

WOMEN LEADERS' EXPERIENCES IN NAVIGATING THE LABYRINTH OF
LEADERSHIP IN SAUDI POST-SECONDARY INSTITUTIONS

A dissertation Submitted to the
College of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in the Department of Educational Administration
University of Saskatchewan
Saskatoon, Canada

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ABSTRACT

Despite initiatives to increase the number of women in leadership positions in Saudi Arabia, women are still underrepresented in leadership, specifically in post-secondary institutions (PSIs) with myriad barriers to overcome in their quest to acquire leadership roles. This qualitative case study explored the experiences of Saudi female leaders in PSIs as they navigate the labyrinth of leadership to gain better understanding of how they overcame barriers and accessed support as they progressed towards and through leadership positions. The significance of this research was derived from the premise that female leaders need essential leadership knowledge and skills; to effectively navigate the labyrinth of leadership and lead through economic transformation, globalization, and rapid technological development in an increasingly diverse world. I used the metaphor 'labyrinth' by Eagly and Carli (2007) as the conceptual framework. I conducted this research using an interpretivist qualitative approach and conducted semi-structured interviews with female academic leaders in three Saudi public universities. The resultant findings revealed that the barriers (societal, organizational, professional, and personal) identified by participants, replicated those identified in the literature. However, findings revealed that organizational barriers were the major hindrances for Saudi females' advancement in the labyrinth and these were followed closely by societal barriers. In addition, findings revealed that women used several strategies to access leadership positions and navigate the labyrinth of leadership in Saudi PSIs, some of which were not indicated in the literature. Spirituality was a powerful key for women leaders who pursued and persisted on their career paths of leadership in Saudi PSIs. Finally, the resultant findings had several implications for practice, policy, theory, and future research of women leaders in Saudi PSIs.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First and foremost, I give praise to Almighty *Allah*, the most merciful and beneficent, for giving me the tolerance and strength to overcome the challenges that I went through during my years of studying.

The completion of this thesis would not be possible without the support and encouragement of some special people, to whom I extend my sincerest gratitude. I would like to thank my supervisor, Dr. Dawn Wallin, whose expertise, advice, and guidance were invaluable throughout my journey. Her encouragement, understanding and patience, are greatly appreciated. I am grateful for her constructive and detailed feedback. I could not have had a better supervisor. Special thanks to the members of my advisory committee Drs. Paul Newton, Jing Xiao, Marguerite Koole, Scott Tunison, and my external examiner Dr. Brenda Spencer for their time and assistance in guiding me through this dissertation. I am grateful for your guidance, encouragement, and support. I also thank many other professors in the department who taught me in my first two semesters.

I would like to express gratitude to my mom who was there for me all the time, praying for me and providing me with unending love. Words cannot express how grateful I am for all the sacrifices that you made for me. I also express thankfulness to my siblings who provided me with support, and inspiration. They nurtured my eagerness to learn and kept me focused on my ambition to achieve my goals.

My sincere gratitude and thanks to my friends, colleagues, and classmates who were always willing to support me, especially Dr. Wilfred Beckford. Without your ongoing support it would have been a very lonely journey; your endless support always lightens my path. During our regular dialogues you allowed me to be open and frank which relieved a lot of my stress. Your unwavering belief in me, starting from the riverside walk when I wanted to quit my journey until my graduation are appreciated and will not be forgotten.

Finally, to the participants of this study, I would like to express my appreciation for your willingness to participate in this study despite your hectic schedules during the global pandemic COVID-19. Without your contributions this work would not have come to fruition.

Thank you all.

DEDICATION

To my mom (my paradise)
and the memory of my dad.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

I am a Saudi woman who from an early age developed a sense of responsibility and compassion for others; as a youth I had the responsibility of caring for my younger siblings whenever my mother was away. The early acts of caring for others assisted me in developing and honing my skills as a leader. During my teen years, I became more interested in leadership because of the roles that I was given in school. My teachers and parents recognized my inclination to lead and encouraged me to pursue leadership opportunities whenever they arose. I can still hear the words of my parents echoing in my ears, “we didn’t get the chance to be educated, but we want you to pursue your education and be an important person.”

As I grew older, I observed that the only occupations for women in my country were teaching and nursing. At that time, I did not understand the reasons for restricting women’s careers. Later, I figured out that the reasons for this restriction were based on the traditional practices that prevailed in the Saudi society. Some of these traditional practices favoured males over females, so most career options are opened to males. In the Saudi society men are the decision-makers in households and in the communities, while the primary role of a woman is to be a housewife and care for the family. Hence, when a woman gets married regardless of her qualification, she is expected to sacrifice her career to care for her family. I envisioned that no matter how educated I became, I probably would not be respected for my education and career contributions in Saudi Arabia *because I am a woman*.

After I completed my bachelor’s degree, I became a teacher. In this position, I was a leader and role model for my students, who were all girls. Later in professional life I transitioned into the corporate world, I was fortunate to be promoted to a position of leadership in a male-dominated organization; this was the position of which I had dreamed from an early age, when my parents instilled in me that I could become an important person in the society. However, being a female leader in a male-dominated organization meant that I had to supervise both male and female employees. To achieve the organization’s goals, I had to improve my skills as a neophyte leader, and I had to become more knowledgeable about leadership concepts and

practices. Consequently, I faced many gender-related challenges as I worked to transform the perspectives of the male staff members who, because of the long-standing cultural traditions of my country, strongly opposed women leaders. Therefore, fulfilling work duties as a female leader was not easy; I had limited authority and there were no training or professional development (PD) initiatives for women, so I struggled to hone my craft in leadership. Despite these challenges, I managed to pursue my path in leadership through the generous support of my family and friends, who encouraged and motivated me.

During my tenure as the chair of a department in that organization, I recalled being summoned to the front desk to speak to a gentleman who was irate about the delay of his documents. As soon as he saw that I was female, he said, “*a woman, I am not going to talk with a woman. Go and call your manager.*” Because of his refusal to speak with me as a female, I had to find another way to offer my assistance, so I asked a male colleague to speak with him. I stood beside the male colleague and directed him to explain to the man that some missing documents from his file had caused the delay. Surprisingly, the man appreciated my colleague’s assistance simply because he was a man. Since that incident, the idea of investigating the challenges that Saudi women face in positions of leadership has reverberated continuously in my mind. I became intensely interested in exploring how other Saudi women overcome leadership challenges despite the persistent barriers that they face.

To improve my leadership ability and explore how Saudi female leaders overcome their challenges inspired me to become an avid reader of books about leadership. For example, I read some of Stephen R. Covey’s books about leadership, especially ‘*The 7- Habits of Highly Effective People*’ which offers insights about how people can improve their behaviours to be effective leaders. Covey’s work caused me to reflect on my personality, self-confidence, and how to define and achieve my goals. Though the practice of leadership appeals to me in a general sense, my focus remains on leadership in post-secondary institutions (PSIs), especially on Saudi female leaders, because studying the future of women’s roles in PSIs is key to my personal and professional goals.

Furthermore, the obstacles that I faced while working as a female leader in that male-dominated organization inspired me to pursue studies abroad. I am now interested in expanding my knowledge of post-secondary leadership and in exploring the essential knowledge and skills that assist women leaders to develop their leadership capacity. Therefore, my experience in my

previous role as a female leader had a major influence on my interest in selecting the research topic. My culture and Islamic values played a key role in who I am and what I study. In addition, my ‘insider-outsider’ perspective as a Saudi woman who has studied leadership abroad provided a rich opportunity for me to engage directly in these areas of interest and inspired me to integrate self-reflexivity throughout the research process.

The Significance of the Study

The study is significant for several reasons. First, it revealed Saudi female academic leaders’ experiences in leadership in PSIs and descriptively mapped their leadership path and successful strategies/keys which they used to navigate the barriers in the labyrinth of leadership. Saudi female academic leaders require these keys; skills, knowledge, and behaviours (SKB) to effectively lead through economic transformation, globalization, and rapid technological development in an increasingly diverse world.

Second, the study unearthed numerous barriers to leadership in PSIs for Saudi women. Women’s education in Saudi Arabia occurs in a “female-sphere” due to social norms. The Saudi national policy of segregation of the sexes in education (separate campuses for males and females) has created a gendered pathway for women, resulting in many of them settling for educational careers as their preferred areas of employment and resulting in women’s roles remaining subordinate to their counterparts’ positions. The women sections of Saudi universities are supervised by men from the male section of these universities. This results in constant male intervention which restricts women’s liberty in decision-making and their effectiveness and trajectory to top leadership positions. In describing Saudi women leaders’ barriers, the study used a metaphor ‘labyrinth’ by Eagly and Carli. Women must overcome barriers to acquire and remain in positions of leadership in Saudi PSIs. Therefore, understanding women’s barriers on their career trajectories draw a clear leadership map that aspiring leaders can follow as they navigate the labyrinth; it may also lead to practical actions that can equally support women in leadership development and, thereby, promote success of the educational organizations.

Third, the study contributes to the development of academic leadership in Saudi PSIs. Academic leadership is essential for the development and sustainability of the quality and performance of universities in today’s rapidly changing world (Parrish, 2010). It also promotes leaders to create conducive teaching and learning environments for faculty and students in PSIs. The professional preparation of Saudi female academic leaders in their leadership transitions

would help them to have a clearer understanding of routes that could help them to be more successful in navigating the labyrinth. The success of Saudi female academic leaders will lead to triumph for the whole educational institution. In addition, the Saudi government advocates for world-class university standards that prepare its citizens for modern global life and the foreseeable future in alignment with the Saudi *Vision 2030 Policy*. Thus, Saudi PSIs are at a crossroads: their mission must be redefined, and their standards of success must meet the needs of citizens in the 21st century and beyond.

Fourth, the study is significant for its contribution to the literature on Saudi female academic leaders' experiences; not much information about the paths of leadership and how females navigate the labyrinth of leadership is found in the Saudi literature; thus according to Al-Ahmadi (2011), Al-Jaradat (2014), Alsubaie and Jones (2017), and Omair (2008) a gap exists in the literature. Therefore, conducting this research in PSIs in Saudi Arabia fills this gap by contributing new perspectives to the knowledge of women's leadership, and shedding light on factors that motivate Saudi women to persist in leadership despite the barriers they face.

