model the Way

The data associated with the first practice, *Model the Way*, expands on the idea of educational leadership as a relationship and supports the findings of Algarni (2018) that the Islamic perspective of authenticity is defined “as being true both to the self and to others” (p.88). The participants’ narratives confirm that the two are intertwined and that leaders will not be considered as authentic if they do not ‘walk the talk.’ This demonstrates a clear link between the core values of the leaders and their actions. The core values serve as the roots on which to act and from this study, it becomes evident that participants refer to Islam as their “way of life” (see 5.4.1). These findings confirm previous research that religion in Islamic cultures includes every feature of human life and is therefore closely linked

to leadership (Algarni, 2018; Alogali, 2018; Musah, 2011; Sellami et al., 2019; Shafai, 2018; Shah, 2006). The data also emphasizes how Islamic core values connect to the upbringing and personal background of the participants.

Furthermore, the link between core values and actions clearly connect to several themes stemming from the leader and her relationship to others (see Figure 14). From the interviews, the four themes of *honesty*, *trust*, *fairness/doing what is right*, and *transparency of information* surface and reveal a close link to the roots. In turn, these themes serve as the foundation on which the other themes of *teamwork*, *professionalism* and *empowering others* are built, collectively displaying the core values that the interviewees base their leadership role on. Combined, the findings attributed to the core values are well in line with previous studies on authentic transformational leadership (Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999; Beddoes-Jones, 2013).

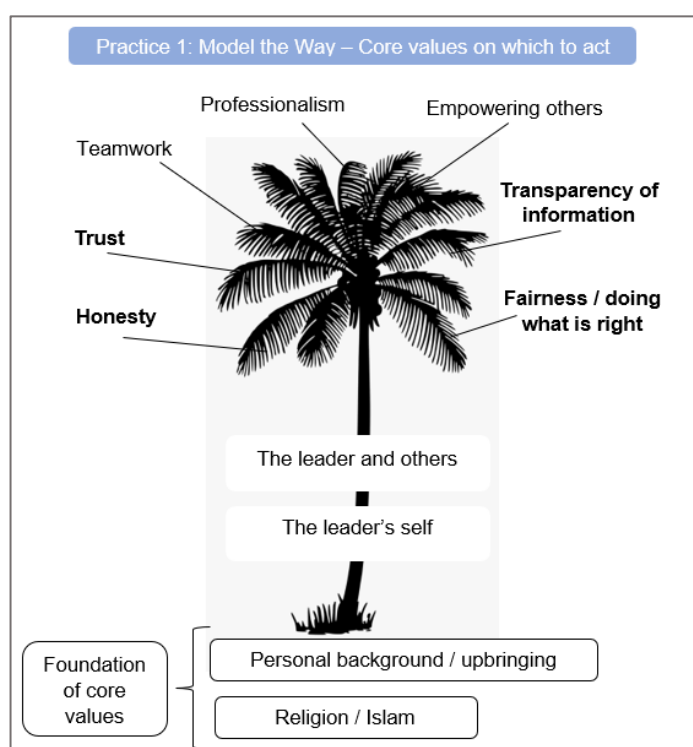


Figure 14. Collective findings related to core values which guide participants in their leadership role (Palm tree picture credit: Buono, n.d.).

An interesting note can be made related to *honesty*, as it so closely connects to authentic transformational leadership. In the quantitative data of the admired leader, being honest is ranked second, after being competent, which is different from the data from other countries. At face value, one may think that the qualitative data would suggest the same: that *honesty* is ranked lower than *competency*.

However, the qualitative data indicates otherwise, as honesty is one of the most frequent attributes mentioned as well as one of the characteristics that the interviewees describe themselves with.

The first practice also involves the leader *setting an example* to the subordinates. By being true to her core values through actions, the leader serves as a role model by modelling the way. Interestingly, the narratives describe how the behaviours and feedback from the team members mirror whether the leader is considered a successful role model or not. Participants also connect this idea to certain characteristics in the leader, such as being *dedicated, determined, persistent, patient, enduring, perseverant, and making sacrifices* for the common good.

Connected to the idea of mirrored behaviour, the narratives also reveal how the interviewees do not consider themselves as role models per se. A possible reason for this is that they do not model the way to *please* other people, but rather as part of her being *faithful* in her work to Allaah.

Practice 2: Inspire a Shared Vision

Firstly, the data pertaining to the second practice demonstrates how the participants take on a *holistic approach* to envisioning the future (see 5.4.2). This includes utilizing the different visions to *create a sense of purpose and direction* as well as undertaking a *balanced approach* while implementing these visions. Seven approaches can be derived from the findings: *have knowledge, carefully select staff, be a realist, practice self-reflection, trust your intuition, model values, beliefs, and good character, discover potential areas of development*, to finally result in *envisioning the future* (see Figure 15). Most of them inaugurate in the leader' self to subsequently include the stakeholders and the organization. The findings clearly correlate to Kouzes & Posner's (2017) second practice as well as the four factors of authentic transformational leadership as described by Beddoes-Jones (2013) (see 1.5 and 3.2.2). However, it can be pointed out that the extent to which the participants are visionary outside of the-organization-stated visions varies and some participants describe a more personal visionary approach than others.

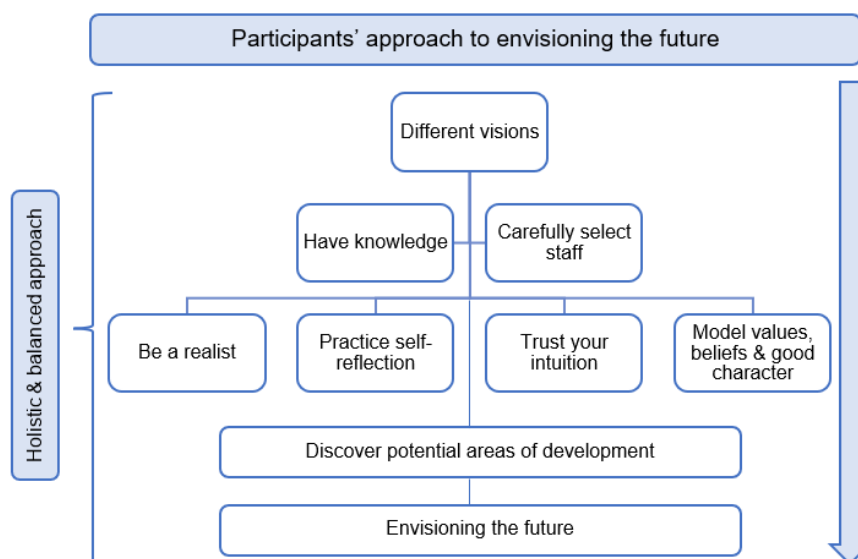


Figure 15. Themes and their relationship connected to participants' approach to envisioning the future in their organization and its followers.

