



The Role and Impact of Saudi Vision 2030 in Leadership Development

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Abstract

Organizations continually try to improve the level of leadership capability and increase the number of qualified successors for leadership positions by supporting leadership development (LD) training program. This qualitative research explores the influence and impact of Saudi Vision 2030 in developing potential and existing leaders to succeed as leaders and support the realization of Saudi Vision 2030. The study is conducted to bridge the gap and highlight the influence and impact of Saudi Vision 2030 in LD. Analyzing the influence of Saudi Vision 2030 in LD will significantly help HR leaders to assess, identify, and evaluate the needs of LD programs in the organization. The study is aimed at two main objectives: First, identifying the LD programs in light of Saudi Vision 2030. Second, assessing the impact of LD programs in achieving the goals of Saudi Vision 2030. A purposeful sample of seven participants is drawn from semi-structured interviews conducted by a researcher from Oil & Gas Company at Saudi Arabia. The results provide evidence that LD programs are essential. The results provide evidence that designing and implementing LD programs to fill a leadership gap is productive. The study supports the influence and impact of Saudi Vision 2030 in LD, by the expansion and implementation of LD programs in the Saudi labor market. Participants who pursued LD opportunities indicated the importance of institutional involvement in LD programs.

Keywords: Human Resources Development; Human Resources Management; Leadership Development; Saudi Vision 2030; Women's Leadership.

Glossary of Abbreviations

- KSA The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
- HR Human Resources
- HRD..... Human Resources Development
- HRM..... Human Resources Management
- HCD..... Human Capital Development
- LD..... Leadership Development
- IDPs Individual Development Plan
- LDPs..... Leadership Development Plans

1. Introduction

Leadership and leader development are different concepts yet they are intertwined and interrelated in the Human Resources Development field. Effective leadership is an outcome of human capital development integrated into networked relationships among individuals at the organization. At micro level, the leader development is focused on sharpening individual's leadership skills, through mentoring, coaching, and challenging assignments. Accordingly, leader development reflects one angle of leadership development (LD) that serves as the foundation for LD programs.

Saudi Arabia is undergoing a journey of transformation in several aspects, including: quality of life, women empowerment, employment, and LD. These aspects reflect the pillars and aspirations of Saudi Vision 2030. Historically, the Saudi workforce encountered a shortage in qualified leaders who could guide and drive transformation in the organization (Saudi Vision 2030, 2020). A great emphasis on LD placed in the Saudi labor market, in support of the realization of Saudi Vision 2030.

With the introduction of Saudi Vision 2030 in 2016, the government and institutions invested in world-class LD programs that pave the way for emerging leaders to develop and succeed in their roles. The recent Human Capability Development programs have given due attention to women empowerment and placement in leadership positions (Human Resources and Social Development, 2023). These programs witnessed influence on increasing Saudi women's participation in leadership positions. Saudi Vision 2030 is a strategic path that allows women to engage, develop, and stand shoulder to shoulder with their male counterparts in the development of the kingdom. In particular, various needs of LD programs among different organizations could accelerate the realization of Saudi Vision 2030 in some and postpone it in others.

The study will be divided into five main chapters. In the first chapter, I will introduce the topic to the readers and provide historical background with my personal perspectives about the history leadership, leadership styles, and LD in Saudi Arabia. As for the second chapter, I will explore literature reviews about LD programs in Saudi Arabia in light of Saudi Vision 2030. In the third chapter, I will explain the research methodology that will be used to collect and analyze the data. In the fourth chapter, I will highlight the research findings and discuss the interview responses along with the data collected through literature review, to shed light on critical and various paradigms. Lastly, in the fifth chapter, recommendations will be summarized from the interviews' findings and literature review.

The upcoming sections define the purpose of the study, research questions, and significance of the study.

1.1 Purpose of the Study

The study has two main objectives: 1) Identifying the role of Saudi Vision 2030 in LD; 2) Assessing the impact of LD programs in achieving the goals of Saudi Vision 2030.

1.2 Research Questions

The study highlights the role and impact of Saudi Vision 2030 in leadership development and as this is data-driven research with a concrete focus on a transformative research analysis, the following questions will guide the research:

What role Saudi Vision 2030 has played in improving the skill set of leaders?

What is the impact of leadership development initiatives in achieving the goals of Saudi Vision 2030?

1.3 Significance of the Study

The explanation of Saudi Vision 2030 and its primary pillars is being emphasized in the current studies. However, there are gaps in exploring and examining the relationship between Saudi Vision 2030 and LD, such as the role and impact of Saudi Vision 2030 in LD (Hanaky, 2021). This study aimed to bridge the gap and highlight the role and impact of Saudi Vision 2030 in LD. Analyzing the influence of Saudi Vision 2030 in LD will significantly help HR leaders to assess, identify, and evaluate the needs of LD programs in an organization.

The next section explains the methodological overview.

1.4 Methodological Overview

The study adopted semi-structured interviews with seven participants, including HR leaders, existing business leaders, and students. The professional participants are working in different companies in different sectors, including oil and gas sector and electronics sector. The semi-structured interview consisted of nine main questions around the role and impact of Saudi Vision 2030 in LD. The participants with HR and business leadership positions have received LDP and currently holding leadership positions. While, the students in top ranked university in Saudi Arabia were taught the principles of leadership and LD.

The categorization of participants' profile is as follow: two were Saudi Arabian female students; One Saudi Arabian female student was pursuing postgraduate degree in Human Resources Development at top ranked university in Saudi Arabia; One Saudi Arabian female student is pursuing undergraduate degree in Software Engineering at top ranked university in Saudi Arabia. These students were interested in leadership development. Four were Saudi Arabian male workers in the oil and gas sector in Saudi Arabia. Two Saudi Arabian male workers, working in the oil & gas sector in Saudi Arabia are existing leaders in the field. Two Saudi Arabian male workers, working in the oil & gas sector in Saudi Arabia as HR leader/coordinator. One Saudi Arabian female worker, working in the electronics sector in Saudi Arabia as HR coordinator. The interviews were conducted in-person and individually to ensure anonymity.

To promote equal gender identity, Saudi Arabian male and female were interviewed. These interviews were recorded for later review and analysis. During the interviews, three main objectives were attained: 1) understanding of leadership concepts; 2) scrutinize the impact of Saudi Vision 2030 in LD programs; 3) identify the areas of improvement and action plans to elevate the LD programs in the Saudi labor market.

1.5 Thesis Statement

Potential and existing leaders require LD interventions to help them succeed as Saudi Arabian leaders and support the realization of Saudi Vision 2030. As a result, well-structured LD programs play a critical role in understanding the employee needs and yielding results in the organization.

The following section explores the historical background of leadership theories and styles.

1.6 Historical Background of Leadership Theories and Styles

Historically, leadership was separated from the individual as a leader. Theorists suggested different leadership theories that define leadership based on leader-subordinates relationship, personal traits and behaviors, and employee involvement in decision-making (Khan, Nawaz, & Khan, 2016). The exploration of leadership has transformed from a singular leadership figure to the qualities and theories involved in the development of leadership. There is no single theory that can explain leadership scenarios, prepare

subordinates or leader equally. The field of leadership study is ever changing.

There are various leadership theories, yet theorists argued that leadership could be summarized into seven main leadership theories, because they are widely used, namely: Great- Man, Trait, and Contingency, Style and Behavior, Process, Transactional, and Transformational Leadership Theory. In 1847, Thomas Carlyle claimed that leaders are born not made (Hunt & Fedynich, 2018). While, the Trait Theory, introduced by Jenkins identified leadership through two traits: emergent traits, intelligence, attractiveness, and self-esteem and effectiveness traits (based on experience or learning), considering charisma as fundamental component of leadership (Khan, Nawaz, & Khan, 2016). Afterwards, Contingency or Situational Leadership Theory was articulated in 1960, stating that leaders act according to the situations and needs of the subordinate (Hanaky, 2021). At later stage, an expansion to Situational Leadership Theory was made, by building on the concept of combining different styles, to meet different needs of employees. This was demonstrated under the Style and Behavior Leadership Theory (Hunt & Fedynich, 2018).

The Style and Behavior Leadership Theory suggested that all leaders should assume one of three major leadership styles that emphasized different levels of authority and decision- making, such as: Autocratic, Democratic, and Laissez-faire (Albejaidi et al., 2020). Autocratic leaders control decisions with limited input from others. Laissez-faire leaders avoid making decisions relying on their subordinates to make decisions.

The leadership concept has evolved to a new phase titled: Process Leadership Theory, where leadership viewed as process, group function, and work relationship (Davenport, 2015).

Transactional Leadership Theory defined leadership as an exchange of skills, knowledge, and resources and rewards (Hanaky, 2021). To illustrate, leaders drive results from their subordinates through rewards and punishments. A different school of thought is the Transformational Leadership Style. It views leadership as a competence to instill self-confidence onto subordinates, motivating others to thrive and excel at their roles (Alharthi et al., 2023).

Empowerment is a factor that shapes Transformational Leadership Style. Transformational leaders empower others to help them turn their vision into action and energize their subordinates, providing them with autonomy and vision, as apposed to relying on the punishment and rewards approach (Alharthi et al., 2023, p. 10). This type of leadership style supports the realization of Saudi Vision 2030, because leaders with vision could develop a culture of participation and enabling conditions that enhances self-efficacy of employees. Sustainable leadership exerts a substantial influence on sustainable competitive advantage within the realm of the information technology sector, hence enhanced prospects for organizations in regards to innovation, perpetual progression, enduring competitive differentiation, and long-term prosperity (Nisha et al., 2022).

An effective LD program starts with thorough analysis of leadership styles. Understanding the factors that influence each leadership style is crucial in determining the developmental and personal needs of leaders and subordinates. For example, leaders with a Transformational Leadership Style recognize a subordinate's motivational and self-confidence level to drive results. Therefore, a matching LD program should focus on understanding human behavior. Assessing the leadership styles at an organization play a major role in the development of skill-based LD interventions and supports the achievement of Saudi vision 2030.

The following section introduces the history of workplace pre-Saudi Vision 2030.

1.7 History of the Workplace Pre-Saudi Vision 2030

The work environment in Saudi Arabia prior to Saudi Vision 2030 was distinguished by the constrained involvement of female in the labor force. The efforts to implement Saudization policies in privately owned enterprises have produced only limited results, with the healthcare industry being particularly challenging. Organizational culture in some companies was found to be autocratic, resulting in low innovation and productivity rate. Additionally, Saudi Arabia's workforce was confronted with challenges such as numerical inadequacy, skill imbalance, gender disparity, and access issues. For instance, Saudi nationals made up less than 20% of the pharmacy workforce in the kingdom, which was dominated by expatriates (Alruthia et al., 2018). The findings point to the necessity of increasing female participation, improving organizational culture, and addressing workforce challenges.

The next sub-section analyzes the Saudi Arabian workplace leadership before the implementation of Saudi Vision 2030.

1.8 Workplace Leadership: Pre-Implementation of Saudi Vision 2030

A study conducted under the Saudi Labor Market research program indicated that employers in Saudi Arabia faced a challenge in finding female job seekers with high demand soft skills, such as communication and work ethics (Domash, 2017). This gap was existed due to lack of accessible leadership training programs. This points a skill mismatch in the Saudi Arabian labor market, but it also gives cause for optimism of how relatively minor policy changes in alignment with the Saudi Vision 2030 can reduce this mismatch. Study showed that the Saudi private sector has relied historically on low-cost foreign labor to fill the gap between the job seekers' skills and labor market needs, which exerts a downward pressure on wages (Harvard Kennedy School, 2019). Therefore, prior to the implementation of Saudi Vision 2030, leadership positions in Saudi labor market were male and expatriates-oriented.

The next sub-section identifies the reason for the change of workplace leadership in Saudi Arabia.