Last, this study is significant as it was conducted at a time when the Saudi nation was undergoing major reforms and efforts are being made to increase Saudi women's opportunities as leaders. Hence, the study is intended to support policymakers who are engaged in policy reforms related to the development of Saudi female academic leaders in times of change, as articulated in the Saudi *Vision Policy 2030*.

Background of the Problem

The gender-segregated policy that prevails in Saudi Arabia results in the enrollment of men and women in separate facilities on the same university campus (Abalkhail, 2017). Through this policy, men occupied most of the top leadership positions even in the female section of the university; they operate from the male section and liaise with women in the female section. In recent years there has been a gradual move to increase the number of female leaders in the female section of the university but there is still a considerable number of men who currently hold top leadership positions that women should occupy. Saudi universities are structured so that females take directives from the male section of the university, because of this, female academic leaders face numerous barriers that impede their level of effectiveness.

The male control at the top levels of PSIs impacts the performance and climate of these organizations and does not support women's leadership or decision-making, which in turn

minimizes the efficiency of educational and research processes and output levels (Abo-Khudair, 2012; Almengash, 2017; Alsubaihi, 2016). In addition, because of the sex-segregation policy in Saudi universities it is difficult for qualified females to gain leadership positions. As a result, Saudi women are still underrepresented in leadership in PSIs and they face numerous barriers that hinder their advancement when compared to their male counterparts (Almengash, 2017; Alomair, 2015; Halawani, 2002; Hamdan et al., 2016). The challenges that Saudi female academic leaders encounter are grounded in cultural practices that propagate male dominance in the society and dictate how males and females communicate with each other. According to Baki (2004), cultural practices position men as superior to women, especially in governmental sectors.

Discrimination and stereotypes in the Saudi society also limit female leaders' effectiveness and reduce their ability to network, especially with their male counterparts. Organizational challenges from the male section of universities due to sex-segregation result in poor communication, deficient resources, limited authority, and unclear work procedures, all which deter women from top leadership positions (Abo-Khudair, 2012). Therefore, Saudi women who achieve leadership positions are less equipped to successfully accomplish their roles as leaders.

Although there are notable changes currently occurring in Saudi Arabia, sociocultural practices, and gender-discrimination in that country restrict women from receiving high-quality education or engaging in economic development (Alomair, 2015). For example, Saudi women are still not allowed to study certain majors at universities, such as engineering and petroleum and mineral fields. In addition, Abalkhail (2017) stated that some Saudi men still hold negative perceptions of women in top leadership positions, especially with ubiquitous biases in the society that portray women as inferior to men. Guardianship, for example, which requires females to obtain permission from a male family member to work, travel, or study, originated from a misinterpretation of religious rules. Some scholars claimed that men are obligated to protect the honor of women and be their controllers; this has led to misperceptions in the Saudi society that men are superior to women and should occupy top leadership positions in PSIs; women are perceived as being incapable of leading hence they are significantly underrepresented in such positions (Al-Ahmadi, 2011; Al-Asfour et al., 2017; Almengash, 2017). In addition, Metcalfe (2008) argued that the challenges encountered by Saudi women are socio-cultural and economical and these factors limit women's advancement in the public sphere. Also, Abalkhail

(2017) and Hodges (2017) agreed that the lack of female role models, segregation, inadequate access to developmental training, and limited career opportunities are salient factors for the underrepresentation of women and hinder their progress to leadership positions.

Patriarchal and cultural norms have shaped Saudi women's roles by restricting their success and preventing them from maximizing their leadership potential in PSIs (Abalkhail, 2017; Abo-Khudair, 2012; Almengash, 2017). Patriarchy is a socio-cultural and institutional construct that influences Saudi women's employment progress; women in these circumstances are disadvantaged especially in building workplace relationships which are fundamental for managerial and leadership success (Almengash, 2017). Saudi women leaders are viewed as being less valuable in the society than men.

Leadership in PSIs is complex and diverse because it is concerned with expanding the values of students, employees, government, and the public, as well as creating learning environments where diversity exists, collaboration is engendered and knowledge is generated (Amey, 2006; Smith & Hughely, 2006). Furthermore, Amey (2006) argued that complexity in leaders' roles can be challenging for leaders who are trying to maintain efficiency, especially in times of change. Hence, universities need to develop strategies to effectively assist future leaders by offering students and leaders the opportunity to develop professional skills that they require to lead effectively and meet workforce demands (Black, 2015). An implication of these expectations according to Durie and Beshir (2016) is that leaders in PSIs should be equipped with leadership knowledge and skills necessary to satisfy a diverse body of stakeholders.

Statement of the Problem

Despite initiatives to increase the number of women in leadership positions in Saudi Arabia, women are still underrepresented in leadership in PSIs compared to their male counterparts (Abalkhail, 2017). The scarcity of women in top administrative positions (e.g., deans) in academia has been and continues to be a worldwide phenomenon (Alomair, 2015) but is more prevalent in Saudi Arabia due to its culture. Women's underrepresentation has "not only undermined their inherent potential and skills but also has thwarted the contributions they might have offered to a particular institution, to the advancement and strengths in ... higher education, and to the community development in general" (Cselenszky, 2012, p. 2). In the Saudi context, the underrepresentation of women as leaders in PSIs is more pronounced than in other parts of the world. Therefore, Saudi women leaders have more hurdles to overcome in their quest to acquire

leadership roles in PSIs. In addition, the women who do rise to the few available top leadership positions in PSIs are often promoted based on their academic expertise and scientific achievements and not on their leadership competencies (Durie & Beshir, 2016). To compound the situation, those women who acquire leadership posts in PSIs in Saudi Arabia do not have access to adequate professional preparation for administrative leadership, nor a clear understanding of what their role as leaders entails (Abalkhail, 2017; Abo-Khudair, 2012; Alsubaie & Jones, 2017; Gonaim, 2020, 2016). The lack of professional training, as well as the patriarchal cultural and religious practices impact the effectiveness of these women in their roles as leaders to navigate the labyrinth of leadership.

Therefore, this study used the metaphor of a ‘labyrinth’ as part of the analytical frame for the work that “captures the varied challenges confronting women” (Eagly & Carli, 2007, p. 1). Metaphors play a significant role in facilitating a clear understanding of social phenomena, organizing cognition, and producing a change in attitudes (Carli & Eagly, 2016). Today’s leaders need to acquire the essential leadership knowledge and skills to effectively cope with the constant organizational changes in PSIs (Shahamandi et al., 2011). Furthermore, PSIs depend on academic leaders to create conducive teaching and learning environments for faculty and students. Therefore, leaders’ who have adequate KSB can effectively improve their performance (Cselenszky, 2012; Durie & Beshir, 2016; Gmelch, 2013; Kattan et al., 2016; Spendlove, 2007) and facilitate their navigation in the labyrinth of leadership (Herwatic, 2016).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the journeys of female academic leaders as they navigate the labyrinth of leadership in Saudi PSIs. I sought to gain better understandings of how these leaders overcame barriers and accessed supports as they progress towards and through academic leadership positions in Saudi PSIs in the Makkah region.

Research Questions

In this research, I explored the following questions:

1. How do Saudi female academic leaders in the Makkah region describe the ways in which they navigate the labyrinth of leadership?
2. What are the societal, organizational, professional, and personal barriers faced by Saudi female academic leaders in PSIs in the Makkah region and how did they navigate despite these barriers?

3. What supports are accessed by Saudi female academic leaders as they navigate the labyrinth of leadership in PSIs in the Makkah region, and how do these supports facilitate their navigation?

Description of the Study

This research employed a qualitative approach to obtain deeper understandings of participants' experiences and perceptions of the barriers and supports of their academic leadership journeys. The research also explored the effect of leaders' competencies KSB as keys to effectively navigating the labyrinth of leadership. Case study which is a popular form of qualitative research that focuses on in-depth data was used as the methodology of the research (Kothari, 2004). This study was anchored in interpretivism, an approach based on the idea that meaning has multiple interpretations that can change over time (Merriam, 2002). More details of the methodology and research design are provided in Chapter 3.

The research was conducted at three public PSIs in the province of Makkah in Saudi Arabia. Eight current and former Saudi female academic leaders were chosen through purposive sampling procedures to engage in semi-structured interviews that provided rich and informative data that yielded greater insights and deeper understandings of Saudi female academic leadership's journeys. I conducted pilot interviews with three of my colleagues in advance to assess the clarity and suitability of the questions and the interview process.

Collected data were recorded, transcribed, translated, coded, and analyzed to identify the key factors for Saudi female academic's success in the labyrinth of leadership in Saudi PSIs and to allow for emergent themes.

Delimitations

The collection, sources, and synthesis of data were delimited as follows:

1. The study was delimited to public PSIs in the province of Makkah in Saudi Arabia.
2. The study was delimited to eight former and current female academic leaders in public PSIs in the Makkah region of Saudi Arabia.

Limitations

The study had the following limitations:

1. The study was limited by the depth of information and insights gained from semi-structured interviews; no other methods were used to triangulate findings, and it was assumed that

participants provided honest and open reflections of their experiences. Several techniques were used to foster trustworthiness of data, these are outlined in Chapter 3.

2. The data were collected in the Arabic language; participants' key responses were translated from Arabic to English. The findings may have limitations associated with translation such as clarity of wording and respondents' understandings of terminologies; this limitation was minimized with the use of a certified translator who verified the translations.
3. Generalization of the study was limited by the fact that the research was conducted in a specific region in Saudi Arabia with a small sample size.
4. The intent of the research was to conduct face-to-face interviews with women in Saudi Arabia. Unfortunately, due to restrictions based on the COVID-19 pandemic, the interview format was changed to virtual format using the Zoom application. This may have limited my ability to create a more trusting and open relational space for the interviews, though it did not appear to significantly impact the quality of data.

Definitions of Terms Used in the Study

The following definitions are meant to clarify the meanings of the main terms used in the study. They include common terms found in literature.