Secondly, the data pertaining to the second practice demonstrates how the participants inspire and enlist the followers in a shared vision (see 5.4.2). The following three predominant themes emerge:

1. Ways of communicating the vision
2. Working side-by-side with staff
3. Ways of inspiration

Theme 1 describes the ways in which the participants communicate the vision with staff through clear goals, consistency and commitment, wise communication, and professionalism.

Theme 2 involves the importance of the leader working alongside the followers in contrast to being secluded in the office. This further connects to the leader modelling the way and the leader acting as a role model.

Theme 3 describes the ways in which the leader inspires the followers, which is seen as crucial by the interviewees. The following subthemes are derived:

- supporting staff,
- catering for self-development and teamwork, and
- nurturing an environment of openness and growth.

Altogether, theme three's subthemes highlight various aspects connected to both the second practice and authentic transformational leadership (see 1.5 and 3.2.2). In terms of supporting staff, some of these aspects connect to empowering and encouraging the followers by recognising their contributions and considering their voices, opinions, and feedback. Building strong teams allows for personal development and further supports the idea that Islamic cultures combine between the individualistic and the collectivist viewpoints (Algarni, 2018). The last sub-theme emphasizes the importance of inspiring subordinates by nurturing an environment of openness and growth where mistakes are accepted. This practice also connects back to Islam, which emphasizes forgiveness (see 5.4.2).

Practice 3: Challenge the Process

The focus under this practice is *how* the leader chooses to deal with challenging moments. The participants collectively found it difficult to answer the two questions related to this. The data includes more answers connected to how the leader *searches for opportunities* and less on how the leader *experiments and takes risks*, suggesting that the interviewees believe the first to be more manageable than the later. This also implies that the participants' leadership practices are more in line with authentic transformational leadership, as described in the literature review, in terms of responding to a change or a challenge than they are in terms of initiating it, especially when it involves some type of risk-taking.

Most of the participants started their leadership journeys with superiors noticing personal qualities of innovation and creativeness, which are well in line with the authentic transformational leader seeking out opportunities and being proactive (Kouzes & Posner, 2017). The data suggests two different approaches to leading people through change and challenges: the initial response of the leader herself, followed by the leader's response in relationship to others. The two approaches are discussed below.

Through the data, the initial response of the leader involves the leader *having knowledge about* as well as *a clear understanding of* the situation at hand together with the people involved. It involves the leader *being realistic* of the situation by focusing on what is possible and listening to the followers. This indicates an awareness together with reflection on the leader's part, to ensure both *readiness* and *stability*, two characteristics pointed out by Kouzes & Posner (2017). The data also supports the idea of the authentic transformational leader not being stagnant, but instead constantly seeking out new ideas and solutions to problems, especially when the environment to do so, is safe.

However, most connection to authentic transformational leadership, under the third practice, lays in the leader's response in relationship to others. Here the following three major themes become apparent:

- transparently, purposefully, and wisely communicate with subordinates,
- get everyone involved in the process step by step, and
- trust team members to work independently and creatively.

Here the data (see 5.4.3) is in clear agreement with the authentic transformational leader nurturing a safe environment where followers are encouraged to be leaders themselves and to think independently, ultimately supporting the five needs of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999; Kouzes & Posner, 2017; Mcleod, 2020).

Nonetheless, the data reveals leadership practices contrary to that of an authentic transformational leader considering experimenting and taking risks in times of change and challenges. Even though a few participants emphasize initiating change and being bold, most interviewees carefully evaluate risks by *foreseeing* changes and challenges through for example *scenario planning*. However, a clear distinction is made between experimenting and risk-taking, where the former is encouraged if it does not jeopardize the situation. The Saudi Arabian culture has a high level of uncertainty avoidance, which could be a possible reason for the risk averse tendencies (see 2.1). Similarly, if an initiative were to fail, the consequences can be too high, leading to losing face (see 5.4.3).

Practice 4 & 5: Enable Others to Act and Encourage the Heart

As suggested in the results section (see 5.4.4), practices four and five are closely connected in the respondents' answers and thus presented together. Except for the first practice, Model the Way, these two practices are clearly at the centre for the interviewees as themes connected to them are often referred to under other practices. In addition, the strong emphasis on *encouraging the heart*, suggests that it takes precedence over *enabling others to act*, as it is seen to lead to the later. This would suggest flipping the two in order of fourth and fifth practice.

The data connected to these two practices primarily evolves around leadership as a relationship between the leader's self, her team, and her community, in addition to the skill of balancing between them (Figure 16). This balance is also described in terms of three categories: *personal and professional*, *freedom and parameter*, and *motivation and consequences*. The first category connects to the leader balancing between having a *personal* and a *professional* relationship with the followers as part of *motivating* and *strengthening* them. Furthermore, the second category constitutes a balance between giving subordinates the *freedom* to be creative as well as providing *parameters* to work within. Finally, the third category connects to the balance between *motivating* staff by encouraging and supporting them and making them aware of the possible *consequences* of not performing well.