1.9 Reason for the Change of Saudi Arabian Workplace Leadership

Achievement of Saudi Vision 2030 requires clear understanding of the leadership capabilities of emerging Saudi leaders, to ensure that future leaders are ready to provision implementation of the vision. To illustrate, leadership development and application of leadership styles in the organization has a direct influence on the level of performance. The effective leadership style enhances the discipline of employees and improves individual and organization's performance. As a result, the Saudi Vision 2030 focuses on the change of workplace leadership because the leadership landscape has changed with the integration of women into the workplace as well as the diverse needs of new generations in the Saudi labor market.

A shift from authoritative to transformational leadership style is needed to drive the goals outline in Saudi Vision 2030. Leaders with transformational leadership style valued the empowerment, trust, and knowledge sharing as key values to effective leadership and enabler to Saudi Vision 2030. As outlined in the studies, organizations should enhance the attention of leaders to the empowerment concept, by providing comprehensive perceptions of work and leaving the largest margin for future leaders to implement it, which inspires them to take responsibility and recommend innovation interventions (Alharthi et al., 2023).

The next section sheds light on my personal understanding about the Saudi Vision 2030 and LD.

1.10 Saudi Vision 2030 and Leadership Development: Personal Understanding

Saudi Vision 2030 has established a clear vision for Saudi society, leaders, and the future of the Saudi economy. In support of the Saudi economic transformational journey, the government continues to enable citizens and institutions to unleash talents and help emerging leaders to reach their fullest potential and cultivate innovative opportunities for the future (Saudi Vision 2030, 2020). Private and public sectors are investing in LD programs to promote one of the strategic goals of Saudi Vision 2030, which is human

capital development (HCD).

Institutional leaders showed commitment and dedication towards realization of Saudi Vision 2030. In order to develop an effective LD program, training needs analysis and leadership assessments should be conducted. Additionally, LD programs should be evaluated in a timely manner to assess the effectiveness and determine the gaps in leadership competencies. In my opinion, HR leaders should act as consultants to guide and apply the best practice in the development and evaluation of learning and development programs.

The Saudi government is aimed to position the kingdom as a pioneering and successful model of excellence, which will be driven through successful and visionary leadership. To manage talent and develop successful leaders, HR leaders should partner with business managers to unleash, develop, and manage the development of potential/existing leaders. The role of HR leadership is evident in embedding the pillars of Saudi Vision 2030 in HR practices and processes.

2. Literature Review

The Saudi Vision 2030 drives various opportunities to individuals, organizations, and the Saudi Arabia's economy. This research utilizes contemporary literature to validate the arguments and raise the awareness of different perspectives collected from the semi-structured interviews. I divided the literature review into six categories: 1) Saudi Vision 2030 2) Saudi Vision 2030 and Leadership Development Programs 3) Leadership Development Programs in the Saudi Arabian Labor Market. 4) Importance of Leadership Development Programs 5) Role of HR Leaders in Leadership Development 6) The Design of Effective Leadership Development Programs

2.1 Saudi Vision 2030

In 2016, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia articulated a vision based on three pillars: vibrant society, thriving economy, and an ambitious nation (United National Platform, 2023). These pillars are interconnected to achieve the kingdom's objectives. It established a clear roadmap for effective initiatives and programs, hence, revolutionized the Saudi economy and promoted a sustainable environment. Saudi Vision 2030 is a multidimensional effort that touches upon almost every single aspect of Saudi citizens' life. How citizens learn and work, cultural and entertainment options provided to them, and their contributions to Saudi labor market through investment and entrepreneurship (Kinninmont, 2017).

The objective of the vision is to foster economic diversification, diminish reliance on oil, and elevate the private sector as the catalyst for both expansion and employment (Grand & Wolff, 2020). Thompson in *Saudi Vision 2030 and National Development* (2019) explains that the objective of the vision is to foster economic diversification, diminish reliance on oil, and elevate the private sector as the catalyst for both expansion and employment. The vibrant society pillar aimed at: positioning the Islamic identity and Arab culture, by improving pilgrim services and raising the awareness of Saudi Nationals' heritage (Thompson, 2019). As for the thriving economy pillar, it seeks to establish equal learning and working opportunities to all nationalities and genders. While, improving the functionality of government services, to align with new technological advancements (Grand & Wolff, 2020).

Considering the third pillar, an ambitious nation, the kingdom has strategic geographic location that provides access into international trade routes between three regions: Asia, Europe and Africa. Consequently, enabling the kingdom to establish new strategic partnerships, cultivating the Saudi Arabia's economy, and increasing Saudi-made productions and exports (Thompson, 2019). Furthermore, Saudi Vision 2030 advances most directly its core mission: diversify and reduce oil-dependency by developing

the private sector and increasing employment rate (Saudi Vision 2030, 2020). To turn the inspiring plans of Saudi Vision 2030 in action, the National Transformation Program was developed by the Saudi government, to create the necessary infrastructure and environment that will enable the public, private, and non-profit sectors to achieve Saudi Vision 2030 (Saudi Vision 2030, 2020).

National Transformation Program Delivery Plan 2021-2025 report (2020) released major achievements that support the realization of Saudi Vision 2030. In terms of private sector enablement and investment in the Saudi market, more than 555 policies and regulations were reformed to support female employment, enhance the workplace environment, and to promote Saudi Arabia's investments. Similarly, government services and various sectors embraced digital transformations and new technologies to leverage the position of KSA among G20 countries. (Saudi Vision 2030, 2020)

According to statistics represented at National Transformation Program Delivery Plan 2021-2025 report (2020): "KSA ranked as the Top Digital Rising among the G20 countries." (Saudi Vision 2030, 2020) Saudi Vision 2030 helps to increase female employment by 94% between 2017-2020 (Saudi Vision 2030, 2020). 41% of Saudi female hold leadership positions in 2022, the kingdom launched the leadership training for women to develop training and orientation programs that aim to improve the skills of Saudi women leaders and increase the percentage of women employed in leadership positions.

According to United National Platform statistics, "The women leadership training initiative trained 506 working women across the kingdom, which were divided into two categories including leaders (260) and managers (246)" (United National Platform, 2023). The achievement of these goals requires human capital, therefore, the Vision seeks to invest in education and training of both men and women, attract qualified workforce, and shape the future of Saudi emerging leaders.

Albejaidi et al. (2020) writes how LD holds great importance within the context of Saudi Vision 2030 due to the substantial influence that leaders possess in realizing the objectives outlined in the vision. The Saudi government is actively promoting the higher education opportunities and cultivating the citizens' leadership aptitude, to assume more proficient roles as leaders within various organizational settings (Albejaidi et al., 2020). The subsequent section illustrated the LD programs that support Saudi Vision 2030 realization. Saudi Vision 2030 has great influence on human capital development programs, providing equal opportunities to citizens, supporting youth development, while promoting women's empowerment.

2.2 Saudi Vision 2030 & Leadership Development Programs

According to Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development (2023), there are various programs to support the realization of Saudi Vision 2030, including leadership development workshops to increase the percentage of women in middle and senior leadership positions, thus increasing women's participation in the labor market. These workshops could be accessed by various sectors, both private and public sectors. This initiative established an ideal environment that will provide Saudi female workers with the leadership competencies to help them become future leaders.

Alhamoudi, Banafea, & Ibnrubbian (2018) mentioned other initiatives by The Institute of Public Administration, which were expanded upon the introduction of Saudi Vision 2030, the Academy for Developing Administrative Leaders. It aims to promote LD in the kingdom (Alhamoudi, 2017; Banafea & Ibnrubbian, 2018). Yamada (2018) highlighted the Misk Academy as a well-known LD institution that serves as a pre-request for successful achievement of Saudi Vision 2030. The Misk Academy was pioneered by Prince Mohammed bin Salman. Its main objectives are to: developing the next generation of citizens to become successful leaders, developers, engineers, and content creators (Mohammed Bin Salman Foundation, 2023). Yamada (2018) also illustrated that the Academy would foster economic growth by preparing leaders for the Saudi Arabian labor market.

The Academy developed various LD programs to support the realization of Saudi Vision 2030 such as the 2030 Leaders Program. The Vision 2030 Leaders is an exclusive world-class leadership program tailored for Saudi leaders and delivered with expert partners. 2030 Leaders program aimed at preparing future leaders with extraordinary passion and a solid commitment to Vision 2030. The program's objective is to shape future Saudi leaders, "The academy will provide leaders who don't only think different, but are different" (Misk Foundation, 2023). Equipping leaders with the required skills to adopt different mindsets is crucial to deal with the dynamic transformation occurring across the kingdom. This will enable future leaders to leverage their leadership, experience, and legacy to lead diverse teams and organizations and act on Vision 2030 strategies and objectives.

Another program developed by Misk Foundation is the 10x Saudi Leaders Program. It is a hybrid program that provides first-time leaders and managers an opportunity to learn and explore the right mindset, skills, and competencies required to excel in delivering results through people and creating an impact on others (Misk Foundation, 2023). Furthermore, the Qimam Fellowship Program is launched in 2018, sponsored by 30 national and international companies. Qimam is a unique institution that provides support and LD services to organizations in the Saudi Arabian labor market. Its goal is to develop quality leaders to support the achievement of Saudi Vision 2030. It helps organizations to identify, develop, and empower young and future leaders in Saudi Arabia, where participants receive leadership training and mentorship (Qimam, 2018).

2.3 Leadership Development Programs in the Saudi Arabia's Labor Market

The Saudi Arabia's labor market has witnessed tremendous transformation in terms of women participation, increased employment rate, and enhancement in the Saudi Arabian labor policies. For example, the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development Strategy introduced TAQAT platform to match Saudi female and male job seekers with employers (United National Platform, 2023). The platform contributed to higher employment rate, integration of Saudi women into the workplace, and increased Saudization rate in private and public sectors.

In alignment with Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 aspirations to increase the participation of Saudi female workers in the labor market to 30% by 2030, SABIC has a partnership with the Qiyadat Global- Georgetown Women's Leadership Program (SABIC, 2021). The program is focused on empowerment of Saudi women in the labor market by improving their competencies and preparing them, to assume leadership roles in various sectors, and to support their growth and development (SABIC, 2021). The SABIC Young Leadership Council (SYLC), served as a knowledge exchange hub for young leaders, where leaders can share knowledge and experience at iENGAGE virtual events (SABIC, 2021)

Dirani and Tlaiss (2017) presented a comprehensive and in-depth analysis of the contextual factors that influence leadership practices and development in Saudi Arabia. This encompasses an exploration of the historical, geographical, and economic dimensions. Considering the education sector, Alghofaily (2019) conducted interviews with Saudi women working in higher education institutions, found that the education sector in Saudi Arabia is the most extensive employer of Saudi women. Additionally, education sector is among the sectors where women can reasonably anticipate minimal obstacles to attain leadership positions. In line with the Saudi Vision 2030, the Saudi Arabian government implemented various reforms to directly influence the empowerment of women. However, the study participants agreed that Saudi women working in the education sector lack the LD and training opportunities, which impacted their level of confidence to lead and limit their career progression in the educational field.

2.4 The Significance of Leadership Development Programs

LD programs are vital for numerous reasons. Firstly, effective leadership is crucial in enabling an organizational culture that stimulates high-quality care and enhanced psychological safety among the team members (Sze et al., 2021). Secondly, these programs aid in cultivating job satisfaction, loyalty, and productivity among employees (Fardellone, Meyer, & Woolforde, 2020). According to Aldulaimi (2018), the importance of LD program in employees' career progression identified that LD programs created career opportunities for participants, through assuming leadership positions at their organizations. Thirdly, LD programs contribute to the development of leadership competencies and qualities, such as promoting effective human resources management practices and fostering feedback-driven culture (Fardellone, Meyer & Woolforde, 2020).