Academic Leadership: Academic leadership refers to leadership that occurs in academic contexts. It represents the responsibilities, roles, and functions of individuals such as heads of departments and other hierarchical formal leadership positions.

Barriers: Barriers are obstacles, events, or conditions either within the person or environment that make career progression difficult (Lent et al., 2000). In this study, barriers consisted of personal, organizational, professional, or societal factors that negatively impact women's access to or progression in leadership in Saudi PSIs.

Female Academic Leaders: Women who are or were in positions of leadership in PSIs (i.e., heads of departments and other hierarchical formal leadership positions). Those women have instructional and managerial leadership responsibilities in the Saudi PSIs.

Post-Secondary Institutions (PSIs): As used in this study, PSIs include public 4-year universities in Saudi Arabia that provide instruction, research, and other educational services that encompass undergraduate and graduate studies.

Labyrinth: Labyrinth is a metaphor that "captures the varied challenges confronting women" (Eagly & Carli, 2007, p. 1) as they transit during their journeys to leadership positions. It is used

to encapsulate the winding paths, dead ends, and maze-like pathways, including the challenges and supports these leaders encountered and accessed as they traversed the leadership pathways. More description of this metaphor is found in Chapter 2.

Leadership: The process through which a person influences an individual or a group of individuals to attain common goals (Northouse, 2013).

Saudi Vision 2030 Policy: A plan of action seeking new ways to diversify the Saudi national economy rather than remaining traditionally dependent on oil. The Saudi *Vision 2030 Policy* was introduced in 2016, by the Crown Prince, Mohammed bin Salman Al-Saud. It has several objectives for the development of the country in different political, societal, and economic spheres. In addition, it aims to enhance and increase women's participation in the labour force from 22% to 30% and to provide equal educational opportunities for men and women (Saudi Vision, 2016).

Saudization: The process of replacing expatriates in Saudi public and private sectors with educated and qualified Saudis (Baki, 2004).

Shoura Council: A consultative council consisting of 120 male members and 30 female members who participate in decision-making within the executive sectors of the ministries and government institutions (Alkhazim, 2003).

Support: Supports are facilitators who help individuals to pursue their career progression and choices (Lent et al., 2000).

Qa'wama (guardianship): *Qa'wama* obligates Saudi females to obtain written permission from a male family member to work, travel, or study; it originated from a literal interpretation of religious rules (Almunajjed, 1997).

Wasta: *Wasta* is an Arabic term that means the cultural and institutional form of social networks that are misused and result in nepotism (Abalkhail, 2018). It is also a system in which people become personally linked to others in high-status positions through close friendships or family relationships to facilitate their personal ambitions or goals (Eagly & Carli, 2007).

Organization of the Thesis

This research consisted of six chapters. In this introductory chapter, I outlined the significance of the research, provided background information of the problem, and stated the purpose of the study. I also included the research questions, description of the research, delimitations, and limitations of the study, and definitions of key terms.

In Chapter 2, I review literature that is pertinent to this study. In Chapter 3, I elucidate the research design, research methodology and method, sampling, and procedures of data collection and analysis. Elements of trustworthiness and ethical considerations of the research proceed statements of the researcher's positionality.

In Chapter 4, I provide participants' profiles, perspectives, and experiences with regards to the research questions. In Chapter 5, I present data from the eight in-depth personal interviews with analysis and findings. In Chapter 6, I summarize the research, discuss the findings in relation to the major research questions with literature and state the implications and recommendations for further research. I conclude the study with reflections on my methodological approach and advice to aspiring female leaders.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this study was to explore the journeys of female academic leaders as they navigate the labyrinth of leadership in Saudi PSIs. I sought to gain better understandings of how these leaders overcame barriers and accessed supports as they progress towards and through academic leadership positions in Saudi PSIs in the Makkah region.

This literature review aims to explicate the relationship between the existing study and literature base on the topic area. In this literature review, I provide background information relating to the key areas of the study under investigation.

The first section of this chapter provides a historical background of Saudi Arabia and the development of education for women. The second section provides a discussion of the status of Saudi women and governmental initiatives that support women's advancement. The third section of the literature review focuses on leadership in Islam, Arab, Muslim nations, and in the Saudi context. The last section focuses on the metaphor 'labyrinth' as a conceptual framework used in describing Saudi female leaders' barriers (societal, organizational, professional, and personal) in relation to PSIs with the essential keys KSB to navigating the labyrinth of leadership.

Saudi Arabia Background

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), commonly known as Saudi Arabia (SA) is the largest country in the Arabian Gulf, encompassing over 2 million square kilometres and 13 regions. Saudi Arabia is surrounded by the Red Sea on the west, Yemen and Oman to the south, United Arab Emirates (UAE), Qatar, Kuwait, and Bahrain to the east, Iraq and Jordan to the north (Figure 2.1).

Figure 2.1. *Map of Saudi Arabia, adapted from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2018)*



Saudi Arabia has a monarchical government, headed by the Al-Saud Royal family. Saudi Arabia has *Majlis AlShura* (a Consultative Council) instead of a parliament (Alkhazim, 2003). As described by Alkhazim, the members of the council were all males appointed by the king, however, in 2013, the king announced a decree that 30 Saudi women be included into the council with 120 male members. This inclusion of women is a new and clear shift towards female participation in decision-making.

Based on the latest United Nations' estimates of the total population in Saudi Arabia, as of April 2018, it was 33,426,401, 55.2% males and 44.8% females (Alharbi, 2016). Sixty-nine percent of the population are Saudi citizens and approximately 31% are foreigners (Aldoubi, 2014). Oil is the main source of income, given that Saudi Arabia has the largest oil reserve in the world (Onsman, 2011). Arabic is the official language in Saudi Arabia and Islam is the official religion. Religion significantly impacts the values that shape people and their relationship with others (Almunajjed, 1997; Hamdan, 2005). Islam is a comprehensive doctrine providing guidelines that encompass all facets of private and public existence, including all social, political, and economic aspects of the country (Almunajjed, 1997). According to Aldakheel (2012) the

history, tradition, and religious roots of the Saudi society originated with tribal people whose customs have influenced the nation since the 18th century.

Saudi Arabia is the heartland of Islam and guardian of the two holy mosques in Makkah and Madinah. Makkah is the birthplace of the Prophet and the spiritual land that Islamic people from all around the world visit during *Hajj* (pilgrimage); it is also home to *Ka'aba*, built by Ibrahim and his son Ismael. All practicing Muslims turn towards the *Ka'aba* five times per day for prayers and worship. Madinah is the city where the Prophet lived and where Islamic history began (Almunajjed, 1997). The Saudi constitution and laws are based on two sources: the *Quran* (Holy book) and *Sunnah* (Prophet's sayings and actions). Therefore, religion permeates every aspect of life in Saudi Arabia. The aforementioned factors place Saudi Arabia in a significant position in the Islamic world.

Importantly, the Saudi society has undergone several changes in recent decades, which have served as major challenges to the education system. The transition of the Saudi society from a nomadic and tribal society to a more urban one (Al-Ahmadi, 2011; Aldakheel, 2012; Kattan et al., 2016) is linked to several factors such as modernization and the rapid pace of progress, literacy, and family income (Mosa, 2015). Furthermore, as Mosa (2015) declared, external forces, such as industrialization, expansion of the economy, influx of foreigners, and war have also impacted the Saudi society.

The Development of Education in Saudi Arabia

Several studies revealed that in the early years of Saudi's history, there was an absence of schools; boys and a few girls were taught, separately, to read the *Quran* in small rooms called *Kuttāb* found in mosques (Alghamdi, 2014; Almunajjed, 1997; Hamdan, 2005). The Saudi Ministry of Knowledge (MOK), that supervised all educational institutions, was established in 1953. Schooling at that time was provided only for boys; girls were prevented from attending school due to family traditions and norms (Almunajjed, 1997). However, some families allowed girls to acquire basic Islamic education at home with the aid of female teachers (Almunajjed, 1997). In 1955, a private school for girls called *Dar Al-Hanan* (Home of Tenderness) was established in Jeddah. According to Alzahrany (2017), 30 girls were enrolled in the school in its opening year. However, because of the support of the king Faisal's wife the number of girls skyrocketed to more than 100 the following year.

The unearthing of oil deposits generated considerable wealth for Saudi Arabia, which led to the implementation of the public education system. An important phase occurred during the early 1960s with the establishment of the first public school for girls, which was opened in Makkah (Almunajjed, 2009), but not all girls were permitted to attend school due to prevailing family restrictions at that time. The impetus to expand women's education came in the mid-1970s, by which time almost half of Saudi girls attended sex-segregated public schools (Almunajjed, 2009; Jamjoom & Kelly, 2013), and by the 1980s, education became available to all Saudi girls at all levels (Almaki et al., 2016). This lag in girls' education due to societal norms was one of the reasons behind the delay in women acquiring leadership positions.

The Development of Post-Secondary Institutions in Saudi Arabia

Post-secondary institutions/universities were established in 1957 with the opening of the King Saud University for men. Other universities followed successively: the Islamic University (IU) in 1961; King Fahad University for Petroleum and Minerals (KFUPM) in 1963; King Faisal University (KFU) in 1967. King Abdulaziz University (KAU), a private university for men, opened in 1968, but began admitting women in gender-segregated settings in 1969 after it became a public university (Almunajjed, 1997). In the years that followed, other universities emerged, and new campuses for women were created in universities (Almunajjed, 1997). The Saudi government embarked on initiatives to invest large sums of money into PSIs to provide its citizens with knowledge and skills that will improve human capital and increase productivity (Ismail et al., 2016). A total of 28 government universities and 30 private universities/colleges have been established to provide separate graduate studies for men and women throughout Saudi Arabia under the supervision of the Ministry of Education (MOE) (MOE, 2016).

In 2011, the Saudi government drastically increased expenditure on education, including approximately USD 40 billion spent on PSIs (MOF, 2011). As Smith and Abouammoh (2013) declared, Saudi PSIs received "a massive injection of public funding into the sector in recent times" (p. x). It is noteworthy to mention that education is free for both Saudi citizens and foreigners in all levels of schools. Textbooks are free as well. Saudi public universities are also fully funded by the government. There are no tuition fees for Saudi's students, and those who attend these universities receive a monthly stipend ranging from US \$280.00 to \$300.00 for their expenses during their enrolment. The Saudi government provides free accommodation facilities on campus for Saudi students who are from remote rural areas in Saudi Arabia. The government

also subsidizes the fees for students who enrol in private institutions with high GPAs by paying 50% of their tuition fees (MOE, 2012).