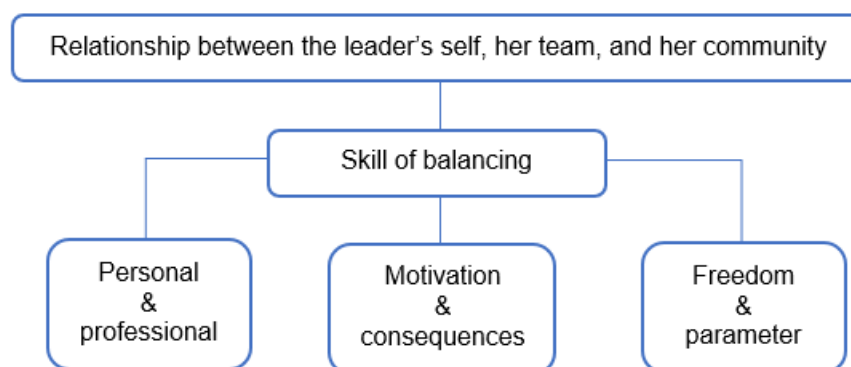


Figure 16. The skill of balancing relationships connected to the fourth and fifth practice.

Related to authentic transformational leadership, these three categories correspond to the importance of connecting with the followers at a more personal level to find out what motivates and drives them (Hackman & Johnson, 2018). The data

further suggests that this motivation is based on the leader believing and investing in the followers and their skills, in addition to being consistent and committed in her feedback to them (see 5.4.4). This supports ideas of authentic transformational leaders building trust through long-term relationships and collaboration, where team members feel valued, needed and listened to (Kouzes & Posner, 2017).

Besides motivating and strengthening the followers, the data is also pinpointing the significance of *recognizing contributions* and *celebrating values and victories*. Through the narratives, the link between followers performing at their best and building a work culture based on shared values emerges. This further connects to the leader *giving personal and genuine feedback* which goes hand in hand with the findings of Kouzes & Posner (2017). In addition, even though participants emphasize the importance of different types of recognitions and celebrations, the interviewees believe that genuine appreciation and recognition last longer. It is viewed to focus team members' energy, which ultimately impacts the whole team positively (Kouzes & Posner, 2017).

6.2.3 Dilemmas connected to the five practices

Collectively from the conversations on the five practices several dilemmas are pointed out by the participants. These dilemmas show that the relationship between the leader and the followers is not frictionless, further underpinning the idea that leadership is something that you do *with* people and not *to* people. Instead, it is a diverse and complex relationship that emerges and develops depending on both internal and external forces (Allio, 2013; Alvesson, 2002; Hackman & Johnson, 2018; Kouzes & Posner, 2009). The following themes emerge from the data connected to dilemmas:

The leader's self and the leader related to her team/her students

- Ethical dilemmas in terms of core values
- Emotional dilemmas when dealing with staff and students
- Motivating staff in challenging times
- Laid-back followers who lack initiative
- Recognition for team members who do not perform well

The leader and her work

- Transparency can backfire on the leader
- Mistakes are not easily accepted – saving face is important
- Risk averse tendencies to avoid blame
- Foreign leadership styles which do not match with culture
- Bureaucracy and fast decision-making
- Positions that are tied to people

Some of the above themes are examples of possible challenges that leaders face every day, such as the ethical and emotional dilemmas, difficulties motivating staff, and what to do with the members who do not perform well. The other themes suggest a close link to work culture that could be further away from the leader's area of influence.

6.2.4 Personal-best leadership experiences

The second research question is: *How do participants describe their own personal-best leadership experience?* Furthermore, it connects to the strategic question: *How do Saudi female leaders in Higher Education define their leadership practices in terms of authentic transformational leadership and The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership®?*

The narratives of the personal-best leadership experience all describe a challenge of some kind similar to the research of Kouzes & Posner (2017) on the same topic (see 1.5). Furthermore, the stories also show several characteristics of an authentic transformational leader, connected to all The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership® and authentic transformational leadership. Examples of these, stemming from the personal-best leadership experiences, are:

1. A close connection between values and actions both at an intrapersonal and an interpersonal level, practicing ethical virtue and ethical action as part of the philosophical self (see 3.2.2 and 3.3.4) (Algarni, 2018; Beddoes-Jones, 2013).
2. Examples of admired characteristics connected to the authentic transformational leader, such as being honest, supportive, trustworthy, genuine, a continuous learner, making sacrifices, doing the right thing, and standing

firm in times of challenges (see 3.2.3) (Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999; Kouzes & Posner, 2009).

3. Empowering and encouraging others towards self-actualization and personal growth as in Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (see 3.2.1) (Hackman & Johnson, 2018; Mcleod, 2020).
4. Practicing self-awareness and self-regulation as part of the psychological self (see 3.2.2) (Algarni, 2018; Beddoes-Jones, 2013).
5. Genuinely recognising the work of others (see 1.5) (Kouzes & Posner, 2017).
6. Consciously aiming at inspiring a shared vision (see 1.5) (Kouzes & Posner, 2017).
7. Initiating change through innovation (see 1.5) (Kouzes & Posner, 2017).

Even though points 6 and 7 above are connected to the theoretical framework of the five practices as well as the literature on authentic transformational leadership, they were not frequently referred to in the interviews. This suggests that the participants focus less on practice two, *Inspire a Shared Vision*, and practice three, *Challenge the Process*, when narrating their personal-best leadership experiences.

6.3 A suggested model of theory and research contributions

The findings of this study support ideas of educational leadership as a relationship which takes place between the leader and her team, her work, her students, and her community. Furthermore, it supports the findings of Algarni (2018, p. 92) and Musah (2011, p. 69) that Islamic culture combines both the individualist and collectivist perspectives, viewing authentic transformational leadership both as an intrapersonal and an interpersonal perception. Moreover, this research supports the model theory of Beddoes-Jones (2013, p. 69-70), with authentic leadership at the heart of the cognitive and behavioural aspects of leadership. In addition, the findings are well in line with other studies from Saudi Arabia, showing the significant role Islam has in shaping the core values, beliefs, and ethics of the leaders. In the following model (Figure 17), the researcher presents a possible

combination between all these findings, suggesting a theoretical model of authentic transformational leadership which also includes variations of the theory in the context of Saudi Arabia.