Additionally, these programs have positive impact on job satisfaction, enthusiasm, and teamwork (Ahrari et al., 2021). Roupnel et al. (2019) explain that the LD programs are crucial in every institution, including medical education and postgraduate training. Overall, these programs help in improving leadership competence, decision-making skills, and effective human resources management and development practices. Singh (2016) highlighted the importance of LD programs in the Oil and Gas sector to augment safety, productivity, and fulfill the high demand for oil and gas. In the oil sector, it is crucial to have LD programs to effectively manage oil revenues and find innovative and cost-effective ways for crude extraction (Fragouli, Balado & Ourolidis, 2015).

From a different perspective, Wang (2015) highlights that the goal of LD programs is to enhance leadership knowledge and skills, enhance performance, and realize a higher return on investment. Corporate LD programs could address business challenges and empower leaders to create ownership spirit for their teams (Rosengren et al., 2017). O'Loughlin (2013) asserted that LD programs contributed to positive impact through behavioral change. These views represent the value of LD programs in achieving organizational and individual target.

2.5 Role of Human Resource Leaders in Leadership Development

Human Resource leaders play a strategic role in developing effective talent management strategies and implementing action plans to develop and retain high potential employees. According to Zhu and Wang (2023) Human Resources function is of utmost importance in the development of leaders, as it serves to augment their leadership proficiency, foster leadership potential, and cultivate strategic leadership and managerial aptitudes (Zhu & Wang, 2023). Similarly, Aseri (2015) elucidates a novel approach to leadership that accentuates the potency and potentiality of every individual while concentrating on human capital, individual competencies, and expansion within organizations in the kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

From a different perspective, Bechtold (2014) emphasized the role of HR leaders in developing and managing effective LD programs, stating that the responsibility of human resource practitioners is paramount in promoting a developmental leadership approach that is in line with the Islamic heritage and addresses the needs of the burgeoning generation-Y demographic in Saudi Arabia. In particular, HR leaders should construct a holistic analysis of the organization's leadership pipeline to design effective LD programs (Bechtold, 2014). Davenport (2015) argued that HR has the capability to foster the development of leadership skills, by focusing on job architecture, incumbent assessment, performance definition, recognition of achievements, and leadership capacity building.

Kabra and Yadav (2019) claimed that, development of leadership is heavily reliant on the contribution of HR leaders as it plays a crucial role in the augmentation of leadership competencies and cultivation of strategic leadership and management aptitude. As highlighted by Kokovikhin, Kulkova and Wang (2018), Human Resources Department is responsible for maintaining the leadership and management capacities of the organization by acting as a trusted coach, reliable advisor, and mentor. Therefore, HR brand

management mechanisms have the potential to enhance business leadership through the creation of a strong HR brand and attraction of talented professionals.

2.6 The Design of Effective Leadership Development Programs

Stage and Meier (2022) state that LD programs can be designed to be more effective by integrating customization devices that widen participants' experiences. Similarly, Majczyk (2022) suggests that diversity and inclusion is essential factor in designing effective LD programs. Specifically, customization tools such as theoretical frameworks, practical examples, and interconnections, have the potential to create a sense of detachment among individuals engaged in a specific field, foster their commitment to a particular program, and strategize forthcoming initiatives (Parapini et al., 2022). Despite of the abovementioned advantages, the customization tools present a challenge to the perspective that open enrollment initiatives are incapable of effectively harnessing the experiences of participants and emphasizes the importance of diligently selecting and integrating compatible customization mechanisms (Liu et al., 2020).

Flores et.al (2018) explained that a successful LD initiative ought to encompass a comprehensive curriculum that features instructional sessions, the provision of suitable occasions, the guidance and support of experienced mentors, as well as the identification and nurturing of individuals with exceptional potential. Correspondingly, Ruben et.al (2018) argued that effective leadership program should be grounded in theoretical foundations and place a strong emphasis on the development of leadership, communication, and organizational theories and skills. Fang (2018) claimed that proficient leadership abilities are required to promote favorable results in the contemporary corporate landscape.

Additionally, Ogilvie et.al (2021) highlighted that the significance of informal and formal leadership roles should be emphasized during the design phase of LD program. While Strawn et al. (2017) declared that LD programs should incorporate contemporary ideas, support activities that promote self-care, and facilitate the growth and acquisition of knowledge within a team. Yokota (2021) expressed that LD programs should be formulated in a way that is consistent with the goals, methods, and values of enterprises. Discussing LD program and its importance, Turner articulated that these programs should prioritize the development of crucial skills and knowledge that are relevant to the participants and their respective organizations. In terms of measuring the effectiveness of LD program, the impact of LD programs should be measured in terms of applicants' knowledge, behavior, abilities, and attitudes (Ilie et al., 2017).

Hinck (2017) discussed that to ensure long-lasting influence and modification of behavior, it is crucial for initiatives aimed at enhancing leadership skills to go beyond traditional subject matter and include approaches such as coaching, mentoring, communal learning, and hands-on learning. Likewise, Paine (2016) agreed that the use of suitable measures and methodologies, including leadership coaching, mentoring, social learning, and action learning, are vital for achieving the desired impact. These opinions summarized the key components of an effective LD program, involving faculty mentoring and experiential learning. The experiential learning allows participants to gain hands-on experience through connecting leadership theories and styles and knowledge learned in the leadership training workshops to their real-world leadership situations. The experiential learning lead to various outcomes and contribute to better leadership development, such as building relationship with their subordinates, gaining a deeper understanding of leadership styles and adoption of these styles to various needs of subordinates, strengthened communication skills with the team, promoted collective growth, enriched self- awareness, and enhanced networking skills of leaders.

2.7 Recommendations from Reviewed Sources

The reviewed literature illustrates that Saudi Vision 2030 provided a strategic path to career planning and LD. The Vision endeavors to allocate resources towards the advancement of education and training for individuals. This includes, both genders, draw in a highly skilled labor force, and shape the trajectory of the forthcoming generation of influential figures in Saudi Arabia (Saudi Vision 2030, 2020). Literature stressed the significance of LD in the context of Saudi Vision 2030, due to the major impact that leaders have on achieving the objectives outlined in the vision (Dirani & Tlaiss, 2017; Kinninmont, 2017); Thompson, 2019).

In light of the influence of Saudi Vision 2030 in LD programs, the studies showed great emphasize on the public institutions' effort to develop effective LD programs while preparing qualified leaders who contribute to the realization of Saudi Vision 2030. Additionally, various literature highlighted diverse leadership training opportunities for Saudi female and male with high leadership potential. Considering the Saudi Arabian labor market, studies supported the need for LD programs to achieve the organizational strategic objectives, improve productivity, and increase profitability (Harvard Kennedy School, 2019).

These studies shed light on the importance of LD programs in sharpening employee leadership competence. For instance, participants could be able to practice in a risk-free environment during the scenario-based LD program. Studies recommend the LD program to foster employee engagement, job satisfaction, and high productivity (Wang, 2015). Moreover, LD programs influence employee behavior and sharpen participants' critical soft-skills, such as: Decision-making skills, giving and receiving feedback, and handling difficult conversations. Providing leaders with the right tools and resources to manage various leadership situations successfully.

The literature suggests the involvement of HR leaders in LD at the organization. To illustrate, studies in human resources management and the development field stressed the role of HR leaders as coaches and mentors to identify the development needs of leaders. Additionally, it highlights the critical role of HR leaders in LD by applying systematic approach to talent management and LD. First, identifying leadership positions, classifying potential successors, assessing the readiness of potential successors, defining their areas of improvement, then designing LD program that address their needs (Kabra & Yadav, 2019).

The sophisticated design of LD program was mentioned in several studies (Hinck, 2017). A major step of designing an effective LD program is conducting thorough analysis of business and individual needs. Studies argue that LD program fail due to a lack of measures to evaluate the effectiveness of LD programs at the organizations. Majority of the literature emphasized the complementary tools in LD programs, such as action learning, coaching, and mentoring. Overall, the studies recommend the partnership of HR leaders in planning, designing, and developing leadership programs, as they are trusted experts at HRM and HRD field.

The following chapter explores the research methodology, research approach, research design, and theoretical framework.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Methodology

This section describes the data collection and analysis approach of the research. Generally, scientific research entails an investigation that helps in answering research questions, accumulates evidences, and provides insights that were not determined at the initial stage, and produces findings that are applicable beyond the direct boundaries of the study. Research is a way to investigate involving research design and data collection (Myers & Avison, 2002). There are different research methods for collecting data such as qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods.

In this research, I choose qualitative research methods combining primary and secondary data collection methods. Qualitative research method is a category of scientific research that focuses on in-depth analysis. Qualitative research seeks to understand a given research problem or topic from the perspective of the local population it involves (Mack, 2005) and the research at hand shares these characteristics. It is effective in gaining culturally specific information about the values, opinions, behaviors, and social contexts of specific populations (Schonfeld & Dreyer, 2008). The following section defines the research approach.

3.2 Research Approach

This research used interviews and an extensive literature review as methods for collecting data. The qualitative research method was utilized, for three main reasons: 1) to capture real-world knowledge about the leadership behaviors and styles in light of Saudi Vision 2030; 2) to analyze the need of LD programs and support the achievement of Saudi Vision 2030; and 3) to explore shared beliefs about the role and impact of Saudi Vision 2030 in LD.

I employed semi-structured interviews because of its flexibility and capacity to collect in-depth data from participants. First-hand information is the most trustworthy source of information for an empirical social science researcher, and interviews are the finest means of obtaining first-hand knowledge. Interview data may be contrasted with the data gathered from literature reviews and after that a thorough thematic analysis of the data provides a deeper understand of the thesis problem. Examining the phenomena under inquiry in detail and deciphering the significance of the respondents' records taken as a whole is the primary goal of the interviews (Kvale, 1996).

Semi-structured interviews are technique for collecting data from the interaction between two parties (Dolczewski, 2022). Interaction is typically the process of asking and answering of open-ended questions that are targeted certain theme (Doody & Noonan, 2013). When literature is combined with interviews in empirical field research, specific and useful results can be obtained because interviews are an advanced method of gaining access to rich information. Interviews can provide both a personal and subjective knowledge of the setting in addition to providing a critical analysis of it (Berg, 2001). The semi-structured interviews are protocol-driven, where agendas and questions intended to be used consistently during each interview, to ensure neutrality and validity (Diefenbach, 2009).

As opposed to quantitative and objective interviews, I prefer qualitative and subjective interviews since they provide a deeper grasp of the situation more quickly. Interviews were conducted with candidates from various organizations to gain an understanding of their perspectives on leadership development in Saudi Arabia. When choosing them for the interviews, I also considered their history, gender, and experience. When respondents possess a thorough and comprehensive comprehension of the subject, this acts as a follow-up to more research, scrutinizing and examining the responses provided by the respondents (McNamara, 1999).

The effectiveness of semi-structured interviews can be summarized into two main items. First, it is a useful tool when a researcher is aware of the topic, but willing to explore other perceptions and discuss new issues. Second, it is powerful when a researcher is working with a complex issue, thus asking spontaneous questions will be effective to explore, expand understand, and clarify answers to queries. Considering these opinions, semi-structured interviews have cohesive alignment with understanding social contexts and challenges. To illustrate, the semi-structured interviews allowed me to gain rich data from the participants who are part of the LD and can help in identifying challenges and gaps in LD programs. The subsequent sections elaborate interviewees profiles and identify the research design.

3.3 Interviews

Interviews are a useful method for fully analyzing a subject because of their effectiveness and correctness (Al-Yateem, 2012). They are also a great approach to understand individuals. Although there are many other kinds of interviews, semi-structured interviews work best for this kind of study because the interviewees are presented to the readers in a correct manner and foster confidence. In order to do a comprehensive interview that allowed the respondents to express themselves in-depth, I created a semi-structured questionnaire.