In 1975, to improve the supervision of educational offerings and services for all universities, the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) was separated from the Ministry of Education. However, in 2015, the two ministries were reunited under one ministry, the Ministry of Education (MOE), in order to unify Saudi education policies and regulations (Ismail et al., 2016). The mandate for this ministry was to establish and manage universities, to authorize universities to offer programs that meet the country's needs, to link universities with other governmental sectors, and to represent Saudi Arabia in educational and cultural affairs internationally (MOE, 2016). Saudi universities focus on quality in their operations in order to achieve and maintain accreditation of their academic programs.

Saudi's PSIs/universities are highly centralized. Education is controlled by the government by way of a hierarchical decision-making structure (Alkhazim, 2003; Ismail et al., 2016; Smith & Abouammoh, 2013). The pinnacle of this structure is represented by the Supreme Council of Education (SCE) which is chaired by the king and comprises other members, such as the prime minister, the minister of education, and the presidents of the local universities (Alkhazim, 2003). The core responsibility of the SCE is to supervise and regulate PSIs at the national level. The absolute centralized control in Saudi's PSIs is a core obstacle to the autonomy of Saudi women leaders (Smith & Abouammoh, 2013). Also, Alkhazim (2003) pointed out that:

universities do not have full control of their employment system; instead, they adhere to the government[']s central employment system, which is supervised by the ministry of employment. This means that any created position, promotion, or salary must be approved first by the Ministry of Employment and must be based on the unified rules of employment and faculties developed by the SCHE and other governmental agencies. Such rules limit the university's ability to develop its own academic policies, staffing, budgeting, and investing regulations, which minimize the independence of, and competitions among, those institutions. (p. 482)

Because professors are appointed by the ministry and not universities, there is little that an individual university can do to terminate professors once they are awarded tenure. In other words, as Gonaim (2016) stated, it is difficult to dismiss professors even if they are ineffective in their roles.

Sex-segregation characterizes Saudi education. For each university, there are two campuses: one for men and one for women (Hamdan, 2005). Importantly, a university's president is stationed in the male section of each university and manages both campuses. Females are not allowed to hold this position. In fact, the only university that has a female president is the Princess Noura University (PNU), which is a female-only university, located in the capital city Riyadh. The second highest position held by Saudi women in universities is that of faculty dean in the female sections of some Saudi public universities (Alsubaie & Jones, 2017). Females may also be vice-deans and vice-chairs of departments in the female sections of universities, but they serve under the management of males. The oversight by males of all decisions and activities, in Saudi PSIs is the key factor behind the multiple sources of directives, unclear chain of command, and vague policies and regulations for women leaders (Abo-khudair, 2012; Almengash, 2017). All Saudi PSIs maintain the gender-segregation policy except for King Abdullah University for Science and Technology, which offers a co-education university system. According to Alhareth et al. (2015), this unique co-education model was implemented in 2009 as an attempt to modernize the Saudi society.

In sum, leadership is a key factor for the development of PSIs, the MOE acknowledges the importance of leadership development to improve the effectiveness of leaders. To this end, the MOE established the Academic Leadership Center (ALC) in 2009, a professional centre that provides developmental training (e.g., workshops and seminars) for leaders in PSIs to improve their performance and efficiency. Unfortunately, as Gonaim (2016) indicated, thus far, the ALC has targeted males only at the highest level of administration in PSIs (e.g., university presidents and deans), not female leaders.

The Status of Women in Saudi Arabia

Misconceptions about the status of Saudi women have distorted their social image and rendered them second-class citizens in many respects (Alsubaie & Jones, 2017). Patriarchy and cultural norms have shaped the roles of Saudi women; therefore, women who have the privilege to become involved in administrative positions need to overcome many barriers (Al-Ahmadi, 2011; Thompson, 2015). Due to the conservative nature of the Saudi tradition and identity, many women are reluctant to engage in activities that are aimed at eliminating the hurdles they face (Al-Ahmadi, 2011). The conservative nature of the Saudi culture is strongly embedded in (a) *Sharia* and (b) patriarchal practices.

The Effect of *Sharia* (Islamic Rules) on Women

To better understand the roles and positions of Saudi women, it is imperative to highlight the function of *Sharia* and culture within the Saudi society. Before Islam, a “woman was considered a creature below man and was deprived of civil rights. She was sold and purchased and had no right to inherit any kind of property” (Almunajjed, 1997, p. 11). Almunajjed further argued that:

during the pre-Islamic period, which is known as *Al Jahiliyya* (the time of ignorance), women in Arabia lived in subjugation and degradation. The birth of a girl was looked upon as a disgrace and female infanticide was a widespread practice, especially among the *Kindah*, *Rabi'a* and *Tamim* tribes. The reasons for burying baby girls alive were to relieve parents from the economic burden they represented and to relieve the tribe from any shame a girl could cause later by being caught as a prisoner during tribal feuds or falling into prostitution. (p. 11)

With the advent of Islam, women were accorded more privileges and honors (Almunajjed, 1997), because Islam requires that women be respected as human beings, and for their roles as sisters, wives, and mothers for the generations. Islam is not only a religious ideology but also a comprehensive, intellectual, spiritual, behavioral, and social system that shapes all aspects of Saudi life including women (Almunajjed, 1997). Furthermore, Almunajjed argued that Islam is a complete constitution for all Muslims around the world, accordingly, women have equal but not identical rights as men on legal, political, and personal levels.

The misinterpretation of religious rules tied to patriarchal norms that pertain to women by some religious scholars, suggest that women are inferior to men, and position men as superior with authority over women (Abalkhail, 2017; Almunajjed, 1997; Thompson, 2015). In addition, Hamdan (2005) and Al-Asfour et al. (2017) elucidated that because a conservative group in Saudi Arabia has literally interpreted Islamic rules. Saudi women are forbidden to work in mixed environments. This has led to a segregated workplace policy, limiting women’s opportunities, and increasing unemployment rates within the Saudi society (Abalkhail, 2017; Almunajjed, 1997; Hamdan, 2005). Although Islam advocates for separation of the roles and rights of men and women, the separation of women’s roles often mistakenly leads to separation of men and women in all public spheres in Saudi Arabia. The notion implies that “women are only able to work in segregated spheres where they cannot be seen by strange men” (Hamdan, 2005, p. 44). For

example, in *Quran*, men have the responsibility for *qa'wama* (guardianship), meaning they are responsible to support women in certain contexts, such as related to finance (Almunajjed, 1997). However, this view has been literally interpreted by religious scholars to mean that men are rulers over women; this view severely limits women's financial and other independence. As Alsubhi et al. (2018) declared, it is often difficult for Saudi women to get along with men who believe they are superior to women.

Sharia gives women equality and respect, though gender inequality is heavily entrenched in Saudi organizations due to the cultural tradition (Almunajjed, 1997; Metcalfe, 2008). Metcalfe also described the effect of inequality on women in Saudi Arabia as:

the gap between the rights of men and women is the most visible and significant, and where resistance to women's equality has been most challenging. Women face discrimination in both the economic and social spheres, and many of them do not enjoy equal rights as citizens. (p. 86)

Inconsistency pertaining to women and their work outside the home has evolved among religious people, as well. Some conservative religious people believe that a woman's position is in the home and that her main role is to be a wife and a mother (Aldoubi, 2014; Alsubaihi, 2016; Elmuti et al., 2009). Others believe that Islam does not prevent women from working, as long as their work does not affect the family or break down the values that Islam advocates (Almunajjed, 1997; Hamdan, 2005). Islam is supportive of working women; nevertheless, it is the literal interpretation that is driven by sociocultural and patriarchal norms that impedes women from working.

The Effect of the Patriarchal Culture on Women

The patriarchal culture in Saudi Arabia has a strong effect on people's lives (Abalkhail, 2017; Hamdan, 2005) in particularly women. Saudi Arabia is known as the most socially and religiously conservative country in the world (Alsubaie & Jones, 2017; Metcalfe, 2008). Due to this culture, men are considered superior and more capable of paid employment than women. In the Saudi society women are deemed to be more suited for household duties (Syed et al., 2018; Thompson, 2015). Hence, the societal perspectives about women impact their roles in society.

The patriarchal culture in Saudi Arabia shapes the status of women and influences gender equality (Baki, 2004; Tlaiss, 2015). For example, negative perceptions regarding women and leadership vary among regions and tribes in Saudi Arabia because of how Islamic rules are

interpreted (Hamdan, 2005). In addition, Hamdan (2005) argued that tribal people tend to be more conservative and oppose women in leadership positions, while individuals from urban areas are often open-minded towards women in leadership positions. Some prevailing cultural concepts and beliefs which are not mentioned in Islamic rules regarding women as leaders can hinder their leadership progression (Hamdan, 2005). In addition, Al-Jaradat (2014) argued that negative perceptions of women's professional capabilities as leaders obstruct their progress. As a result, women are seen as weak, less intelligent, less reliable and too emotional to hold senior positions compared to men who are deemed to be aggressive, balanced, autonomous, and able to make decisions even under high pressure (Omair, 2008; Mohajeri et al., 2015; Stead & Elliott, 2012). Mohajeri et al. argued that:

many women do not aspire to management positions, because they believe themselves unable. Therefore, women are more unwilling to demonstrate their management skills in public or to socialize with colleagues to build professional networks. This behavior restricts professional opportunities and development for women academician in higher education institutions. (p. 11)

The Saudi patriarchal views continue to hinder women from striving for leadership positions in PSIs.