Theoretical model of authentic transformational leadership in Saudi Arabia



Figure 17. Authentic transformational leadership among Saudi female leaders

Research contributions

In summary, this study adds to the growing body of research on leadership practices in Saudi Arabia. In specific, it appears to be the first study to explore leadership practices among *Saudi female leaders in HE*, in a *female-only* environment in terms of authentic transformational leadership and The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership®. Furthermore, this thesis contributes to existing knowledge of authentic transformational leadership theory in general and in the context of Saudi Arabia specifically. First of all it confirms previous literature on what constitutes authentic transformational leadership in theory. Second, it provides a deeper insight into this theory in under-represented contexts, such as Saudi Arabia, contributing to diversity in research. Its contributions further adds

to previous suggested models by Algarni (2018) and Beddoes-Jones (2013), by suggesting a theoretical model of authentic transformational leadership in Saudi Arabia (see 6.3).

Furthermore, this study shows that the participants to a great extent display The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership® (see 1.5) of an authentic transformational leader (see 3.2) in their leadership practices. This particularly applies to the five practices in the following order: *Model the Way*, *Encourage the Heart*, *Enable Others to Act*, *Inspire a Shared Vision* and *Challenge the Process*. These results shed some light on the importance of conducting localized research, as there is no blue print on what constitutes exemplary leadership practices across all contexts. However, the findings do support the idea that leaders have more in common than not across different contexts, even though the priorities may differ.

Emerging from the results of this study is a Saudi female leader in HE who cherishes her religion and culture along with her main core values of competency, honesty, supportiveness, trust, fairness/doing what is right, and transparency. Through these, she aspires to build strong personal and professional relationships with a focus on teamwork and empowering others to be leaders themselves. On her path, she displays self-awareness and practices self-reflection related to both her inner and outer self as well as how it relates to others. Through this holistic view, she consciously and carefully balances her approach to the circumstances that come her way. She believes that listening to others, recognizing the work of others, and being open to feedback, is key to development. She values knowledge, education and describes herself as a realist. She is accepting of mistakes and believes that they lead to development, personal growth and valuable learning lessons. At the heart lays a genuine wish to lead staff and students, guided by the shared visions, towards self-actualization and growth, finally extending to the larger community of Saudi Arabia.

Still, there are some differences compared to the theoretical framework, primarily connected to the third practice, *Challenge the Process*. The data suggests that there are some limitations regarding the extent to which the Saudi female leader in HE *searches for opportunities*, *experiments* and *takes risks*. The findings

indicate that the leader prefers to innovate and take risks only when it is considered safe. Some possible reasons for this from the data are: extensive bureaucracy in HE, a more managerial focus to leadership in HE, mistakes are not easily accepted, as well as a preferred collective decision-making approach in order to avoid individual blame. These reasons may affect the scope under which the Saudi female leader can implement her preferred leadership practices.

In extension, the risk-averse tendencies can affect the degree to which the leader introduces visions of her own, connected to the second practice, *Inspire a Shared Vision*. The data indicates that most visions are *shared with* the leader, contrary to *created by* the leader. However, the focus of the third practice, as per the theoretical framework literature, is not necessarily on *what type* of vision is shared, but rather on the importance of a *shared vision*.

6.4 Limitations and recommendations

Limitations

One of the limitations of this study was its small sample size which limited its generalizability. Initially the sample included seven respondents and seven interviewees. Later, one of the interviews was omitted due to the interview being continuously interrupted, concluding in 6 interviews analysed for this thesis. One of these interviews was not recorded, even though extensive hand-written quotes were made. This way, some valuable parts of this individual narrative may have gone unnoticed. In addition, the sample study only included Saudi female leaders from a female-only public HE environment, also limiting its generalizability. Furthermore, despite the richness that qualitative research provides in terms of describing the human experiences, it also suggests some limitations. Due to its main qualitative nature, the possibility of researcher subjectivity cannot be ignored. However, with the use of a thematic narrative analysis, the researcher did her utmost to keep the narratives as intact as possible, limiting the scope of subjectivity (see 4.2.3).

Moreover, the outcome of the interviews and the questionnaire may have been somewhat different if they were conducted in Arabic and by a Saudi national herself. This is supported by a few of the participants asking the researcher whether she was familiar with certain aspects of culture, religion, or practices. On the other hand, this may not have affected the content of the narratives and the participant may only have asked this as a sign of being consciously aware of the listener and out of consideration.

Even though using a thematic narrative analysis added extensive richness to the data, as stated above, it also added to the scope of this project. Due to the narrative approach, the researcher could not easily reduce the narratives as this may have compromised the original stories. In retrospect, there are some possible ways in which the amount of data could have been reduced. Some of these are: to include less interviewees, to use less interview questions and to use a more focused approach in the questionnaire. For instance, questions nineteen and twenty, from the questionnaire, diverted a little from the focus of this study (Appendix 7). Furthermore, the transcribed data could have been analysed using a software program such as NVivo, to make the data more manageable, and to possibly achieve a deeper analysis.

Finally, this research journey started before the Covid-19 pandemic and the changes and challenges that the pandemic led to have had an impact on the process of this project. The conditions under which the researcher initiated her MBA journey changed drastically, both professionally and personally. For example, the face-to-face interviews were conducted wearing face masks and practicing social distancing, which may have caused both psychological and physical strain on the participants. For this reason, two of the interviews were conducted online. For the researcher, the pandemic also prolonged the thesis process, as regular work duties increased due to the pivot to online work. Suddenly, everything connected to both professional and personal life had to be conducted from one place, the home.