As the interviewees come from different backgrounds, in addition to asking some common and comparable questions, I also came up with some unique ones that let me get their perspectives from various aspects. The follow-up questions are an essential component of the interviews; asking follow-up questions whenever anything is unclear or a point requires further clarification adds extra value to the conversation. An unwelcoming gap between the interviewer and the interviewee might be created by an excessively formal or dry atmosphere. The interviewees may feel uncomfortable or mistrustful as a result of this distance, which may also discourage them from sharing insightful thoughts. Thus, follow-up questions and a pleasant setting can create a dynamic vibe. The participants in a perfect interview feel at ease, tranquil, and quiet (Given, 2008).

As discussed, interviews are crucial to empirical field research, protecting the confidentiality, comfort, and privacy of candidates is also a key component of the interviews. It was made clear early on in the interview that the interview was being recorded and that the results will be utilized in my master's thesis. I told them that the interview might last up to an hour, and that they can ask question at any time. If they were uncomfortable in any way, they could also choose to end the interview or not answer at all. I used the following set of key questions to conduct interviews:

1. Please introduce yourself and explain what does leadership means to you?
2. In your opinion, what are the most useful 3-traits/ qualities that make great leaders?
3. How do you see leadership development in Saudi Arabia and what role can HR professionals play in the development of effective leadership development programs?
4. In your opinion, what are the current leadership gaps in the labor market?
5. Describe the role of Saudi Vision 2030 in leadership development? Share examples if any
6. In your opinion, what is the impact of leadership development programs in the development of existing/ future leaders?
7. In your opinion, what is the impact of Saudi Vision 2030 in leadership development?
8. What are the opportunities that were provided to Saudi Arabian workers and students to improve their leadership skills?
9. How can leadership development programs contribute to the realization of Saudi Vision 2030?

3.3.1 Interviewees

To gain holistic view of the role and impact of Saudi Vision 2030 in leadership development, specific research population was targeted including: students, business leaders, HR leaders and coordinators. In this study, Saudi Arabian male and female from oil and gas and electronics sectors were chosen to participate. In addition, students were targeted to take part in the study to analyze and apply the leadership styles in the Saudi Arabian labor market. For the sake of privacy, safety and data protection as well as giving real life feeling, I assigned pseudonyms to the research participants.

A. A. Mansour: Saudi Arabian male professional, working as a lead engineer in the oil and gas company in Saudi Arabia. He is responsible for supervising engineers and technicians in the remote areas for more than five years. His contribution into the study is valuable because of his leadership experience in the oil and gas organization in Saudi Arabia.

F. S. Ahmad: Saudi Arabian male professional, working as a lead of corporate knowledge base in the oil and gas company in Saudi Arabia. He is responsible for encouraging personnel to promote knowledge transfer practices in the organizations. He has more than seven years in transferring knowledge among employees at corporate- wide. His participation was insightful because he has corporate exposure that enables him to deal with various leadership styles.

R. A. Yousef: Saudi Arabian female student, pursuing undergraduate degree in Software Engineering at top ranked university in Saudi Arabia. Her participation supported the theoretical part of my study about the leadership styles, theories, and traits. I chose her to participate because I wanted to explore and scrutinize different perspectives about the leadership gaps in the Saudi Arabian labor market based on her internship experience.

M. O. Salem: Saudi Arabian female professional, working as HR Coordinator in the electronics company in Saudi Arabia. She has a bachelor degree in Human Resources Management and experience in the field for more than three years. She was chosen to participate in the study, due to her passion in Human Resources Management and Development.

S. S. Abdulrahman: Saudi Arabian male professional, working as HR Leader in the oil and gas company in Saudi Arabia. He has more than ten years of experience in Human Resources. He was chosen to participate in the study due to his wide experience and best practices in Human Resources.

Y. A. Saleh: Saudi Arabian female student, pursuing postgraduate degree in Human Resources Development at top ranked university in Saudi Arabia. She has previous experience of more than three years in Human Resources in government entity in Saudi Arabia as HR coordinator and legal advisor. Her valuable contribution was preferred in the study, due to her solid knowledge in the Human Resources Development and enablement of Saudi Vision 2030 in the Saudi Arabian labor market.

Z. S. Zaher: Saudi Arabian male professional, working as HR Coordinator in the oil and gas company in Saudi Arabia. He has more than eight years of experience in training and HR Administration activities in the oil and gas company in Saudi Arabia. I chose him to take a place in the study, due to his direct interaction with business leaders, which helped me to explore the leadership gaps through the lenses of HR coordinators.

3.4 Research Design

A questionnaire containing nine questions was pre-defined, to facilitate smooth discussions and align with the research questions and objectives. In the context of this study, participants are existing, or future leaders, and experts in the Human Resources Management and LD field in the Saudi Arabian labor market. They have experienced LD and interested in their own and other leaders' development. Participants' valuable contribution will provide detailed experiences, structure future developmental endeavors, and influence future implementation of research findings.

To analyze the collected data, a Thematic Analysis tool was utilized. Thematic Analysis is an approach for identifying, scrutinizing, organizing, defining, and reporting themes found within data collection (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic Analysis intends to identify and define patterns across a dataset (Braun & Clarke, 2020). Additionally, perspective from students who had previous internship experiences was collected to analyze the needs in the leadership talent pool in the Saudi Arabian labor market.

The sub-sections demonstrate the research sampling and ethical considerations.

3.4.1 Research Sampling/ Participants

The selection of participants was based on specific population criteria as follow: students, business leaders, HR leaders and professionals. I interviewed seven people where two were Saudi Arabian female students. One Saudi Arabian female student was pursuing postgraduate degree in Human Resources Development at top ranked university in Saudi Arabia. One Saudi Arabian female student is pursuing undergraduate degree in Software Engineering at top ranked university in Saudi Arabia. These students were interested in leadership development. Four were Saudi Arabian male workers in the oil and gas sector in Saudi Arabia. Two Saudi Arabian male workers, working in the oil & gas sector in Saudi Arabia are existing leaders in the field. Two Saudi Arabian male workers, working in the oil & gas sector in Saudi Arabia as HR leader/coordinator. One Saudi Arabian female worker, working in the electronics sector in Saudi Arabia as HR coordinator. The workers represented different companies from different sectors in Saudi Arabia. To promote equal gender identity, Saudi Arabian male and female were interviewed. These interviews were recorded for later review and analysis. During the interviews, three main objectives were attained: 1) understanding of leadership concepts; 2) scrutinize the impact of Saudi Vision 2030 in LD programs; 3) identify the areas of improvement and action plans to elevate the LD programs in the Saudi labor market.

3.4.2 Ethical Considerations

The semi-structured interviews with seven participants from oil and gas and electronics companies were conducted in-person and individually, to observe verbal and non-verbal behaviors. The responses were noted and captured during the interviews with an initial and documented approval from the participants. Additionally, interviews were recorded for later review and analysis. The data was stored in restricted permission files, to avoid any potential data leakage. In regard to ethics, there were several items raised during the research that are discussed here in terms of transparency, voluntariness, and confidentiality.

Transparency, voluntariness, and confidentiality: To promote transparency in relation to the research aim, methodology, voluntariness, and confidentiality for the interview respondents, an information consent process was originated, including oral and written information. Consent was shared and confidentiality for the responses around the interview questions was clarified. For the sake of privacy and safety of the participants, pseudonyms were used throughout this research.

The next section develops a clear understanding of the research theoretical framework.

3.5 Theoretical Framework

The study used thematic analysis technique to address the research questions and objectives. This technique guided my analysis, through identification/classification of patterns and emerging themes across the semi-structured interview responses. Consequently, the study followed an inductive analysis to analyze qualitative data without fixed theories. A narrative review of semi-structured interviews data identified eight themes, which explained the role and impact of Saudi Vision 2030 in leadership development. The themes were subjected to a thematic analysis to identify the leadership development gaps and programs in support of Saudi Vision 2030. The results were used to build a conceptual framework of the leadership development needs.

This study investigated the need of LD interventions for potential and existing leaders to succeed as leaders and support the realization of Saudi Vision 2030. Additionally, explored the importance of well-structured LD programs in understanding the employee needs and yielding results in the organization. Results of this study added value to the literature on the Saudi vision 2030 and leadership development. Findings could lead to further study on how to measure the progress in LD and its contribution to the achievement of Saudi Vision 2030. Determining whether participation/ investment in leadership development programs could expedite the realization of Saudi Vision 2030.

The subsequent chapter summarizes the findings and discussion of literature and interview findings.

4. Findings and Discussion

The adopted methodology was a qualitative research methodology to identify, evaluate, and analyze the Human Resources Leaders' perspectives on the role and impact of Saudi Vision 2030 in LD, and to gain a holistic insight into the challenges, options, and opportunities for existing and future leaders. My objective was to understand what these participants observed, felt, and experienced in their respective businesses. The research was conducted to bridge the gaps in understanding the role and application of Saudi Vision 2030 in LD due to the lack of research conducted on the relationship between Saudi Vision 2030 and LD, as well as the leadership gaps and development needs from HR and students' standpoint. Historically, leadership was separated from the individual as a leader. As a result, LD needs were streamlined among various personalities and potential leaders. The perspectives examined in this study serve as a reference point for during the design of LD programs.

The data was collected from purposeful sample of seven participants including HR leaders, existing business leaders, and students via semi-structured interviews, consisted of nine main questions around the role and impact of Saudi Vision 2030 in LD. The participants with HR and business leadership positions have received LDP and currently holding leadership positions. While, the students participants were taught the principles of leadership and LD. The age of participants ranged from 20-45 years. The broad range was targeted to analyze different views from people who are older as well as younger generations, and to recognize the LD needs of different organizations and generations. The sample could indicate future changes for HR Leaders, Management, and policy makers.

The study scrutinized the role, application, and impact of Saudi Vision 2030 in LD in Saudi labor market, through nine questions. The questions asked were as follow: 1) Explain what leadership means to you? ; 2) In your opinion, what are the most useful three-traits/ qualities that make a great leader? ; 3) How do you see LD in Saudi Arabia and what role can HR professionals play in the development of effective LD programs? ; 4) In your opinion, what are the current leadership gaps in the labor market? ; 5) Describe the role of Saudi Vision 2030 in LD? Share examples if any; 6) in your opinion, what is the impact of LD programs in the development of existing/ future leadership? 7) In your opinion, what is the impact of Saudi Vision 2030 in LD? 8) What are the opportunities that were provided to Saudi workers and students to

improve their leadership skills? 9) How can LD programs contribute to the realization of Saudi Vision 2030?

I have conducted semi-structured interviews with seven participants including three women and four men. I was able to classify the answers into a thematic framework. It was a deliberate decision to include male participants in this research because I wanted to explore the male perspectives about the role and impact of Saudi Vision 2030 in LD. For the sake of privacy and safety of the participants, I have used pseudonyms in the study findings and analysis.

I chose semi-structured interview as it allows for open-ended answers from participants for more in-depth information. Additionally, it encourages two-way communication and provides an opportunity to understand the reasons behind the answers. According to Braun & Clarke (2020), thematic analysis is an approach consists of six phases: 1) Comprehension of data; 2) Classification of data through codes; 3) Categorization of data into themes; 4) Review of potential themes; 5) Identification of the themes; 6) Production of a report.

Considering the study context, I familiarized myself with the interview data where I read the words actively, analytically and critically. Then, I identified codes as an interpretation of the data. Afterwards, I shifted from codes to themes and categorized important data in relation to the research questions. Further review on the pre-defined themes was conducted to capture additional themes and adjust as needed. In parallel, titles were identified for each theme to be aligned with the data, research questions, and research objectives.