Culture has a great impact on women's rights (Aldakheel, 2012; Almunajjed, 1997). As noted earlier, Saudi Arabia has a tribal society, so each tribe guides and controls its people especially regarding culture (Aldakheel, 2012). Before 1913, most people who lived in the Arabia Peninsula were nomadic. They obeyed the tribe's orders and traditions even if these orders were against Islamic rules. The first Saudi king, Abdulaziz, desired to unite the tribes within the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and reduce their individual influence on the public. However, when the tribal communities moved to new cities with the king's support, "this action did not solve the problem of the power of the families and people's loyalty to their tribes although it helped to reduce the strength of the tribal society" (Aldakheel, 2012, p. 11). In other words, many tribes continued to practice their traditions even though they had moved away from the geographical area where the clan resides. Some of these traditions are not aligned with Islamic doctrine and often put great pressure on women. Aldakheel (2012) further argued that

because Saudi Arabian society placed such great focus on women's status and behavior, women suffered from its pressure and control, so it is no exaggeration to say that the

power society exerted over its women was even stronger than the the[sic] government's power. The history of Saudi society played an important role in making women's issues very sensitive and from this point it became extremely difficult to make changes. The differences between the status of women living in the desert and others living in cities supports this: for example, nomad women are allowed to drive cars while women living in cities are not. Therefore, most of the difficulties that women face are generated by the power of Saudi society and because of the sensitivity surrounding women's issues. (p. 12)

The tribe's strength in rules and practices in the Saudi society does not obliterate the power of the Islamic religion; rather, the issue is the confusion between the doctrines of Islam and traditions (Aldakheel, 2012). Aldakheel further stated that the challenge that many Saudi females encounter is to decide which consequences to accept, either that of obeying the rules of their tribe or sticking to the values of Islam, which their tribe may not support because of misinterpretations of Islam by some scholars.

The Saudi culture also has a stronghold in the concept of male guardianship (*qa'wama*). Guardianship has become a major norm and is the most significant impediment for Saudi women who are treated as minors. For example, by law, women are required to have approval from their guardian a (father, brother, uncle, husband, son, nephew, or grandfather) as prerequisite for obtaining education abroad regardless of their age (Abalkhail, 2017; Aldoubi, 2014; Alhareth et al., 2015). This requirement imposes restrictions on women's education and employment opportunities since they cannot attain a scholarship without approval from a guardian. Syed et al. (2018) argued that "although this system of guardianship is not written in law, organizations and individuals usually act in accordance with it, which implies that women need their guardian's consent for employment-related activities such as travelling and signing employment contracts" (pp. 3-4) or for education.

Another effect of the Saudi culture is evident in the education that women receive within the country. The contents of the school's curricula are differentiated based on gender. Likewise, women in PSIs have limited options in terms of majors from which to choose; these options typically align with cultural norms and stereotypes. This was to ensure that:

women's education did not deviate from the original purpose of female education, which was to make women good wives and mothers, and to prepare them for 'acceptable' jobs such as teaching and nursing that were believed to suit their nature. (Hamdan, 2005, p. 44)

As a result, women are mainly employed as teachers, nurses, or clerical assistants and primarily occupy the lower end of organizational hierarchies of leadership.

The Saudi culture has also impacted the work environment for women. The issue of gender-segregation, for instance, impedes women's access to top leadership positions within the organizational hierarchy (Abalkhail, 2018). Syed et al. (2018) pointed out that:

Saudi women are generally not allowed to work in the same room as men and also need separate female entrances. Complying with such requirements may ask for a major restructuring of the building, which can be difficult and expensive which in turn limits employment opportunities available to women, especially in small and medium-sized businesses. (p. 4)

Additionally, Le Renard (2008) spoke to how Saudi women have adapted to societal norms and have used sex-segregated spaces to create agency on their own terms:

segregation led to the development of a female sphere of activities. This separation is not only spatial; state institutions have designated women as a distinct category for which a particular discourse has been developed. ... [W]omen have appropriated this segregated organization and reproduce it daily, and on their own terms, by developing their own activities and discourses that are by women, and for women. (p. 610)

In other words, despite restrictions, Saudi women have managed to successfully create their own niche and perform their activities freely in women-only environments. Le Renard (2008) also argued that to understand the concept of sex-segregation, one needs first to understand the social, political, and economic context of Saudi society because they are strongly connected. In his view, because women accept the system rather than work to change it, they are complicit in their own subordination. Contrary to Le Renard's view, Almutairi (2018) argued that change at times is painstaking, especially changes of perspectives that are deeply embedded in the cultural and religious practices. These changes in the Saudi society takes time and must pass through the proper channels to protect women. Almutairi further stated that these changes are slowly taking place in Saudi Arabia.

The Saudi society is strongly family-oriented; family is top priority. Once a woman gets married and has children, it is the norm that she sacrifices her career and stays home to care for her children even if she is well educated (Abu-Khudair, 2012; Almaki et al., 2016, Alsubhi et al. 2018; Hamdan, 2005). The expectations of married females to be mothers hinder them from

finding balance between their family and work obligations. Some husbands in conservative families do not allow their wives to work in a mixed gender workplace, or to accept leadership positions, because they do not want their wives to interact with men. Some men believe that the interactions between males and females in work environments might lead to sexual harassment or inappropriate relationships. According to Abalkhail (2017), some Muslim scholars reinforce these beliefs by forbidding mixed workplaces with the justification that it protects the honour of families and prevents sexual harassment.

In sum, it is often difficult in Saudi Arabia to distinguish between *Sharia* and cultural norms because the society has a high cultural homogeneity based on Islamic and tribal affiliations (Alhareth et al., 2015) which makes its culture unique and complicated.

Initiatives that Support Saudi Women's Opportunities

Saudi Arabia has witnessed increasing attention to and investment in women's education because women have contributed to Saudi's advancement. Even King Abdullah offered this acknowledgement, as recorded in MOE (2012):

when we talk about general development, we cannot overlook or ignore women's role; Saudi women have achieved the highest levels in the educational field...we are anticipating giving them an active role to develop this nation based on Islamic principles.
(Para. 3)

King Abdullah has enacted numerous policies and initiatives to promote women's education and participation in important roles in the country. One such initiative was the approval to convene a conference in 2010 dubbed, *Saudi Women Current Situation and Future Expectations*. The gathering was aimed at highlighting women's achievements, discussing the challenges they faced, and generating strategies to enhance their professional development. Women, for the first time, were recognized as playing key roles in the cultural, economic, and social development of the country (MOE, 2010). In the following sections I describe several governmental and institutional supports that have opened opportunities for Saudi women in PSIs.

King Abdullah's Scholarship Program

Although more universities have been established in Saudi Arabia, they are unable to meet the growing demand for graduate studies among its citizenship (Alkhazim, 2003), especially with the growing number of graduating students each year. Mosa (2015) stated that "Saudi higher education is under mounting pressure to admit more students than it is really capable of

handling—to accommodate the ever-increasing number of high school graduates” (p. 24). To meet the demands of the Saudi population for PSIs, a scholarship program that allows women to study abroad was established by King Abdullah in 2005 as one solution to this problem (Hamdan, 2005). King Abdullah’s reign is considered by many as the golden era for women because he supported and encouraged them to work in various fields, especially in education. The return of those female students who have studied abroad will increase the demand in Saudi Arabia for career roles in their chosen disciplines, and in leadership of those disciplines.

In addition, King Abdullah’s Scholarship Program (KASP) provides both genders with equal opportunity to study abroad in the major of their choice without restrictions (Hamdan, 2005); it is hoped that this initiative will support the Saudi job market needs. This program is the most lucrative government scholarship program ever offered by a nation-state (Alharbi, 2016). Saudi women, for the first time, are being given the opportunity to pursue their education and fulfill their dreams in majors that used to be open only to men. The MOE (2016)’s report indicated that the number of Saudi women pursuing studies in PSIs in Saudi Arabia is approximately 56.6% and more than 20% of them are receiving scholarships to study abroad.

King Abdullah University for Science and Technology

The establishment of this co-educational university in 2009 was a deliberate attempt to modernize the society. King Abdullah University for Science and Technology (KAUST) has the world’s fastest supercomputer and attracts Nobel laureates and disciplinary medallists to its staff (Onsman, 2011). Student enrollment at KAUST is about 800 postgraduates most of whom are from overseas. Onsman further stated that:

its most potent and controversial strategy to attain international ranking (and the approval of the international academy) is that KAUST is the first mixed-gender university campus in Saudi Arabia and one of the very few places where the religious police will not be allowed to operate. On campus, women will be allowed to study and research with men, to drive and they will not be required to wear veils in the coeducational classes. This is distinctly at odds with the rest of the Kingdom and every other university therein. (p. 525)

In addition, KAUST is a great accomplishment for the country’s technological transformation and provides various majors for women.

Princess Noura University

Another series of initiatives in graduate studies for women was the establishment of Princess Noura University (PNU) in 2010, which is designed to be the world's largest university for females and is expected to enroll up to 50,000 women (Profanter, 2014). Furthermore, PNU is the first high-tech institution in Saudi Arabia with women as the principal decision-makers administrating and managing the university without men's interference (Almansour & Kempner, 2016). Accordingly, PNU is "unique in the high percentage of women in top administrative and policy positions" (p. 520). Alhareth et al. (2015) declared that PNU "offers courses in science that were previously restricted to male students, so the situation regarding women's higher education opportunities has continued to improve" (p. 10). In addition, PNU highlights the role of Saudi women and their contribution in the public sphere of a Muslim country that is guided by the law of *Sharia*.

Saudi Vision 2030 Policy

Another series of initiatives for women is the announcement of Saudi *Vision 2030 Policy*. In 2016, the Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman adopted Saudi *Vision 2030 Policy*, a vision and strategy for Saudi Arabia to become one of the most advanced countries in the world, particularly in the field of education (Alharbi, 2016). The Crown Prince stated that "Saudi Arabia's vision for the future is an ambitious yet achievable blueprint, which expresses our long-term goals and expectations and reflects our country's strengths and capabilities" (Vision, 2016, para, 1). This vision places priority on the development of high-quality skills and knowledge of female academic leaders in PSIs. In fact, it aims to transform the Saudi economy from reliance on oil and by investing in other public resources such as education (Elsayed & Elmulthum, 2016). Overall, this vision intends to generate a learning environment that stimulates creativity and innovation in all Saudi sectors.