Recommendations

Although, the findings of this study and its suggestion of a theoretical model contributes to the existing theory of authentic transformational leadership in the context of Saudi Arabia, it is still limited. Building on Hallinger & Hammad's (2019), suggestions, more conceptual research on educational leadership and management is needed in Saudi Arabia, aiming at, for example, proposing a theory or system used for leadership and learning. They also recommend more purposeful studies, leading to more productive research in the field, ultimately developing a clearer research agenda, encouraging more collaboration between scholars, and strengthening the research capacity to create and build more 'indigenous related' literature in the field (pp. 31-32). Because of these suggestions, it is important for researchers to come together under one collaborative umbrella, pushing forward Saudi Arabia's own researchers, leaders, and experts. A few potential research topics in the Saudi context can be made, which are as follows:

- Organizational culture and its impact on authentic transformational leadership
- Transparency and its implications in authentic transformational leadership
- Authenticity in the Islamic culture
- Definitions of education and its relation to '*tarbiyyah*' and '*ta'lem*'
- Perceptions of educational leadership
- The impact of Saudi Vision 2030 on educational leadership
- Theoretical and Practical understanding of the concept of educational leadership
- The 'saving-face culture' and its impact on leadership practices

In the end, I would like to finalize with a quote from one of the participants when she wrote,

| What female leaders do now will determine the role of women in leadership in the future.

This quote symbolizes a crucial moment in time for Saudi Female leaders and the significance in making conscious and grounded decisions moving forward. What type of Saudi female leadership do they want to promote and cater for?

As Saudi Arabia proceeds into a new era, many would want a piece of its successes. Consequently, it is essential for educational leaders to balance between the indigenous religious and cultural values while carefully selecting the options and opportunities that come their way, embracing change with a conscious mind.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Initial invitation letter

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ
السَّلَامُ عَلَيْكُمْ وَرَحْمَةُ اللَّهِ وَبَرَكَاتُهُ

Dear _____,

My name is Aminah Davidsson and I am [omitted background information]. I am also presently a master candidate in the MBA program of Educational Leadership at Tampere University of Applied Sciences in Finland. I am cordially inviting you to participate in my study on “Leadership Practices among Saudi Female Leaders in Higher Education– A Focus on Authentic Transformational Leadership”.

Permission to conduct this study at [omitted name] has been granted by [omitted name] (kindly refer to attachment). Your participation in this study is voluntary and you are free to decline participation or withdraw from the study at any point. Participants in the study are guaranteed the right of confidentiality and anonymity.

The purpose of my study is to explore the perceptions of Saudi female leaders in higher education regarding their personal leadership practices and to what extent these relate to authentic transformational leadership practices. I will be interviewing Saudi female leaders in higher education in current or previous leadership positions.

The study will be conducted in English and will include a 40-45 minutes’ interview, followed up by a 5-10 minutes’ survey, with a total time commitment of approximately 55 minutes. Due to the pandemic, I offer to conduct the interviews online, using Zoom, but should you prefer, we can meet face-to-face, practicing social distancing. The interview audio will be recorded, with your permission, in order to easily transcribe it for further analysis. Please rest assured that these recordings will be deleted after the completion of this study. All participants will be kept anonymous and given pseudonyms to prevent identification. (Please refer to the second attachment describing the three security steps that will be taken related to the audio recording.) Also, please note that I can take notes during the interview instead of recording. I will be happy to discuss this further, should you wish.

Thank you for your consideration of this request. If you have any questions or comments about the research study, please feel free to contact me at [email] or at [phone number].

I am really looking forward to your participation and contributions with your valuable experiences and insights of leadership practices as a higher education leader.

Kindly respond whether you will be participating as soon as possible or by **Thursday the 22nd of April, 2021**. Interviews will take place up until the 31st of May, 2021.

Warm regards,

Aminah Davidsson

Master Candidate

Appendix 2. Audio data security procedures

Invitation to participate in a study on Leadership Practices among Saudi female leaders in higher education

Audio Data Security Procedures

Kindly refer to the steps taken below related to the safeguarding of your recorded audio. Also, please note that I can *take notes during the interview instead of recording*. I will be happy to discuss this further, should you wish.

1. The recorded audio will be stored on my personal laptop until the exam board confirms the result of my dissertation. After this, it will be deleted.
2. For easier transcription, the recorded audio will be uploaded to the paid automated transcription and analysis software service provided by <https://www.scrintal.com> where the data can only be accessed by the researcher. The reason I chose this service is due to their high level of personal data security and close collaboration with researchers. Please refer to their **security policies** here: <https://www.scrintal.com/en/security>.
3. The audio file and transcribed material will be saved using pseudonyms only. Furthermore, all identifiable information will be removed in the transcribed material.

Warm regards,

Aminah Davidsson

Aminah Davidsson – [Email address] – [Phone number]

Appendix 3. Follow-up invitation letter

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ
السَّلَامُ عَلَيْكُمْ وَرَحْمَةُ اللَّهِ وَبَرَكَاتُهُ

Dear _____,

I hope you are doing fine.

This is a follow up email to the invitation to participate in my study on “Leadership Practices among Saudi Female Leaders in Higher Education– A Focus on Authentic Transformational Leadership”. Thank you for taking the time to read this.

After receiving replies on my invitations, I have understood that this is a very hectic time for many of the invited participants, especially as the exams are being rescheduled etc. Therefore, to accommodate more valuable participants, I am *extending the period of data collection* to be available when you have a less hectic period.

In addition, some would like to know a bit more about the procedures of securing the recorded audio. Kindly refer to the steps taken below related to the safeguarding of your recorded data. Also, please note that I can *take notes during the interview instead of recording*. I will be happy to discuss this further, should you wish.

Securing the recorded audio procedures

1. The recorded audio will be stored on my personal laptop until the exam board confirms the result of my dissertation. After this, it will be deleted.
2. For easier transcription, the recorded audio will be uploaded to my paid membership with the following service: www.scrintal.com . The reason I chose this service is due to their high level of personal data security and close collaboration with researchers. Please refer to their **security policies** here: <https://www.scrintal.com/en/security>.
3. The audio file and transcribed material will be saved using pseudonyms only. Furthermore, all identifiable information will be removed in the transcribed material.

Lastly, please find attached the [omitted name] giving me permission to conduct my research at [omitted name].

Your experiences are valuable and unique, and they will add much richness to the field of research in Educational Leadership in Saudi Arabia. I would be so very happy to have you join in the study.

Kindly respond whether you will be participating by **Thursday the 8th of April 2021**.