The study findings disclose number of challenges and key insights that merit consideration. The following eight themes were identified: 1) notions of leadership; 2) leadership: characteristics of a great leaders; 3) LD in Saudi Arabia; 4) strategic role of HR leaders in LD; 5) leadership gaps in Saudi labor market; 6) Saudi Vision 2030 and LD; 7) LD programs: an era of opportunities; 8) LD programs: enablement of Saudi Vision 2030. These themes were linked with the research questions, as follow: First, what role Saudi Vision 2030 has played in improving the skill set of leaders? Second, what is the impact of LD initiatives in achieving the goals of Saudi Vision 2030?

4.1 Notions of Leadership

The notions of leadership theme served as a foundation for the research questions. Understanding notions of leadership through interview participants' perspectives was essential to determine the role of Saudi Vision 2030 in improving the skill set of leaders and the impact of LD initiatives in achieving the goals of Saudi Vision 2030. The interview findings emphasized that leadership is about becoming a role model who inspire and guide subordinates towards the realization of the vision. Such a view supported that visionary leaders can cultivate a culture of participation and enabling conditions that boosts self-efficacy of employees to reach their individual, team, and organizational goals. Similarly, leaders with a transformational leadership style, tend to unleash the talent and potentials of their team (Alharthi et al., 2023).

The interviewees were asked to share their perspectives about the meaning of leadership. Responses demonstrated that leadership is a collection of various traits exhibited by individuals at assigned leadership positions. Four out of seven participants agreed that leadership is the capacity to guide, inspire, and motivate team members to achieve a common goal. "Leadership involves taking charge, making decisions, and encouraging others to achieve common goals" (Zaher, Personal Communication, September 17, 2023). This response has supported the drastic shift in leadership concepts from a singular leadership figure to the qualities, behaviors, and theories involved in the development of leadership (Hanaky, 2021).

According to Abdullah Ayman Manosur stated, “leadership involves being accountable, making tough decisions, and setting positive example for others to follow” (Mansour, Personal Communication, September 16, 2023). Similarly, Saleh Sami Abdulrahman mentioned that, leadership is about inspiring, motivating, and guiding subordinates towards a vision (Abdulrahman, Personal Communication, September 17, 2023). In reference to Yumna Ahmad, Saleh stated that the leadership is about two-way communication between the leaders and subordinates (Saleh, Personal Communication, September 14, 2023). From different angles, three out of seven participants referred that knowledge transfer and trust behaviors are main components of the leadership concept. As mentioned by Fayez Salman Ahmad, “Leadership signifies the establishment of trust, a sense of reliance between leaders, and their subordinates” (Ahmad, Personal Communication, September 18, 2023). The trust can be shown when employees feel trusted by their leaders, empowered, and given the authority to make decisions, which is classified as democratic leadership style (Khan, Nawaz, & Khan, 2016).

In reference to Maram Othman Salem, highlighted that: “Leader is a person who passed the knowledge to the next generation of leaders more than utilizing the role for power and authority” (Salem, Personal Communication, September 19, 2023). Similarly, Rozan Ali Yousef, claimed that: Leadership is more than influencing and guiding group of people to achieve a common goal. It’s about motivating each individual within the team to continuously demonstrate their best behaviors, skills, potentials, therefore achieving a common goal at personal and group level (Yousef, Personal Communication, September 20, 2023).

The interview responses emphasized that leaders with transformational leadership valued the empowerment, trust, and knowledge sharing as key contributors to effective leadership and as an enabler to Saudi Vision 2030 (Alharthi et al., 2023). The majority of the responses from the interviews highlighted that leadership is a pool of traits more than the power of authority. Women and men agreed that leadership is collaborative effort between a leader and the subordinates to achieve common goals. Furthermore, effective leadership emphasized the importance of being a positive example and role model for others to follow. Leadership combines people management skills and technical skills to achieve desired outcomes.

The next section investigates the characteristics of a great leader.

4.2 Leadership: Characteristics of a Great Leader

Exploring the characteristics of a great leader helped me to better understand the role of Saudi Vision 2030 in improving the skill set of leaders from interview respondents’ point of view. The interviewees were asked about the most three qualities/traits that make a great leader. Four out of seven agreed that communication, decision-making, and emotional intelligence are the most useful three qualities/traits that make a great leader. In reference to Maram Othman Salem, stated that: effective leader should communicate his/her feelings and thoughts as well as explaining the aspects and expectations of work to the subordinates (Salem, Personal Communication, September 19, 2023).

According to Abdullah Ayman Manosur, highlighted that: “A great leader should be able to make informed decisions in a timely manner” (Mansour, Personal Communication, September 16, 2023). Correspondingly, Zuhair Saad Zaher mentioned that a great leader should maintain two-way communication with the subordinates and communicates a clear vision (Zaher, Personal Communication, September 17, 2023). Such views were aligned with the importance of LD programs in improving communication, decision-making, and emotional intelligence skills of existing/future leadership. Similarly, leaders should exhibit strong communication and decision-making skills to support the realization of Saudi Vision 2030 (Albejaidi et.al, 2020). In reference to Saleh Sami Abdulrahman, asserted that: communication is a core skill of effective leadership (Abdulrahman, Personal Communication, September 17, 2023).

The interview findings clarified that two out of seven participants agreed that the empathy is the most useful traits/ qualities that make a great leader. This supports the concept of the Contingency or Situational Leadership Theory. A great leader should weigh diverse perspectives, collect relevant information, and take responsibility for the choices he/she made. Rozan Ali Yousef shed light on emotional intelligence as a key trait of a great leader. She relied on her personal experience during the internship, claimed that: “In group work, my productivity and creativity will significantly increases whenever the leader is identifying and recognizing my emotions” (Yousef, Personal Communication, September 20, 2023). This strengthened the position and need of Trait Theory in the workplace, which focuses on emotional intelligence and self-awareness (Hunt & Fedynich, 2018). According to Fayez Salman Ahmad, commented that a great leader be emotionally balanced: “Be empathetic when it is needed and be strict as needed” (Ahmad, Personal Communication, September 18, 2023).

Minority of one participant included empowerment, resilience, and confidence, and self- awareness along with the three most useful traits of a great leader, as determined and explained above. According to Yumna Ahmad Saleh, a great leader should be resilient with the subordinates (Saleh, Personal Communication, September 14, 2023). Leaders act according to the situations and needs of the subordinates (Khan, Nawaz, & Khan, 2016). This emphasizes the need for adopting Situational Leadership Style in today’s workplace to meet the various needs and personalities of the subordinates.

A high cohesion across the responses on three main qualities of great leaders, namely: Communication, decision-making, and emotional intelligence. A great leader should understand and connect with the emotions and perspectives of their team. Additionally, being able to communicate and convey their vision and expectations to team members. As mentioned by Paine in *Building Leadership Development Programmes: Zero-Cost to High-Investment Programmes that Work* (2016) effective LD program, involving: Faculty mentoring and experiential learning lead to various outcomes such as strengthened communication skills and enriched self- awareness.

The following section explores the LD in the kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

4.3 Leadership Development in Saudi Arabia

LD in Saudi Arabia theme highlighted the impact of LD initiatives in achieving the goals of Saudi Vision 2030. Saudi Arabia has recognized the importance of LD as a key factor in driving its Saudi Vision 2030 agenda, which aims to transform the kingdom’s economy and society. The interviewees were asked about how they see LD in Saudi Arabia. The interview findings disclosed three different insights around the LD in Saudi Arabia, including the evolution of Saudi Arabia, business and its needs, and the development of Saudi citizens.

In support of LD in Saudi Arabia, Saudi Arabia is evolving to achieve the aspirations of Saudi Vision 2030. Three out of seven participants agreed that LD in Saudi Arabia has witnessed significant growth and focus in recent years. The kingdom acknowledges the importance of developing leaders to drive economic and social progress (Mansour, Personal Communication, September 16, 2023). Similarly, Fayez Salman Ahmad, stated that: the rapid development and accelerated growth that Saudi Arabia is witnessing has encouraged the government to expand the training opportunities and invest in LD programs and nurturing the talent pool of leadership in Saudi Arabia. (Ahmad, Personal Communication, September 18, 2023). According to Zuhair Saad Zaher, commented that: “LD is key element to realize the aspirations of Saudi vision 2030” (Zaher, Personal Communication, September 17, 2023).

Such views recognized the efforts by Human Resources and Social Development in designing and implementing effective LD programs, including the HADAF LD program that aims to develop future leaders in essential leadership competencies and support the achievement of Saudi Vision 2030 (Human Resources and Social Development, 2023). One out of seven participants viewed LD in Saudi Arabia from

a different perspective that merit consideration. According to Saleh Sami Abdulrahman, debated that LD in Saudi Arabia varies based on the nature of the business. There is no size fits all, it depends on various factors such as; Company's scope of work, vision, and culture (Abdulrahman, Personal Communication, September 17, 2023). This supported the need for customization tools in LD programs, because it fosters participants' commitment to a particular program (Parapini et al., 2022).

Three out of seven participants agreed that plans and programs were implemented to support the development of Saudi citizens. The Saudi Vision 2030 is aimed to increase the participation of Saudi women workers in the labor market to 30% by 2030. SABIC, for example, has a partnership with the Qiyadat Global- Georgetown Women's Leadership Program (SABIC, 2021). Such effort supports the women empowerment. Similarly, the Misk Academy has developed various LD programs to support the realization of Saudi Vision 2030 such as the 2030 Leaders program (Misk Foundation, 2023).

The future leaders programs are provided to Saudi Arabian female and male to grow and succeed as future leaders. Saudization has a critical role in assigning Saudis at managerial roles (Salem, Personal Communication, September 19, 2023). "LD in Saudi Arabia is the scoop now" as it will provide Saudi citizens the opportunity to lead and participate in the growth of the kingdom (Saleh, Personal Communication, September 14, 2023). Similarly, Rozan Ali Yousef, argued that: leadership development programs are expanded and implemented in every organizations to support the development of Saudi citizens to be qualified future leaders (Yousef, Personal Communication, September 20, 2023).

The interview findings highlighted positive correlation between LD programs and the success of Saudi future leaders and growth of the Saudi economy. LD is embedded into business strategies and processes to contribute to the realization of Saudi Vision 2030.

The below section emphasizes the strategic role of HR leaders in LD.

4.4 Strategic Role of HR Leaders in Leadership Development

Leadership development is a core area in HR field, thus it was vital to include HR perspectives' and role in leadership development. This theme emphasized the role of Saudi Vision 2030 in improving the skill set of leaders and the impact of LD initiatives in achieving the goals of Saudi Vision 2030. Human Resources leaders are responsible for equipping leaders with the right tools to develop and manage their teams. Their role is expanded to be more strategic to achieve organizational objectives. The interviewees were asked about what role HR leaders could play in the development of effective LD programs, the majority of four out of seven participants referred to a systematic approach of LD. While, the remaining of three participants shed light on different practices that could positively influence the development of effective LD programs.

Five out of seven participants agreed that HR leaders could contribute by identifying, designing, and developing, and evaluating needs of the business and individuals. "HR leaders should analyze the needs of the business and type of leadership skills needed for their future leaders" (Abdulrahman, Personal Communication, September 17, 2023). Similarly, Abdullah Ayman Manosur stated that HR leaders should consider five steps to develop effective LD program. 1) Identification of the leadership talent pool; 2) design of leadership program; 3) succession planning; 4) continuous learning 5) measurement of program's effectiveness (Mansour, Personal Communication, September 16, 2023). This would indicate that HR leaders should develop a holistic analysis of the organization's leadership pipeline to design effective LD programs (Bechtold, 2014).