With the Saudi *Vision 2030 Policy*, there is an urgent need to nationalize the Saudi workforce. There are 67,793 foreign workers in various sectors of Saudi Arabia, whereas Saudi workers are 79,784 (MOE, 2016). Through the *Vision 2030 Policy*, qualified Saudis, especially those who acquire education overseas, will replace foreign workers. Elsayed and Elmulthum (2016) indicated that the number of Saudi women in the education sector now exceeds non-Saudi women, emphasizing the empowerment process that is currently underway for women and suggesting that they may achieve much more in the future. Elsayed and Elmulthum (2016)

further noted that the *Saudization* and *feminization* of the workforce were mandated by the Ministry of Labour in 2015; the initiative is intended to create employment initiatives for Saudi women. Al-Ahmadi (2011) explained that “Saudi Arabia is embracing a new strategic direction to recruit qualified women into positions of leadership at the top of the hierarchy in public and private sectors” (p. 150). It is expected that this strategy will result in lower unemployment rates and greater contributions by women.

With the tremendous changes occurring in Saudi Arabia and the drive towards achieving the *Vision 2030 Policy*, more opportunities are emerging for women in the public sector, particularly in PSIs. The Saudi MOE seeks to improve the quality of PSIs for women by providing outputs that will foster community and economic development. Furthermore, to respond to current labour-market requirements, the Saudi MOE seeks to make PSIs competitive with neighbouring countries. Great attention is being given to provide support for women in leadership with the intention of improving leadership in PSIs (MOE, 2016).

The year 2009 brought a new era for Saudi women as leadership opportunities were created. Table 2.1, partially adapted from Alomair (2018), summarizes the significant milestones for Saudi women from 2009 to 2020.

Table 2.1. *Significant milestones for Saudi women (2009-2020)*

Year	Significant Milestones for Women in Saudi Arabia
2009	The appointment of the 1 st female as the deputy minister of education (Seikaly et al., 2014). The establishment of KAUST, the 1 st co-educational university, allowing women to study majors that were open to men only (Alhareth et al., 2015; Onsman, 2011).
2011	The expansion of PNU's campus, female only university, accommodates up to 60,000 students (Alhareth et al., 2015; Jamjoom & Kelly, 2013).
2013	The appointment of 30 women to 'shura council,' a consultative council that provides the country's king with recommendations on policy-making (Hamdan et al., 2016).
2015	The election of the 17 women for municipal seats (Black, 2015).
2016	The induction of the Saudi <i>Vision 2030 Policy</i> that aims to improve women achievements (Saudi vision, 2016).
2017	The election of the 1 st woman chair to the Saudi stock exchange (Nereim & Martin, 2017). The appointment of the 1 st woman, Dr. Dalal Namnaqani, as dean for medicine faculty in Taif University (MOE, 2017)
2018	The appointment of the 1 st woman as the deputy minister of labour and social development (ArabNews, 2018). Women for the 1 st time are allowed to drive (Baker, 2018). Women for the 1 st time were allowed to attend live soccer matches in stadiums (Feingold, 2018).
2019	The appointment of the 1 st Saudi woman as the ambassador to the USA (Sidi & Robertson, 2019). Women for the 1 st time travel without a male guardian's approval (Rashad & Kalin, 2019). Women teachers teach young student boys for the 1 st time in Saudi public elementary schools (Obaid, 2019).
2020	Ten Saudi women were appointed in leadership positions to run the affairs of the Two Holy Mosques (Althaqafi, 2020). Three cultural attaché were appointed, in a first of its kind. Fahda Al Sheikh as a cultural attaché in Ireland, Dr. Amal Fatani as a cultural attaché in the United Kingdom, and Dr. Yousra Al-jazaery as a cultural attaché in Morocco (MOE, 2020)

The following section details the literature base that links leadership theory to the experience of women leaders in the Saudi post-secondary context.

What is Leadership?

Leadership is a critical ingredient for professional human development and a key factor for the success of any organization (Kouzes & Posner, 2007; Parrish, 2010; Rowley & Sherman, 2003). Despite the plethora of information on leadership, Klenke (2011) noted, "it can be argued that we still do not understand leadership particularly well" (p. 3). Although leadership has been extensively researched, no consensual definition of the conception of leadership or its nature

appears to have been reached (Alotaibi et al., 2017; Thrash, 2012). Smith and Hughey (2006) argued that leadership is "...one of the most observed and least understood phenomena on earth" (p. 158). However, many scholars agree that leadership exists when a group of people come together to achieve a common goal and when followers are influenced by leaders (Smith & Hughey, 2006). Similarly, Northouse (2013) defined leadership as "a process between the leader and the followers to influence others to achieve a common goal" (p. 5). Astin and Astin (2000) described leadership as a group of processes that develop a supportive environment where people share responsibility, care, and nurture each other for a sustainable future. From these definitions, one can perceive that leadership encompasses the process by which an individual influences other to achieve a common goal that is based on the leader and followers' commitment to that goal. In addition, leadership is basically about relationships as "the quality of the relationship between leader and follower determines the quality of the leadership" (Boyum, 2006, p. 1), hence, the success of leaders is tied to their effective interrelationship with followers.

Many researchers have called for improvements in leadership in general Boyum (2006) and women's leadership in particular to meet the demands of the 21st century (Abalkhail, 2018; Black, 2015; Kearney, 2017; Klenke, 2011; Hamdan et al., 2016; Madsen, 2011). These improvements are associated with socio-economic status, the need for more opportunities for women, as well as the growing demand for PSIs to be the driving force behind the development of economies. According to Kearney (2017), the status quo of women as leaders in PSIs "is now a specific and critical matter since the entire question of academic careers has shifted significantly in recent years" (p. 4). Given this importance, there are often urgent calls to increase the number of women in leadership, eliminate barriers on their career paths, and assure a higher presence for them in public and private sectors.

Leadership is essential for the development and sustainability of the quality and performance of universities in today's rapidly changing world (Kouzes & Posner, 2007; Parrish, 2010). Each university has its own culture; and this unique culture helps to determine the best leadership practices that improve women leaders' efficiency. Globally, growing diversity has increased the complexity and challenges of leadership's roles in PSIs, especially for faculty and administrators (Spendlove, 2007). The complexity in roles can be challenging for leaders who are trying to maintain efficiency, especially in times of change.

Academic leadership must offer services to students, faculty, and other stakeholders to create learning environments that respect diversity and encourage collaborative learning to generate knowledge (Amey, 2006; Smith & Hughely, 2006). Amey (2006) explained the nature of this complex role for academic leaders in PSIs:

academic leaders create learning environments that include cultural awareness, acceptance of multiple intelligences and ways of knowing, strategic thinking, engagement, and a sense of collective identity as collaborators in developing knowledge and active investigators into practice. They are skilled facilitators who encourage interdisciplinary collaboration, collective responsibility, cultural change, and an interest in the public good. (p. 56)

In addition, Amey (2006) argued that academic leaders need to guide universities into the future and provide “the authentic insights that come from critical reflection about and deep understanding of the organizational culture and value” (p. 58). Academic leaders must realize that their personal development is crucial to create supportive environments that meet the learning needs of others. Furthermore, academic leaders must also seek opportunities to learn from and reflect on their own experiences by way of PD activities, collaboration, and reading (Amey, 2006). Therefore, leadership is one area that academic leaders need to develop to succeed in their professional career.

Women and Leadership in Islam

Leadership, from an Islamic perspective, is viewed as an explicit contract between leaders and followers. Leaders protect, guide, and treat their followers fairly and ethically (Beekun & Badawi, 1999) as mentioned in the two holy sources (*Qur'an* and *Sunnah*). In Islam, leadership is a fundamental concept, for example, in the *Quran* God declared that He never leaves a nation without a leader or a messenger, “verily, we have sent a messenger to every *ummah* (nation)” (16:36). This verse declares the purpose of leadership as the provision of guidance and enlightenment to humans (Gonaim, 2016). In addition, in Islam, leadership is based on vital pillars such as trust, accountability, integrity, and honesty. The *Quran* proclaims, “...the best for you to hire is the strong, the trustworthy” (28:26). This verse implies that a leader needs to be trustworthy, and the relationship between a leader and followers must be built upon trust and accountability, which are critical elements to effective leadership. The ability to inspire others, fulfill a shared vision, and communicate effectively are also parts of Islamic leadership. The

Quran supports the development of knowledge and understanding as it states “are they equal, those who know and those who do not know? It is only those with understanding who will remember” (39:9). In Islamic belief, any command to the prophet (messenger) in the *Quran* is commanded to the believers as well. As God declares in the holy book, “o messenger, proclaim (the message) which has been sent down to you from your Lord. If you do not, then you have not conveyed his message” (5:67). This verse teaches that a leader must convey and articulate the vision and help followers to achieve that vision.

In *Sunnah*, the prophet is a role model for all Muslims around the world because of the prophet’s moral and high standard of behaviour; hence, numerous studies have been conducted on the prophet’s leadership. The prophet’s leadership is strongly based on values that include mercy, justice, and kindness towards all mankind. During his short period of 23 years as a leader, his leadership was extremely influential (Ishak & Osman, 2015) because his leadership was a living example of leadership excellence in all aspects.

From the beginning of Islam in the Arabian Peninsula and throughout the region’s history, Muslim women leaders have had critical roles in Islamic societies in political, economic, and social spheres. For example, the Prophet’s first wife, Khadijah, was a prominent businesswoman, leader, and the first female role model who fully supported her husband (Almunajjed, 1997). Almunajjed further stated that Fatima Alzahra, the prophet’s daughter, and the wife of Ali bin Abi Taleb (the Prophet’s cousin and the fourth companion), was a leader and the first one to advocate for social justice for women. In addition, Sukainah bint Alhussain, the prophet’s granddaughter, was a role model, and her house was a meeting place to educate women (Almunajjed, 1997). In the *Quran*, the Queen of Saba’, Balqees, was a female who ruled her kingdom: “...found [there] a woman ruling them, and she has been given of all things, and she has a great throne” (27:23). Overall, these examples and many others showed that women leaders “are not newcomers to leadership or interlopers, but have a particular and rich leadership history that is significant in looking towards the future” (Stead, 2012, p. 200). These examples also assure that Islam with its rules did not prevent women from being leaders.