Warm regards,

Aminah Davidsson

Master Candidate

Appendix 4. Participant consent form

Participant Consent Form

Title of the study: Leadership Practices among Saudi Female Leaders in Higher Education - A Focus on Authentic Transformational Leadership

- I voluntarily agree to participate in this research study and even if I agree to participate now, I can withdraw at any time or refuse to answer any question without any consequences of any kind.
 - I understand that I can withdraw permission to use data from my interview within two weeks after the interview, in which case the material will be deleted.
 - I have had the purpose and nature of the study explained to me in writing and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study.
 - I understand that participation involves a 40-45 minutes' interview, followed up by a 5-10 minutes' survey, with a total time commitment of approximately 55 minutes.
 - I understand that all information I provide for this study will be treated confidentially and that in any report on the results of this research my identity will remain anonymous. This will be done by changing my name and disguising any details of my interview which may reveal my identity.
 - I understand that disguised extracts from my interview may be quoted in the thesis maturity test, final thesis paper, conference presentation, published papers and/or any other research presentation format.
 - I understand that the recorded audio will be uploaded to the paid automated transcription and analysis software service provided by <https://www.scribbr.com> where the data can only be accessed by the researcher.
 - I understand that signed consent forms, original audio recordings and the uploaded audios on <https://www.scribbr.com> will be retained by the researcher until the exam board confirms the results of the dissertation. After this, they will be deleted.
 - I understand that a transcript of my interview and/or any notes taken, in which all identifying information has been removed, will be retained by the researcher.
 - I understand that I am entitled to access the information I have provided at any time while it is in storage as specified above.
 - I understand that I will not benefit financially from participating in this research.
 - I understand that I am free to contact any of the people involved in the research to seek further clarification and information.
- I agree to my interview being audio-recorded.
- I agree to the researcher taking notes during the interview instead of recording the audio.

Signature of participant

Date

Appendix 5. Brief summary of authentic transformational leadership

Leadership Practices among Saudi Female Leaders in Higher Education— A Focus on Authentic Transformational Leadership

Brief Summary of Authentic Transformational leadership

Transformational leadership theories were mainly developed in terms of business and management theories of leadership (Robinson, 2016). It has its origin in the work of James MacGregor Burns from the late 1970s where he contrasted transformational leadership with transactional leadership based on Maslow's Hierarchy of Need (Hackman & Johnson, 2018, p. 100). The original version of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs contains five needs from bottom to top: *physiological, safety, love and belonging needs, esteem, and self-actualization*.

Burns connected transactional leadership to traditional leadership style where only the basic human needs in Maslow's model were fulfilled. The transactional leader focuses on the three basic needs of *physiological needs, safety needs and love & belongingness needs* (Hackman & Johnson, 2018, p.100-101). In exchange for the followers' performance, the transactional leader ensures that these three needs are met and thus the reference to a transaction or an exchange. The transformational leader takes it one step further and goes beyond those basic needs to also fulfil the higher-level needs of the followers. So, the transformational leader not only secures the three basic needs, but also aspires to go further, with more focus on the individual follower and his/her higher needs of esteem and self-actualization (Hackman & Johnson, 2018, p. 101). According to Hackman and Johnson (2018), by stimulating the higher-level needs of the followers, the transformational leader inspires followers to go beyond the mere transactional relationship by empowering and encouraging them to achieve higher levels of motivation and morality. In this light, the aim of transformational leadership is not to create more followers, but rather to create more leaders, active moral agents (p. 101) and change agents (p. 105). According to Bass and Steidlmeier (1999), most leaders portray both transactional and transformational leadership characteristics and seldom only portray one of the styles.

The authentic part of transformational leadership is explained as part of the ethical dimension of transformational leadership, and it is connected to the behaviour of the leaders, including his/her moral character, values, and beliefs (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999, p. 184). To be considered authentic, the transformational leader has to 'walk the talk' and present both inward and outward authenticity. By being consistent, reliable, and genuine, the authentic transformational leader focuses on bringing out the best in people not for the sole gain of him/herself but rather by calling for 'a universal brotherhood', in service of others (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999, p. 187-188).

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Appendix 6. Interview questions

Leadership Practices among Saudi Female Leaders in Higher Education– A Focus on Authentic Transformational Leadership

Interview questions

- 1) *Tell me what brought you into leadership.*
 - 2) *From your perspective, how would you describe an admired leader?*
-
- 3) *How would you define your core values that you use to guide you in your leadership role?*
 - 4) *To what extent do you believe that you as a role model make a difference in your leadership position?*
 - 5) *Describe your approach to envisioning the future in your organization and its followers?*
 - 6) *How do you inspire and enlist your followers in a shared vision?*
 - 7) *In your opinion, what is the best way of leading people through change and challenges?*
 - 8) *What is your approach towards taking risks and experiment in times of change and challenges?*
 - 9) *How do you motivate your followers to perform at their best and in what ways do you work towards strengthening them?*
 - 10) *Do you think that it is important to recognize the contributions of your followers? Would you care to elaborate?*
-
- 11) *Describe one of your own 'personal-best' leadership experiences. What made it your best leadership moment?*
- Extra) Is there anything else you would like to share related to leadership practices?*

Thank you!

Aminah Davidsson – Email address – Phone number

Appendix 7. Online questionnaire

1 (2)

Leadership Practices among Saudi Female Leaders in Higher Education

This questionnaire is part of the study on Leadership Practices, conducted by Aminah Davidsson, that you have chosen to participate in. Welcome!

The questionnaire is designed to take around 10 min, but this also depends on how much you chose to write in the open-ended questions. For the sake of a detailed study and deeper analysis, all detailed answers are welcomed and very much appreciated.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at (email address) or at (phone number).

Regards,
Aminah Davidsson

Demographics and Background

This first part focuses on your demographical and educational background. The purpose of this section is mostly for the analysis and comparison of participants' data. No specific data, that can be traced back to you specifically, will be shared in the final thesis.