Maram Othman Salem stated that HR leaders could partner with management to design comprehensive LD programs. “Potential and existing leaders should be provided with leadership training opportunities throughout their employment to acquire and transfer leadership skills to their team” (Salem, Personal Communication, September 19, 2023). Likewise, Zuhair Saad Zaher explained three main steps that HR leaders could follow to contribute to design effective LD programs, including “A needs assessment, program design and delivery, and talent identification and succession planning” (Zaher, Personal Communication, September 17, 2023). This shows a positive correlation with the literature was shown, where HR leaders should identify future leaders through a succession planning process, assess their development needs, and design and implement LD programs aligned with the business and individual needs (Davenport, 2015). Yumna Ahmad Saleh, stated that HR leaders can contribute to LD at the organization, by conducting awareness sessions about leadership to employees (Saleh, Personal Communication, September 14, 2023).

One out of seven participants mentioned a powerful practice to improve business processes, including benchmarking. According to Fayez Salman Ahmad, stated that: “HR leaders are required to observe and learn from best in-class organizations through benchmarking.” (Ahmad, Personal Communication, September 18, 2023) One out of seven participants viewed the role of HR leader as a coach. It is seen as valuable role at the organization to improve the effectiveness of LD programs. According to Rozan Ali Yousef, stated that: “HR leaders are seen as coaches because they are the ones who can observe the leadership gaps through coaching and feedback sessions with the employees” (Yousef, Personal Communication, September 20, 2023). This indicates mutual agreement with the literature. HR leaders should act as a trusted coach, reliable advisor, and mentor (Kokovikhin, Kulkova, & Wang, 2018).

Overall, HR leaders play a critical role in identifying, nurturing, and developing leaders in Saudi Arabia by designing and implementing effective LD programs aligned with the organization’s goals and Saudi Vision 2030. The majority of the interviewees agreed that effective LD programs are based on business and employees’ needs. Additionally, HR leaders must play a pivotal role in identifying, developing, and assessing leaders through succession planning and continuous learning practices. These views align with the previous studies and literature.

The next section analyzes the leadership gaps in the Saudi Arabian labor market.

4.5 Leadership Gaps in the Saudi Arabian Labor Market

Analyzing the leadership gaps in Saudi labor market was major theme, to identify the role of Saudi Vision 2030 in improving the skill set of leaders, as well as the impact of LD initiatives in achieving the goals of Saudi Vision 2030. Leadership gaps in the labor market can vary depending on the industry, region, and organizational context. There are some common challenges and gaps that often observed by HR practitioners. The interview findings shown different leadership gaps with critical focus on soft skills. The interviewees were asked about the current leadership gaps in the labor market. All participants agreed that there is a shortage of leaders with solid communication and people management skills. This supported the need of LD programs to train existing/future leaders on soft skills, including: Communication, adaptability, and decision-making (Ruben et al., 2018). According to Saleh Sami Abdulrahman, revealed that: “There is tendency to manage things and people rather than leading, guiding, and inspiring” (Abdulrahman, Personal Communication, September 17, 2023).

According to Rozan Ali Yousef, mentioned that leaders lack the skills to communicate openly and effectively, which creates miscommunication (Yousef, Personal Communication, September 20, 2023). Similarly, Abdullah Ayman Manosur, stated that existing leaders have limited competence on communication skills, such as emotional intelligence and adaptability (Mansour, Personal Communication, September 16, 2023). To close the gap, LD programs should sharpen participants’ skills on essential leadership skills, such as communication skills, adaptability, and people management, and knowledge

sharing among team members (Strawn, McKim, & Velez, 2017).

According to Yumna Ahmad Saleh, stated that leaders lack the ability to coach, develop talents, and provide constructive feedback to the subordinates (Saleh, Personal Communication, September 14, 2023). Fayeze Salman Ahmad, argued that leaders should be assigned to leadership positions based on pre-defined attributes and qualities for effective leadership (Ahmad, Personal Communication, September 18, 2023). Managers should act as coaches for new leaders to handle difficult conversations with the subordinates (Salem, Personal Communication, September 19, 2023). Zuhair Saad Zaher, highlighted a different perspective, stated that leaders require further training and development on how to think strategically and make sound decisions (Zaher, Personal Communication, September 17, 2023).

Along with the lack of communication skills, participants shed light on critical challenges during the assignment of leaders to leadership positions. Two out of seven participants agreed that some organizations assigned leaders at leadership positions based on their exceptional expertise in a particular field. These assignments are based on years of experience. This is an unconscious bias creating a major gap in the quality and readiness of the leadership talent pool at the organization. "Leaders need LD programs on soft skills, as they were placed at leadership positions based on their existing work experience" (Salem, Personal Communication, September 19, 2023). Fayeze Salman Ahmad argued that in the past, leaders were assigned to leadership positions depending on their years of experience. However, "The current trend and practices were improved to close the gap in leadership, by considering essential qualities and qualifications of great leaders" (Ahmad, Personal Communication, September 18, 2023). This stresses the importance of assessing leaders' readiness to LD programs against predefined criteria, such as positive changes in behavior (Ilie et al., 2017).

The responses summarized key leadership gaps and challenges in alignment with the current studies, in terms of the emphasis on LD programs on soft and interpersonal skills to promote effective leadership at the organizations. With the introduction of Saudi Vision 2030, organizations started to revamp the current process of LD to foster new leadership development.

The following section will introduce the role of Saudi Vision 2030 in promoting future ready leaders.

4.6 Saudi Vision 2030: Future-Ready Leaders

The Saudi Vision 2030 has paved the way for future leaders to grow and succeed. Public and private sectors have implemented LD programs to identify, develop, and manage employees with high potential. These programs aim to prepare future leaders to set strategies that contribute to the achievement of Saudi Vision 2030.

The next sub-section analyzes the role of Saudi Vision 2030 in LD field.

4.6.1 Saudi Vision 2030: Towards Leadership Development

Saudi Vision 2030 has expedited the path for emerging Saudi leaders. It has played a pivotal role in the LD field. Saudi is transforming the economy towards sustainable development and prosperity. Various initiatives and programs, such as Misk Academy and Human Resources and Social Development programs were initiated to develop future-ready leaders. The general criteria for Misk LD programs is as follow: participants with Saudi national, have experience of five years or more in leadership position, have experience of ten years or more in public or private sector, and fluent in spoken and written English (Misk Foundation, 2023). The interviewees were asked to describe the role of Saudi Vision 2030 in LD. Six out of seven participants reported the great efforts by the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development, including the Human Resources Development Fund (HRDF). The Ministry of Human

Resources and Social Development launched different programs and initiatives, to develop future-ready leaders who can lead and support the realization of Saudi Vision 2030 (Human Resources and Social Development, 2023). One out of highlighted leadership development institute programs and its contribution to Saudi Vision 2030 goals.

According to Maram Othman Salem, indicated that: the LD programs by Human Resources Development Fund aim to prepare next generation of leaders in the private sector to hold managerial roles in the kingdom by 2030 (Salem, Personal Communication, September 19, 2023). In reference to Rozan Ali Yousef, stated that: Saudi Vision 2030 produces an ambitious nation committed to efficiency and accountability at all levels, including building a government that is effective, transparent, accountable, empowering, and high-performing, therefore, a qualified leadership is required to be accountable and responsible for delivering results and yielding success (Yousef, Personal Communication, September 20, 2023).

With the introduction of Saudi Vision 2030, women are now being integrated and empowered to join the Saudi Arabian labor market. Women empowerment and quality of education across Saudi citizens are key goals of Saudi Vision 2030. Women's empowerment programs, for example, aim at training women on leadership skills through extensive LD programs. Saudi women are empowered to lead in different sectors and their development becomes crucial in every organization (Dirani & Tlaiss, 2017). This supports the studies on LD workshops offered by the Ministry of Human of Human Resources and Social Development, which aim to increase the percentage of women in middle and senior leadership positions, thus rising women's participation in the labor market (Alhamoudi, 2017; Banafea & Ibnrubbian, 2018).

Educational improvements related initiatives help to enhance the education system, promote lifelong learning, and develop a skilled workforce. The enhancement of educational system is an integral element of Saudi Vision 2030, the advancement on how citizens learn will contribute to the achievement of Saudi Vision 2030 (Kinninmont, 2017). The educational improvements and women's empowerment programs are preparing individuals for leadership positions. According to Zuhair Saad Zaher, stated that: "Two different initiatives support LD in Saudi Arabia; The Women's Empowerment and Quality of Education" (Zaher, Personal Communication, September 17, 2023).

In reference to Yumna Ahmad Saleh, stated that the government enforced Saudization in different sectors supports Saudi employment including leadership positions (Saleh, Personal Communication, September 14, 2023). The Saudi Vision 2030 recognizes the nationalization of the jobs in the Saudi labor market as an ongoing goal to increase employment participation rate of Saudi women and men (Thompson, 2019). As stated by Abdullah Ayman Mnasour: "Saudi Vision 2030 plays a significant role in LD by emphasizing the importance of nurturing and developing qualified leaders to drive economic and social transformation in Saudi Arabia" (Mansour, Personal Communication, September 16, 2023).

"iLead program aims to improve leadership skills of existing and potential leaders" (Ahmad, Personal Communication, September 18, 2023). It also recognizes the women's empowerment, LD, and placement at leadership positions. This will promote diversity and inclusion, expand the pool of potential leaders, and foster the development of diverse and talented leadership pipelines. In support of the education, Saudi Vision 2030 places strong emphasis on improving the quality of education to meet the demand of knowledge-based economy. Such initiatives and programs cultivate a new generation of leaders who can effectively lead and contribute to the achievement of Saudi Vision 2030's goals. Different initiatives to support the realization of Saudi Vision 2030 were highlighted by one of the participants, such as the introduction of LD Institute by the Ministry of Sport.

Leadership Development Institute (LDI) is established to accelerate the development of leaders through series of training courses, such as: Strategic thinking, innovation, leadership/managerial development (Abdulrahman, Personal Communication, September 17, 2023).

The next sub-section explains the impact of Saudi Vision 2030 in LD.

4.6.2 Saudi Vision 2030: The Impact

The interviewees were asked about the impact of Saudi Vision 2030 in LD; all participants witnessed the rapid development and transformation in the LD field. "The achievement of Saudi Vision 2030 goals and aspirations required solid local leadership capabilities to represent the kingdom at International engagements and events" (Saleh, Personal Communication, September 14, 2023). Rozan Ali Yousef emphasized that the Saudi Vision 2030 has fostered new pathways for accelerated LD programs to be in place and accessible at anytime by female and male, such as Doroob platform that provides various free online leadership-training courses (Yousef, Personal Communication, September 20, 2023). According to Fayez Salman Ahmad, affirmed that the impact of Saudi Vision 2030 is enormous, specifically, Public Investment Fund (PIF) Graduate Development program, which was launched in 2017, to attract and develop the best of young Saudi talents (Ahmad, Personal Communication, September 18, 2023).

"Saudi Vision 2030 has created new employment opportunities that promote Saudis to lead new sectors such as tourism and entertainment" (Zaher, Personal Communication, September 17, 2023). "The Saudi Vision 2030 related programs minimized the leadership gaps in the Saudi labor market by designing and implementing LD programs in alignment with the labor market needs" (Salem, Personal Communication, September 19, 2023). Saudi Vision 2030 has had a major impact on LD, such as: Focused on local talent, developed LD programs, promoted diversity and inclusion, embraced digitalization and technological advancement (Mansour, Personal Communication, September 16, 2023). Similarly, Saleh Sami Abdulrahman claimed that Saudi Vision 2030 stresses the organizations to empower women, promote Saudization, and develop future leaders (Abdulrahman, Personal Communication, September 17, 2023). This is associated with the right approach of designing effective LD programs, through aligning participants' needs with the program objectives and outcomes (Yokota, 2021).

Saudi Vision 2030 stresses the importance of digitalization in the labor market. Overall, Saudi Vision 2030 has been showing a tangible impact on leadership in Saudi Arabia. It led the establishment of targeted programs, initiatives, and policies that focus on developing local talent, promoting diversity, and preparing leaders for the challenges and opportunities of the future. There is a positive correlation between the responses and previous studies on LD programs after the introduction of Saudi Vision 2030, such as 2030 Misk leadership programs that aimed to develop Saudi leaders (Misk Foundation, 2023). Additionally, the Qimam program was launched in 2018; to identify, develop, and empower young and future leaders in Saudi Arabia, where participants received leadership training and mentorship (Qimam, 2018).