Women and Leadership in Arab and Muslim Nations

Before expounding the role of women in the Arab and Muslim world, it is necessary to differentiate between the terms ‘Arab’ and ‘Muslim.’ Arab is used for people who mostly live along the shores of Arabia. Their official language is Arabic, and their official religion is Islam.

This includes the people who live in areas such as Saudi Arabia, Gulf countries, Yemen, Syria, Egypt, and others. The term Muslim is used for countries, mainly in Asia and Africa, where Islam is widespread for more than 50% of its population and Arabic is not their official language. Pakistan, Iran, Turkey, Uganda, and other countries are considered Muslim nations.

Several scholars emphasize the need to explore professional women's experiences in Middle Eastern nations, where there is strong support for gender equality for women in education but not in employment (Alshoihat, 2017; Alsubhi et al., 2018; Metcalfe, 2008). Although in recent years, there have been many global studies on women's leadership, very few studies have researched Arab women who are largely thought to lag behind men in education, employment, and contribution in society (Albarwani, 2011). To compound the situation, the Arabian countries have been described as the "bastions of patriarchy and male chauvinism" (Al-Lamky, 2006, p. 49). Women in Arab countries such as Jordan have progressed in management positions, yet they are still constrained in advancing to leadership positions due to gender-bias, discrimination, and stereotypes (Alshoihat, 2017). This is supported by Omair (2008), who argued that, although education in Tunisia is desegregated, women still face barriers to career leadership advancement due to the country's patriarchal culture. By the same token, in Egypt, women have limited opportunities in leadership positions because they are unable to balance their personal and professional commitments. Consequently, many of these women experience a sense of marginalization, inferiority, and loss of self-confidence (Abalkhail, 2017) that hinder their advancement to leadership positions.

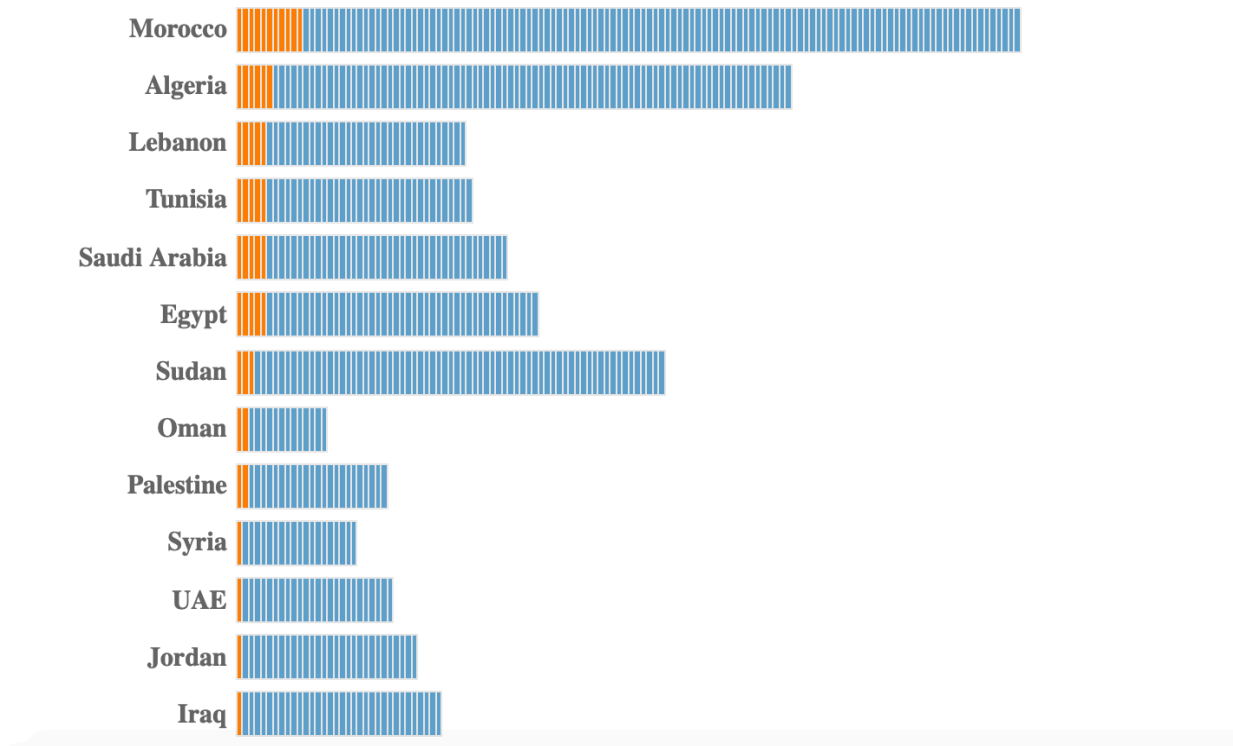
The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, UAE, Qatar, Bahrain, Oman, and Kuwait have similar cultural and socio-economic contexts to Saudi Arabia. The UAE, for instance, has undergone transformations from its traditional roots as a tribal society into a modern one with a strong vision for the improvement of women's position; however, in spite of the modernization of Emirati society, it still adheres to religious and cultural taboos, as well as negative attitudes towards working women (Kirdar, 2010; Omair, 2008; Tlaiss, 2015). However, the wealth in UAE plays "a role in women promotion of women's rights. Women and their achievements are a symbol of the country's modernity and its efforts to take a more globalised role" (Seikaly et al., 2014, p. 18). Female leaders in UAE may have less challenges in leadership positions because of the structure of the society.

In Kuwait, one of the most liberal countries in the GCC and a nation that promotes women's participation in the public sphere, women remain far from achieving equality in senior positions; as an example, only 2% of women are vice-chancellors in universities (Seikaly et al., 2014). Women are prevented from taking key power positions in government. Omair (2008) stated that, as a result, some women have the belief that men should be given priority in senior positions.

In Oman, women have equal opportunities as men for employment and compensation, yet they are “a small minority in a sea of men” (Al-Lamky, 2006, p. 62). Omani women still have limited opportunities in PSIs and are underrepresented in middle and upper management positions. Oman “remains less vocal and more conservative in promoting women's rights and equality” (Seikaly et al., 2014, p. 18). According to Omair (2008), the main obstacles for them are discrimination, absence of policies, lack of professional networks, lack of female role models, and lack of adequate quality day-care centres.

As for the level of Arab countries, Figure 2.2. shows the ranking of countries according to the proportion of women leaders in the academic field, as noted in the orange colour. Saudi Arabia ranked fifth after Morocco, Algeria, Lebanon, and Tunisia in the proportion of women in leadership. Universities that have incorporated women leaders are women's universities only, such as the University of *Dar Al-Hekma*, PNU, and *Effat* University. Female academic leadership in Arab countries is only 7%, and globally only 18% (Eleraqi & Salahuddin, 2018).

Figure 2.2. *Ranking of Arab countries by academic women in leadership positions (Eleraqi & Salahuddin, 2018, p. 4)*



Muslim research shows that women in leadership positions across the globe share several challenges that impede their growth. This underrepresentation of women seems particularly pronounced in Muslim countries (Almaki et al., 2016). Almaki et al. further stated that women in Muslim countries who “strive to assume the leadership positions are facing multiple challenges and many times give up because they become overwhelmed in dealing with multiple barriers” (p. 75). Women find it hard to make “a significant impact in terms of knowledge due to the attitude of society toward women leaders and many women feel that society is still male dominated, and men are not accepted the idea of women holding senior posts” (Almaki et al., 2016, p. 75). Almaki et al. argued that, in Malaysia, for instance, although Malaysian women can reach senior positions such as deans, heads of departments, and vice-chancellors, several obstacles still impede their advancement. The authors stated that a reason for women’s impediment and inequity within PSIs settings is:

male leaders hold a certain perspective about women’s role as leaders. These men assume that women succeed in leadership positions only when they behave and hold male

characteristics [,] such assumptions force women to assimilate as men in order to be taken seriously and to succeed professionally. (p. 77)

In Turkey, “patriarchal gender regimes do not allow women to be full and equal members of society” (Bespinar, 2011, p. 186). Bespinar contended that Turkish women’s main role is motherhood, and their social positions should be limited to household chores. Bespinar (2011) further declared that “the lack of specific legal provisions, coherent gender policies, and clear-out legislation are far from encouraging women’s rights in the context of their social, political, and economic rights” (p. 186). In addition, Almaki et al. (2016) argued that there are numerous factors that may be at play in keeping the inequality between men and women who occupy leadership positions in PSIs most of which are related to discrimination and gender bias. Furthermore, family obligations and conflict between life/work responsibilities are key obstacles that hinder women’s progress and exclude them from top positions. According to Shahtalebi et al. (2011) and Mohajeri and Mousavi (2017), although the nation of Iran has made remarkable developments with respect to women’s roles in PSIs, it is still not easy for Iranian women to reach key positions in these institutions without confronting challenges that limit their contributions.

From this literature review, it is obvious that women share several similarities and challenges in Arab and Muslim contexts, however, while this may be true, it does not necessarily present a true picture of all Arab and Muslim nations. The level of challenges in these nations depends on their culture, social, economic, and political factors.

Women and Leadership in the Saudi Context

Leadership in Saudi Arabia is associated with unwritten social norms that are characterized by a patriarchal hierarchal culture (Arar & Oplatka, 2016) and masculine traits such as power and domination (Alomair, 2015; Alotaibi et al., 2017). The Saudi culture affects how women are prepared as leaders; leadership norms are typically aligned to masculine traits and characteristics (Alotaibi et al., 2017). Hence in most cases, women are negatively impacted by the perceived notion that successful leaders must exhibit masculine traits. Also, as noted earlier, in the Saudi society, women are seen as not being able to combine their roles as wife, mother, and leader, moreover men are often unwilling to work with females in senior positions (Omair, 2008). Saudi male leaders’ negative perception of women’s roles as leaders is a key factor for women’s inequity in leadership positions (Almaki, et al., 2016). Furthermore, Almalki (2016) argued that

the negative community outlook towards women's work and gender discrimination, discourage women from seeking leadership positions. Undoubtedly, negative views among men towards women, as well as men's general antipathy towards hiring women, hinder the advancement of women in educational leadership positions.