1. What is your code number given to you by Aminah Davidsson?
2. What age are you?
25-30, 30-35, 35-40, 40-45, 45-50, 50-55, 55-60
3. What is your bachelor's degree in?
4. What is your master's degree in? (If you do not hold an MA degree, please write 'none'.)
5. What is your PhD degree in? (If you do not hold a PhD degree, please write 'none'.)
6. Did you study any of your degrees abroad, outside of Saudi Arabia?
Yes/No
7. If you answered yes to the previous question, in which country/countries did you study?
8. If you studied abroad, what degree/courses did you study?
BA, MA, PhD, Other
9. How many years of experience in a leadership position do you have?
0-5, 5-10, 10-15, 15-20, 20+
10. Did you take any leadership training BEFORE you embarked on your leadership role?
Yes/No
11. Did you take any leadership training AFTER you embarked on your leadership role?
Yes/No

Leadership Practices

This second part focuses on leadership practices both at general and a personal level. No specific data, that can be traced back to you specifically, will be shared in the final thesis.


12. In your opinion, from the list of characteristics, which are the SEVEN most important characteristics of an admired leader, ranked in order from 1-7 (where #1 is the most important and #7 is the least important)? Kindly write them in the text box together with the ranked number before each one. (as in 1. characteristic 2. characteristic etc.) 2 (2)

Caring	Broad-minded	Cooperative	Loyal
Inspiring	Dependable	Determined	Intelligent
Imaginative	Honest	Forward-Looking	Mature
Competent	Supportive	Courageous	Ambitious
Fair-minded	Straightforward	Self-Confident	

13. Would you like to add any characteristics to the previous list that you think are missing, especially related to the Saudi Context?
14. From the same list of characteristics, which FOUR characteristics would you describe yourself with, ranked in order of priority, where #1 is the strongest and so on? Kindly write them in the text box together with the ranked number before each one (as in 1. characteristic 2. characteristic etc.).
15. Who are your THREE main positive influencers in your leadership role?
A close family member, A political person, A religious person, A friend, A colleague, A student, A famous social media person, An entertainer, A philanthropist, An artist, A teacher, An activist, Other
16. In what ways do these three main influencers inspire you in your leadership role?
17. What does it mean to you that a leader is being 'authentic' in his/her role?
18. Within Authentic Transformational Leadership Theory, an authentic leader is described in the following way:
"In order to be considered authentic, the transformational leader has to 'walk the talk' and present both inward and outward authenticity".
- How does this relate to ideas of leadership in the Saudi Context and to what extent do you think that it is important for a leader in a Saudi context to be 'authentic' given this definition of authenticity?
19. What aspects of the Saudi culture influence you the most related to your own leadership practices?
20. If you were to say something about Saudi female leadership to someone who is not familiar with the Saudi context/culture, what would it be?
21. Is there anything that you would like to add to your leadership story or the leadership topic in general?

Appendix 8: The Five Practices and the Ten Commitments

1
MODEL THE WAY




1. Clarify values by finding your voice and affirming shared ideals.
2. Set the example by aligning actions with shared values.

2
INSPIRE A SHARED VISION



3. Envision the future by imagining exciting and ennobling possibilities.
4. Enlist others in a common vision by appealing to shared aspirations.

3
CHALLENGE THE PROCESS



5. Search for opportunities by seizing the initiative and by looking outward for innovative ways to improve.
6. Experiment and take risks by constantly generating small wins and learning from experience.

4
ENABLE OTHERS TO ACT



7. Foster collaboration by building trust and facilitating relationships.
8. Strengthen others by increasing self-determination and developing competence.

5
ENCOURAGE THE HEART



9. Recognize contributions by showing appreciation for individual excellence.
10. Celebrate the values and victories by creating a spirit of community.



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Appendix 9: Characteristics of admired leaders

Characteristics of Admired Leaders (Kouzes & Posner, 2017, pp. 30-31)

Percentage of Respondents Selecting Each Characteristic Over Time Periods*

Characteristic	1987	1995	2002	2007	2012	2017
1. HONEST	83	88	88	89	89	84
2. COMPETENT	67	63	66	68	69	66
3. INSPIRING	58	68	65	69	69	66
4. FORWARDLOOKING	62	75	71	71	71	62
Intelligent	43	40	47	48	45	47
Broad-minded	37	40	40	35	38	40
Dependable	33	32	33	34	35	39
Supportive	32	41	35	35	35	37
Fair-minded	40	49	42	39	37	35
Straightforward	34	33	34	36	32	32
Cooperative	25	28	28	25	27	31
Ambitious	21	13	17	16	21	28
Caring	26	23	20	22	21	23
Determined	17	17	23	25	26	22
Courageous	27	29	20	25	22	22
Loyal	11	11	14	18	19	18
Imaginative	34	28	23	17	16	17
Mature	23	13	21	5	14	17
Self-Controlled	13	5	8	10	11	10
Independent	10	5	6	4	5	5

*Note: Since we asked people to select seven characteristics, the totals add up to more than 100 percent.

Appendix 10: Answers to open-ended questions in questionnaire

1 (3)

Characteristics

TABLE 3. Characteristics to describe themselves

Q 14: From the same list of characteristics, which FOUR characteristics would you describe yourself with, ranked in order of priority, where #1 is the strongest and so on? Kindly write them in the text box together with the ranked number before each one (as in 1. characteristic 2. characteristic etc.).			
1. supportive 2. competent 3. inspiring 4. broad-minded	1. courageous 2. ambitious 3. cooperative 4. straightforward	1. honest 2. supportive 3. loyal 4. competent	1. determined and straightforward 2. courageous 3. honest 4. imaginative
1. fair 2. broad minded 3. honest 4. cooperative and ambitious	1. fair-minded 2. straightforward 3. intelligent 4. mature	1. honest 2. intelligent 3. caring 4. loyal	

Authenticity in leadership

TABLE 5. Meaning of a leader being authentic

Q 17: What does it mean to you that a leader is being 'authentic' in his/her role?
I believe that an authentic leader is a leader whose actions confirm the words s/he claimed.
To try make a difference/ a change
Trustworthy and loyal to the workplace
Honest, transparent, and straight forward with effective and integral conscious. believes in the value of education, practice and creating opportunities for national citizens out of nothing.
They do not change their core values and beliefs for the sake of those around them or and stay steadfast under pressure. Flexibility is not bad but change to please others or hold onto one's position is unauthentic.
Honest with oneself with what you want and what you expect from others
Broad -minded, inspiring -imaginative, supportive, transparency, genuineness, and honesty within the workplace