The following section clarifies the LD opportunities and its impact on the development of current and future leaders.

4.7 Leadership Development Programs: An Era of Opportunities

Every leader has a journey filled with hardships and challenges. Despite the setbacks, there are certain leadership improvement areas that everyone should prioritize, including soft skills, effective feedback, and talent development. The next sub-section represents the development of current and future leaders as a result of LD programs. It recognized the role of Saudi Vision 2030 in improving the skill set of leaders, as well as the impact of LD initiatives in achieving the goals of Saudi Vision 2030.

4.7.1 Development of Current and Future Leaders

LD programs have a significant impact on the development of current and future leaders. This impact can be related to leaders' behavior, knowledge, and leadership skills. The interviewees were asked about the impact of LD programs in the development of current and future leaders, five out of seven participants agreed that these programs have had a positive impact on leadership. "LD programs enhanced leadership skills, promoted self-awareness and personal growth, and accelerated the readiness of potential leaders"

(Mansour, Personal Communication, September 16, 2023). Similarly, Fayeze Salman Ahmad stated that: "LD programs have increased motivation, employee engagement, and employees' commitment to work" (Ahmad, Personal Communication, September 18, 2023). "LD programs expose participants to various leadership theories, models, and frameworks. This broadens their knowledge of different leadership styles" (Zaher, Personal Communication, September 17, 2023).

Saleh Sami Abdulrahman, debated that LD programs help current and future leaders to manage and develop people, improve their emotional intelligence, and reinforce a high performance culture (Abdulrahman, Personal Communication, September 17, 2023). Likewise, Maram Othman Salem, stated that the existing LD programs provided current and future leadership the essential leadership competencies to be a role model and successful leader (Salem, Personal Communication, September 19, 2023).

One out of seven participants agreed that current and future leaders are inspired by the Saudi Arabian leadership, Yumna Ahmad Saleh stated that: "Saudi Arabian leadership is seen as a role model by existing and future leaders, which encourages them to further develop their leadership skills" (Saleh, Personal Communication, September 14, 2023). One out of seven participants brought a different perspective, mentioned that: "the more we improve the existing LD programs, the higher opportunity to have a great leader is expected" (Yousef, Personal Communication, September 20, 2023).

The responses support the effectiveness of LD programs in positive behavioral change (O'Loughlin, 2013). These programs provided participants with an opportunity to enhance their leadership skills and competencies. These programs often focus on effective communication, decision-making, strategic thinking, team building and emotional intelligence. It is important to mention that LD programs enhance participants' self-consciousness, as it involves self-assessment tools and feedback mechanism (Fardellone, Meyer, & Woolforde, 2020).

The upcoming sub-section explores the opportunities provided to Saudi Arabian workers and students to improve their leadership skills.

4.7.2 Leadership Development Opportunities: School and Workplace

To support Saudi Vision 2030's strategic pillars and vision realization programs, including the Human Capability Development Program, institutions must focus on aligning educational outcomes with the needs of the labor market, foster innovation, and develop and upgrade skills. The interview findings highlighted various insightful LD opportunities for Saudi workers and students.

The Saudi government has recognized the importance of developing strong leadership capabilities to support the country's economic and social development. The interviewees were asked about the opportunities provided to Saudi Arabian employees and students to improve their leadership skills, all of the participants agreed that private and public sector institutions have embraced the existing LD programs or developed in-house LD programs to enhance the leadership skills at the institution. Four out of seven participants agreed that HRDF and Misk leadership programs and workshops are valuable LD opportunities for Saudis.

To support the realization of Saudi Vision 2030, many opportunities were introduced to develop students' and workers' leadership skills, such as: Misk foundation, FutureX, SIDF Academy, Mohibah (Ahmad, Personal Communication, September 18, 2023). Zuhair Saad Zaher mentioned two different programs, such as Graduate Development Program for interns and senior students (Zaher, Personal Communication, September 17, 2023). This program is aimed to help senior students to gain hands-on experience and excel at their respective fields.

The LD programs will accelerate the achievement of Saudi Vision 2030, through preparing qualified employees and future leaders (Roupenel, Rinfret, & Grenier, 2019). Maram Othman Salem said, Career Consultation “Subl” by HRDF allows Saudis to be exposed to different career choices and learn essential leadership competencies; “Doroob program provides set of free virtual leadership and soft skills courses that only require determination and motivation” (Salem, Personal Communication, September 19, 2023). The Ministry of Education develops leadership skills of students, through graduation pre-requisite voluntary hours and group projects (Saleh, Personal Communication, September 14, 2023).

Three out of seven participants brought different perspectives for developing the leadership skills in students and workers. For instance, scholarship opportunities, internships, certification reimbursement, and leadership curriculum at universities are practical tools to develop leadership competencies in students and workers. The International Scholarship Program provides students and workers with the opportunity to develop key leadership skills at an early age. In addition, these programs facilitate participants working or studying with people from different cultures. They are also encouraged to develop their emotional and cultural sensitivity, which is critical in today’s globalized work environment.

The International Scholarship allows candidates to enhance their self-leadership, decision-making and time management skills (Abdulrahman, Personal Communication, September 17, 2023). The Saudi government has also provided numerous scholarship programs, such as the King Abdullah Scholarship Program, allowing Saudi Arabian students to pursue higher education abroad, thus, developing leadership skills (Mansour, Personal Communication, September 16, 2023). “During my study at the university I learned essential leadership theories and styles through comprehensive leadership and team work curriculum, which helped me to lead group projects effectively” (Yousef, Personal Communication, September 20, 2023).

Participants agreed on the value of internship and mentoring programs and customized leadership workshops and seminars in pursuit of LD programs play a crucial role in contributing to the realization of Saudi Vision 2030, to help diversify the Saudi economy, reduce its dependence on oil, and promote social and cultural development. These programs have had positive impact on individuals and Saudi economy.

The next section sheds light on the contribution of LD programs to the realization of Saudi Vision 2030.

4.8 Leadership Development Programs: Enablement of Saudi Vision 2030

In reference to interview question about the contribution of LD programs to the realization of Saudi Vision 2030, four out of seven participants agreed that these programs improved leadership competencies of leaders. This supports the attainment of Saudi Vision 2030. Three out of seven participants agreed that LD programs promoted the diversification of the Saudi Arabian economy, through entrepreneurship, innovation, and technological advancements.

The interview findings also revealed different insights around the impact of these leadership programs on the realization of Saudi Vision 2030. They have contributed to the development of future Saudi leaders, and formulated effective leadership strategies. These programs can help increase a leaders ability to develop the right capabilities needed to enhance team productivity.

Similarly, LD programs produce a skilled workforce with capable leaders, which is essential for the success of Saudi Vision 2030 (Ahmad, Personal Communication, September 18, 2023). According to Maram Othman Salem, highlighted that the LD programs must be aligned with the HR development goals of Saudi Vision 2030, by empowering women and developing high-demand leadership skills within the Saudi

Arabian workforce (Salem, Personal Communication, September 19, 2023). In refernce to Yumna Ahmad Saleh, stated that LD programs helped leaders to manage people and tasks effectively (Saleh, Personal Communication, September 14, 2023). Rozan Ali Yousef corresponded that the LD programs contributing to the realization of Saudi Vision 230, by producing a highly capable workforce who works towards a stronger economy.

The LD programs have paved the way for economic growth and innovation. Thus supporting the achievement of Saudi Vision 2030's aspirations (Abdulrahman, Personal Communication, September 17, 2023). Leadership programs have helped to increase the percentage of entrepreneurship in Saudi Arabia, which supports the thriving economy pillar of Saudi Vision 2030 while reducing dependency on oil (Zaher, Personal Communication, September 17, 2023). Abdullah Ayman Mansour, pointed critical aspect which is embracing digital transformation.

LD programs can include training in digital leadership, equipping leaders with the required skills to be Tech-savvy. As a result, leveraging digitalization aspect of Saudi Vision 2030 goals (Mansour, Personal Communication, September 16, 2023).

In general, all of the participants agreed that there is positive correlaton between LD programs and achieving Saudi Vision 2030 objectives. These programs have supported the attainment of Saudi Vision 2030 startegic goals by promoting innovation, embracing technological advancements in the workplace, and enriching the understanding of human resources management and development. Based on the given responses, there is no noticable differences between the students' responses and the responses from the professional participants in terms of the LD programs in Saudi Arabia and the role of Saudi Vision 2030 in LD. However, one of the students found difficulty in answering the leadership gaps in Saudi Arabia, due to their limited experience in the Saudi Arabian labor market.

The following chapter concludes the study with key recommendations, research limitations, and future studies.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

The study was conducted to examine the role and impact of Saudi Vision 2030 in LD. The subject was examined by adopting semi-structured interviews followed by a Thematic Analysis technique to categorize the participant responses into themes. Thematic analysis is a technique for identifying, analyzing, organizing, describing, and reporting themes within data collection. The objective of thematic analysis is to identify patterns across a dataset. These techniques and tools were utilized to address the research questions, were: 1) what role Saudi Vision 2030 has played in improving the skill set of leaders? and 2) what is the impact of LD initiatives in achieving the goals of Saudi Vision 2030? These research questions were based on the following objectives: 1) to identify the LD programs associated with Saudi Vision 2030; and 2) to assess the impact of LD programs in achieving the goals of Saudi Vision 2030.

To facilitate smooth discussions and align with the research questions and objectives, a questionnaire containing nine questions was prepared. In the context of this study, participants were existing, or future leaders and experts in Human Resources Management or the LD field in the Saudi Arabian labor market. They have participated in LD programs, and are interested in their personal and other leaders' development. The interviews were conducted with seven participants belonging to the following demographics: 1) three Saudi women and four Saudi men, both group had an age range of 20-45 Years. They were either employees or students, of the oil and gas, education, or electronics sectors. The diverse sample population was targeted to capture and analyze different sector, generation, and occupation.

Based on the results of this study, the findings can be concluded and categorized into three top insights that were common to all participants in the study. These topics dealt with three major pillars: 1) the impact of Saudi Vision 2030 in LD; 2) the opportunities provided to Saudi Arabian workers and students to improve their leadership skills, to support the aspirations of Saudi Vision 2030; and 3) the positive impact of LD programs in the development of existing and future Saudi leaders. Each topic answered one or more of the research questions with regards to the role and impact of Saudi Vision 2030 in LD.

The following sub-sections summarize the key insights related to each research objective

1) to identify the LD programs associated with Saudi Vision 2030; and 2) to assess the impact of LD programs in achieving the goals of Saudi Vision 2030.

5.1 Identifying the Role of Saudi Vision 2030 in LD

The objective was set to shed light on the LD programs after the introduction of Saudi Vision 2030 between 2016 to 2023, therefore identifying diverse application of Saudi Vision 2030 in LD. The participants agreed that LD is embedded into business strategies and processes to contribute to the achievement of Saudi Vision 2030 goals.

In alignment with the Saudi Vision 2030's aspirations to increase the participation of Saudi women workers in the labor market to 30% by 2030, various organizations have created their own LD programs and/or partnered with the best in class LD institutions, to apply effective LD programs in their organizations. For instance, SABIC partnered with the Qiyadat Global Georgetown Women's Leadership Program (SABIC, 2021). Similarly, the Misk Academy has developed various LD programs to support the realization of Saudi Vision 2030, such as 2030 Leaders Program (Misk Foundation, 2023).