Leadership in the Saudi culture and context

TABLE 6. The authentic leader in a Saudi context

<p>Q 18: Within Authentic Transformational Leadership Theory, an authentic leader is described in the following way: “In order to be considered authentic, the transformational leader has to ‘walk the talk’ and present both inward and outward authenticity”. How does this relate to ideas of leadership in the Saudi Context and to what extent do you think that it is important for a leader in a Saudi context to be 'authentic' given this definition of authenticity?</p>
<p>I think this may vary between leaders.</p>
<p>I believe authenticity can be established when the leader relies on his/her principles, ethics, past experiences, and acquired skills to solve current issues in his/her leadership role. By doing this, they can bring out the best in their followers by emphasizing their intrinsic motivation and personal development.</p>
<p>It originates from the transparency of believes and action, if the leader is clear and integral, he or she would walk and talk of what of what actions needed to be achieved and what are those steppingstones to start and move toward the goal. focus on long term results rather than short ones.</p>
<p>It is of paramount importance to be authentic according to the provided definition, which I sadly feel is severely lacking in our context.</p>
<p>I believe that academic leaders/ managers should be teachers, so they can be able to understand and reflect the reality of a classroom, and consequently, be able to identify any problem and any possible solution.</p>
<p>Practice self-awareness Identify the institute or the department values Lead by example Communication skills Trustworthy mentor</p>

TABLE 7. Leadership role and Saudi influences

<p>Q 19: What aspects of the Saudi culture influence you the most related to your own leadership practices?</p>
<p>Helping and caring for others are the main aspects influenced me and make me more supportive to the people I work with.</p>
<p>The Saudi Culture experiences a rapid change. Therefore, you need to be always ready for changes as a leader because change brings a lot of duties and tasks to be considered.</p>
<p>Religion</p>
<p>I believe respecting the religious cultural and ethical values of the Saudi culture is the most to be considered. the leader shouldn't swim against the current in order to achieve the person or the organizational goals. diplomacy in communication and always having a returning communication loupe. consistency and leading with heart and vision.</p>
<p>I think being supportive and thinking in terms of being a team are positive aspects from our culture, but sadly I feel that is being slowly eroded via people adopting a more 'Americanized' individualistic, selfish approach to leadership.</p>
<p>supportive</p>

3 (3)

TABLE 8. Leadership role and Saudi influences

Q 20: If you were to say something about Saudi female leadership to someone who is not familiar with the Saudi context/culture, what would it be?
Saudi female leaders are highly responsible, skilful, professional, and have a lot of potentials that are still unrevealed and not fully trusted. Hopefully this's going to happen soon with the Saudi Vision 2030 and the strong woman empowerment movement evoked lately.
A Saudi female leader is a fighter. She is extremely determined to prove herself especially in a society that is originally male dominated.
What men can't achieve, a woman does it professionally.
Saudi female leaders are full of potentialities, educated, goal oriented and hardworking capabilities, their efforts need to be looked at seriously irrespective to gender issues, integrated to what the governmental directions are moving towards and the most encouraged and appreciated for what endeavours they have achieved
Due to years being side-lined, Saudi female leadership is very cut-throat, but I'm optimistic for the future.
The pre-golden age of female empowerment. What female leaders do now will determine the role of women in leadership in the future.
They are really dependable.
Q 21: Is there anything that you would like to add to your leadership story or the leadership topic in general?
A leader should be faithful in his/her work to Allah and not to wait for a reward from people.
A leader should have a clear vision and goals to be achieved, it requires passions, transparency, dedication, endurance, role modelling and the self-development across the continuum.

Appendix 11. Summary of research questions, theoretical framework, and interview questions

1 (2)

Strategic Question: How do Saudi female leaders in Higher Education define their leadership practices in terms of authentic transformational leadership and The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership®?			
Research Question/Purpose	Theoretical Framework		Interview questions
	The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership®	The Ten Commitments	
Warm up/Lead in			1. Tell me what brought you into leadership.
What do participants look for and admire in a leader?	All Five Practices	All Ten Commitments	2. From your perspective, how would you describe an admired leader?
R 1. To what extent are participants using The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership® as part of their own leadership style?	Model the Way	Clarify values by finding your voice and affirming shared values.	3. How would you define your core values that you use to guide you in your leadership role?
		Set the example by aligning actions with shared values.	4. To what extent do you believe that you as a role model make a difference in your leadership position?
	Inspire a Shared Vision	Envision the future by imagining exciting and ennobling activities.	5. Describe your approach to envisioning the future in your organization and its followers?
		Enlist others in a common vision by appealing to shared aspirations.	6. How do you inspire and enlist your followers in a shared vision?

2 (2)

Strategic Question: How do Saudi female leaders in Higher Education define their leadership practices in terms of authentic transformational leadership and The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership®?			
Research Question/Purpose	Theoretical Framework		Interview questions
	The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership®	The Ten Commitments	
R 1. To what extent are participants using The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership® as part of their own leadership style?	Challenge the Process	Search for opportunities by seizing the initiative and looking outward for innovative ways to improve.	7. In your opinion, what is the best way of leading people through change and challenges?
		Experiment and take risks by consistently generating small wins and learning from experiences.	8. What is your approach towards taking risks and experiment in times of change and challenges?
	Enable Others to Act	Foster collaboration by building trust and facilitating relationships.	9. How do you motivate your followers to perform at their best and in what ways do you work towards strengthening them?
		Strengthen others by increasing self-determination and developing competence.	
	Encourage the Heart	Recognize contributions by showing appreciation for individual excellence.	10. Do you think that it is important to recognize the contributions of your followers? Would you care to elaborate?
		Celebrate the values and victories by creating a spirit of community.	
R 3. How do participants describe their own 'personal best' leadership experience?	All Five Practices	All Ten Commitments	11. Describe one of your own 'personal-best' leadership experiences. What made it your best leadership moment?
			12. Is there anything else you would like to share related to leadership practices?