Participants' responses showed positive association between the strategic role of HR leaders and effective LD in the organization. This was supported in the literature review, where HR leaders must identify the future leaders through succession planning processes, assessing their development needs, and designing and implementing LD programs aligned with the business and individual needs (Davenport, 2015). Participants agreed that HR leaders play critical role in identifying, cultivating, and developing leaders in Saudi Arabia by designing and implementing effective LD programs in alignment with the organization's goals and Saudi Vision 2030.

The majority of the responses agreed that effective LD programs should be based on business and employees' needs. Furthermore, succession planning and continuous learning practices are essential in LD. Various views were aligned with the previous studies and literature. Leadership gaps in the labor market were identified through different methods, interviews and literature reviews. There is a positive association between the current leadership gaps in Saudi labor market and the need for effective LD programs. Participants summarized key leadership gaps and challenges in alignment with the literature reviews, in terms of the emphasis on LD programs on soft and interpersonal skills to promote effective organizational leadership. Furthermore, organizations started to revamp the current process of LD to foster emerging leaders' development and contribute to Saudi Vision 2030.

The interview responses emphasized the concrete application of Saudi Vision 2030 in LD. The role and application of Saudi Vision 2030 in LD was highlighted in literature reviews and interview findings. The participants agreed that aspirations of Saudi Vision 2030 were applied through various initiatives and programs such as women empowerment and quality education enhancement. Saudi Vision 2030 stresses the importance of increasing women's participation in middle and senior leadership roles as well as elevating the quality of education, to develop ready leaders for the future. Women are empowered and integrated into the Saudi labor market. Such initiatives and programs cultivate a new generation of leaders who can effectively lead and contribute to the attainment of Saudi Vision 2030 goals.

The next section summarizes the interview findings in relation to the research objective, to assess the impact of LD programs in achieving the goals of Saudi Vision 2030.

5.2 Assessing the Impact of LD in Saudi Vision 2030

Conducting interviews and comparing the interview findings with the literature reviews achieved this objective, to assess the impact of LD programs in achieving the goals of Saudi Vision 2030. A review of the literature explained Saudi Vision 2030 and its strategic pillars. Findings from the interviews agreed with the literature, which found a positive relationship between LD programs and achieving Saudi Vision 2030 objectives. Leadership programs have had positive influence in fostering innovation, embracing technology advancement in the workplace, and enriching the understanding of human resources management and development.

Furthermore, positive association between the diversification of the Saudi Arabian economy and the cultivation of social and cultural development with LD programs was shown in literature reviews and interview findings. Participants agreed that internship and mentoring programs, international scholarships, and customized leadership workshops and seminars played a crucial role in the realization of Saudi Vision 2030. The LD programs in particular have had a positive impact in creating high performing teams, developing strategic thinking, and promoting innovation, equipping existing and future leaders with the right tools and resources to extend global engagement, create innovative growth opportunities, and support national and global investments.

Interview findings also revealed how significant the impact of the LD programs has in enhancing the leadership skills of students and workers. For instance, scholarships allow candidates to improve their self-leadership, decision-making, and time management skills. Similarly, the literature reviews and interview findings showed positive correlations between the enhancement of leadership talent tools and LD programs. To illustrate, leaders become emotionally intelligent and strategic thinkers due to the extensive LD programs. LD programs have had a positive impact in developing the leadership competencies of students and workers and contributing to Saudi Vision 2030.

The next section sheds light on the research implications.

5.3 Research Implications

The results of this study have significant implications for leadership development programs and practices in the Saudi Arabian labor market. The data yield implications for HR leaders to design effective leadership development programs and act as strategic business partners, drive positive behavioral change among leaders, and create new policies to support leadership development. The findings hold important implications for leadership trainers and coaches who conduct leadership workshops and design LD programs in the Saudi Arabian labor market. This supports the interview findings that indicate: "HR leaders should be seen as coaches" to guide leaders to the best practices in leadership and people management (Yousef, Personal Communication, September 20, 2023). To achieve this goal, HR leaders should be trained to be certified coaches. Additionally, HR leaders could utilize the research data to design effective leadership training in alignment with the business and individual needs. The interview findings revealed that soft skills such as communication and emotional intelligence are viewed as essential traits of a great leader and should be integrated in the LD training programs in organizations.

Implications for practice arising from this research are concentrated on improvements that could be made to the LD programs that were identified by interview participants. Participants stressed the importance of objectively identifying people for leadership positions. As one participant noted, having been in a leadership position for a definite number of years is not an adequate criterion alone (Salem, Personal Communication, September 19, 2023). Other factors such as the individual's willingness to improve their leadership skills,

their work performance, and their leadership aptitude should be taken into consideration.

The research could drive positive behavioral change among leaders through better understanding of leadership styles and its influence in organizations. For example, leaders with a Transformational Leadership Style recognize a subordinate's motivational and self-confidence level to drive results (Alharthi et al., 2023, p. 10). This indicates that transformational leadership style enhances work productivity and employee satisfaction level among the subordinates. The study findings could guide new policies; a policy could be made to embed leadership courses into high school curriculum. This will allow the students to become more comfortable facilitating a group, better able to articulate their impact on others as a leader, and impactful public speakers. All these skills are crucial to effective leadership.

The following section concludes the study with practical recommendations that can be considered and applied by directors, HR leaders, senior leaders, and potential leaders.

5.4 Research Recommendations

Recommendations of this research were based on the literature review, findings from interviews, and discussions about the findings. To improve LD programs in the Saudi Arabian labor market to support the realization of Saudi Vision 2030, four key recommendations were identified: 1) stakeholders' involvement in the design of LD Programs; 2) evaluation mechanisms; 3) diagnostic of barriers to behavior change; 4) strategic role of HR leaders in LD.

5.4.1 Stakeholders Involvement in The Design of Leadership Development Programs

To design effective LD programs, key stakeholders should be involved in the design phase. Key stakeholders should include HR leaders, managers, targeted participants, and direct supervisors. Their involvement is essential to identify the leadership gaps and training needs. They should utilize the 360-feedback tool, which is an assessment tool used to help the participants in receiving collective and actionable feedback from direct supervisor, manager, and peers, and direct reports to identify the leadership gaps and specify the training needs, hence designing LD programs in alignment with the needs of the stakeholders.

HR leaders could utilize pre-training survey to identify training needs and current knowledge, skills, and attributes of its participants. To complement the abovementioned techniques, HR leaders must facilitate focus groups with managers and direct supervisors, to discuss and review the leadership positions, nature of the subject leadership position, and required leadership competencies in the organizations. These techniques and discussions are crucial to design demand driven learning models and to support the achievement of Saudi Vision 2030.

5.4.2 Evaluation Mechanisms

To measure the impact of LD in the achievement of Saudi Vision 2030, evaluation mechanisms should be established. HR leaders could utilize post-training mechanisms. Post-training survey could be used as a feedback tool to measure the impact of LD programs on the change of participants' behaviors. Additionally, participants could reflect on their work experience before and after the completion of LD programs. From different perspectives, managers and direct supervisors should assign participants challenging assignments and projects to apply the learned materials, thus assessing the development of participants' leadership skills, innovation, and growth mindset. The development of participants will significantly contribute to Saudi Vision 2030, specifically preparing leaders who can unify high performing teams and inspire teams to create innovative solutions.

5.4.3 Diagnostic of Barriers to Behavior Change

HR leaders need to investigate barriers to behavior change such as cultural beliefs, assumptions, feelings, and lack of management support that may cause resistance of behavior change. HR leaders, direct supervisors, and managers should be trained to be coaches and mentors to support the participants and implement the reflective learning activities in practice. Coaches and mentors should also be involved in helping the participants to thoroughly reflect and critically evaluate their own beliefs and values.

Additionally, Peer-learning activities and 360-degree feedback tools can help the participants to reflect more deeply. Learning reflection activities should be integrated into business processes and HR practices, such as business and performance management reviews. Mentors, direct supervisors, and HR leaders should reflect the LD programs and behavioral change in participants' leadership development plans (LDPs) to be reviewed and considered by higher management during the talent review and succession planning processes.

5.4.4 Strategic Role of HR Leaders in Leadership Development

The role of HR leaders has transformed from transactional to a strategic role. HR Leaders should take a step forward in the LD. HR leaders should be seen as coaches to guide leaders to the best practices in leadership and people management. To achieve this goal, HR leaders should be trained to be certified coaches. There are various training courses and professional certifications that could be embedded into HR leaders' development plan to design, develop, and support LD programs in the organization. These certifications could include Certified Professional Coach or Talent Management Practitioner. HR leaders will coach leaders in handling difficult conversations and cultivate a feedback-driven culture in the organization.

In terms of best practices in succession planning, HR leaders should collect different data points to identify, prepare, and develop qualified leadership pipelines. The data points could include details about the leadership position, employee's education background, performance rating, experience, years of experience, history of acting assignments, special projects or tasks, and records of leadership assessments, records of 360 feedback, and feedback on employees' personality, behaviors, and attitudes from managers, and direct supervisors, and direct reports.

Therefore, HR leaders should partner with managers to make data-driven decisions when identifying and assigning leaders based on multiple factors rather than a single factor. Additionally, HR leaders should encourage decision makers to empower women and embrace diversity and inclusion in the HR practices, consequently supporting the achievement of Saudi Vision 2030.

HR leaders should identify the leadership positions, develop leadership pipeline, and design LD program that addresses the needs of the targeted participants and higher management. HR leaders should prioritize the development of crucial skills and knowledge that are relevant to the participants and their respective organizations. LD program should be measured based on participants' knowledge, behavior, abilities, and attitudes.

5.5 Research Limitations and Future Research

The section explores the research limitations and further studies to capitalize on the current study. Each researcher comes across many challenges throughout the study, yet these research limitations are worth mentioning and can be mitigated in the future. In the following section, research limitations are identified and explained thoroughly. To further utilize this study, future studies are recommended in the upcoming sub-section.

5.5.1 Research Limitations

The study encountered three main limitations: 1) Research sample; 2) generalization of the study; 3) limited resources. Starting with the research sample, the study was conducted based on a population size of seven participants. Some comments from students indicated that they were not exposed fully to the labor market to identify the current leadership gaps in the labor market, however they answered the question based on their past internship experience. Additionally, this research did not include individuals in senior leadership roles who may have a valuable contribution to the research. For example, upper managements who have new leaders reporting to them and requires further leadership development. Those individuals may share valuable insights related to the current leadership gaps in the Saudi Arabian labor market, due to their current experiences and observations.

In terms of the generalization of this study, it was conducted on the knowledge of LD programs in Saudi Arabia based on Saudi Vision 2030. The findings and recommendations of this research cannot be generalized and applied to different countries. Lastly, there were few studies about the Saudi Vision 2030 and LD. Most of the studies used these topics separately. This study was intended to bridge the gap in the available studies and analyze the role and impact of Saudi Vision 2030 in LD.

5.5.2 Future Research

The findings of this study are based on views from HR leaders and students in Saudi labor market. Supplementary studies based on views from higher management along with HR leaders can offer diverse insights into the role and impact of Saudi Vision 2030 on leadership gaps. Further studies could visualize and measure the impact of Saudi Vision 2030 in LD through developing and analyzing standardized Key Performance Indicators in organizations. Also, additional studies could measure the progress in LD and its contribution to the achievement of Saudi Vision 2030.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Informed Consent Form

The interviewees were requested to share their approval on below conditions

- The purpose and details of this study have been explained to me.
- I have had an opportunity to ask questions about my participation.
- I understand that I am under no obligation to take part in the study, have the right to withdraw from this study at any stage for any reason, and will not be required to explain my reasons for withdrawing.
- I agree to take part in this study.
- I understand that all the personal information I provide will be treated in strict confidence and will be kept anonymous and confidential to the researchers unless (under the statutory obligations of agencies which the researchers are working with), it is judged that confidentiality will have to be breached for the safety of the participant or others or for audit by regulatory authorities.

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