However, in 2011, a historic decision was made by King Abdullah, which became a catalyst of change, when he announced the inclusion of Saudi women to the *Shura* Council, the formal government advising body (Hamdan et al., 2016). This decision gave women the right to vote in municipal councils. Many believe that including women in that council was a sign of real change and the continuation of the progress for women's rights, inspiring Saudi women both young and old, and in particular, women who aspire to leadership positions (Hamdan et al., 2016). In addition to this achievement, the Saudi *Vision 2030 Policy* assures the involvement of women as a vital group for the country's development through workforce and education.

The inclusion of women in the decision council is a key step towards empowering women to meet the goal of Saudi *Vision 2030 Policy*. However, women leaders in female campuses are still not decision-makers, as most decisions stem from male campuses (Almunajjed, 2010). Almunajjed further suggested the implementation of new leadership practices for female sections of universities without male interference. Almunajjed gave the example of women at the PNU, a female-only university, who successfully lead that educational organization with no intervention from men. Thus, it is hoped that similar policies in other universities can be created for female sections in PSIs. In doing so, female leaders can display their self-confidence, decision-making abilities, and independence in managing their sections to obtain absolute managerial responsibility, similarly to their male counterparts (Almunajjed, 2010). In addition, women who are in senior positions need to acquire better understandings of their legal rights according to Islamic doctrine as this will help them to pave the paths for greater integrations of women in all levels of society.

The Progress of Saudi Women

Despite challenges to leadership, Saudi women have demonstrated that they can be successful leaders. These elite Saudi leaders have not allowed the patriarchal society to impede them from reaching their goals, instead, they "have broken the barriers of rigid tradition and represent a combination of traditional and contemporary socio-economic forces" (Thompson, 2015, p. 19). For example, Dr. Nora Alfayes was appointed the first Saudi female minister and

later was selected as deputy minister of education (Seikaly et al., 2014). Dr. Haya Awwad, who earned the position of undersecretary of the Ministry of Education and the president of PNU, was the first woman to hold this position. Dr. Dalal Namnaqani was appointed as the first Saudi female dean for the faculty of medicine at Taif University (TU). In addition, Princess Reema Al Saud was appointed the first Saudi woman ambassador to the United States of America (USA) (Sidi & Robertson, 2019). Those women and many others have recently seen success as leaders.

According to these iconic Saudi female leaders, some of the key driving forces for their successes were family support, self-confidence, determination, and the potential for professional growth and development (Omair, 2008). In addition, Omair noted that “success for Arab women is not defined in terms of financial gains but rather satisfaction, happiness and growth” (p. 115). Therefore, the personal or professional pathways for women to leadership may well be traced by their behaviours and effective performances as leaders. In addition, according to Kearney (2017), what then becomes paramount is how each of these women leaders navigate her individual path in the labyrinth of leadership, which will gradually merge into the collective journey.

The success of Saudi female leaders stems from the Saudi *Vision 2030 Policy*, as one of its main goals is to emphasize women’s roles in leadership and increase their involvement in the country. Hence, Saudi society is in the process of generating a new identity, new ideas, and new experiences that will not conflict with its deeply rooted traditions, and at the same time, link Saudis to the most developed and competitive countries (Omair, 2008). In terms of equity in the positions of leadership, Saudi women leaders revealed that “the correct interpretation of Islamic teachings, and separation between Islam’s requirements and Saudi socio-cultural norms, could enhance equity and foster improved gender relations to the benefit of society” (Thompson, 2015, p. 23). Evidence showed that there has been an increase in the number of Saudi women entering the workforce, and this rise can be deemed a significant aspect in recruitment development, a career planning system, and employee training. Also, this increase will require that more women become leaders in their organizations, including PSIs. Hence, the paths to and through leadership should be less cumbersome for aspiring and existing Saudi women leaders. Women in the Arabian regions, and in Saudi Arabia in particular, are making strides in entering the work environments.

The Labyrinth of Leadership

Several Western conceptual frameworks have been introduced to explain women's progress (or lack thereof) in leadership positions. These include Human Capital Theory, Gender Role Theory, Gendered Organization Theory, and Professionalism Theory. Each of these perspectives considers reasons why women are underrepresented in leadership, including lack of motivation/interest, stereotypical gender roles, gender norms operating in the organization, and role requirements that differentially affect women who maintain significant familial or caregiving responsibilities. Although each of these frameworks offers valuable ways of framing the experiences of women leaders, they are written from a Western perspective, and do not reflect the cultural, social, and religious infrastructures of Arab and Muslim countries such as Saudi Arabia (Samier, 2015). The Saudi society has a high cultural homogeneity based on Islamic and tribal affiliations that make its culture unique and complicated (Al-Ahmadi, 2011; Alhareth et al., 2015; Al-Jardat, 2014); this necessitates that researchers be respectful of this difference and be open to touchstones between Western and non-Western research contexts without assuming homogeneity. Although the 'labyrinth' is used in a Western sense, it is a common term that exists in the Saudi context. Eagly and Carli's understanding of the labyrinth which places emphasis on women's experiences in leadership in the Western context, is different from the understanding of women's experience in the Saudi's context. Saudi women's experiences in the labyrinth of leadership are different due to their unique culture and sex-segregation policy in educational settings. Hence, the touchstone here is meant to extend the use of Eagly and Carli's metaphor to make it contextually aligned with the Saudi context. However, Eagly and Carli's use of the metaphor offered a valuable means to extend understanding.

The term 'labyrinth' comes from the Greek 'labyrinthos' and describes a maze-like structure with a single path through it as depicted in Figure 2.3. by McDonagh and Paris (2012). This single path differentiates the labyrinth from a maze, which may have multiple paths that are intricately linked. The term 'labyrinth' was first introduced in the 5th century BC by the Greek historian Herodotus; he indicated that it was an image with a long and varied history in ancient Greece. The term labyrinth was used to describe the challenges that a *Minotaur* faced in finding a route through the maze and reaching the centre to obtain a prize. The *Minotaur* had to navigate the labyrinth with its "unicursal, meandering symbol, turning and changing directions from outside to the centre but never crossing itself" (Soar, 2017, para. 1).

Figure 2.3. *The labyrinth, adapted from Mcdonagh and Paris (2012)*



Globally, women who do rise to leadership positions describe their paths as being full of twists and turns. As a result, Eagly and Carli (2007) introduced the metaphor of the ‘labyrinth’ in leadership and reference it to the indirect paths that women take to reach leadership positions. According to Eagly and Carli (2007), this metaphor “captures the varied challenges confronting women as they travel, often on indirect paths, sometimes through alien territory, on their way to leadership” (p. 1). In addition, Carli and Eagly (2016) stated that the labyrinth is a useful metaphor for women leaders because “there has been slow steady improvement in women’s access to leadership positions, women continue to face challenges that men do not face, and the labyrinth reflects the myriad obstacles women face throughout their careers” (p. 514). Saudi women leaders face several barriers that obstruct their advancement to leadership positions in PSIs. Thereby, I chose to use the metaphor ‘labyrinth’ as a conceptual framework that adequately describes Saudi female academic leaders’ paths to leadership and obstacles that they have to overcome to remain in leadership positions in PSIs.

The Structure of the Labyrinth

The Saudi women leadership labyrinth’s structure has areas that may be penetrated more easily than others. The sections that are difficult to penetrate represent the barriers formed because of sociocultural norms related to gender or religion. Sex-segregation, for instance, represents a section of the labyrinth that is extremely difficult to penetrate. The two-campus

structure of Saudi universities, each with its own leaders create significant challenges. The top leaders are located in the male section of each university; this is the key factor behind the difficulties female leaders face, the multiple sources of directives, unclear chains of command, vague rules and regulations, limited professional training, and lack of resources (Abo-khudair, 2012; Al-Ahmadi, 2011; Almengash et al., 2007; Almengash, 2017; Gonaim & Peters, 2017; Madsen, 2011). Another social barrier that strengthens the labyrinth of leadership is gender discrimination, which limits women's authority, communication, and networking possibilities (Al-Ahmadi, 2011; Al-Asfour et al., 2017). Moreover, some Saudi men still hold negative perceptions of women in leadership positions, especially with patriarchal biases in the Saudi society that portray women as inferior to men (Abalkhail, 2017). Furthermore, Alomair (2015) noted that sociocultural practices limit the opportunities of women to obtain senior positions in PSIs, regardless of the notable changes that are currently occurring in the country.

Organizational barriers are walls and cul-de-sacs that impede women's ability to access or maintain leadership positions. Glass and Cook (2016) argued that organizational barriers for women such as "lack of access to important social and professional networks, [a] lack of acknowledgement of [women's] role[s] and responsibilities, and subtle and explicit challenges to their authority" (p. 59) impede women's capacity to impact the organization and ease the pressure off those who are in leadership positions in organizations. Abalkhail (2017) and Hodges (2017) agreed that the lack of female role models, segregation, inadequate access to developmental training, and limited career opportunities are salient professional factors that hinder Saudi women's progress to leadership positions in PSIs.

On the other hand, there are sections of the labyrinth's structure that may be easier to penetrate or shift; these include organizational and professional barriers that might be minimized, reduced, or eliminated by the organization to open opportunities for strategic change and alleviate burdens on women academic leaders. There are also some entrances that are sealed but can be pried open by women's persistence and ability to manage and overcome barriers in their journey to the centre.

The labyrinth can also include mirrored areas that reflect other women's personal barriers, these reflections can discourage current leaders on their journey through the labyrinth of leadership. For example, some Saudi women might be influenced by their colleagues and the society to believe that their roles and possible achievements will be minimal. These reflections of

other female leadership journeys may cause current female leaders to construct personal barriers because of their own fear, lack of confidence, lack of family support, family/work conflicts, or lack of natural leadership capabilities (Abo-khudiar, 2012; Almengash, 2017; Alomair, 2015; Madsen, 2011). Others will be unaffected and may even shatter those images because of their self-efficacy or through the social supports available to them.

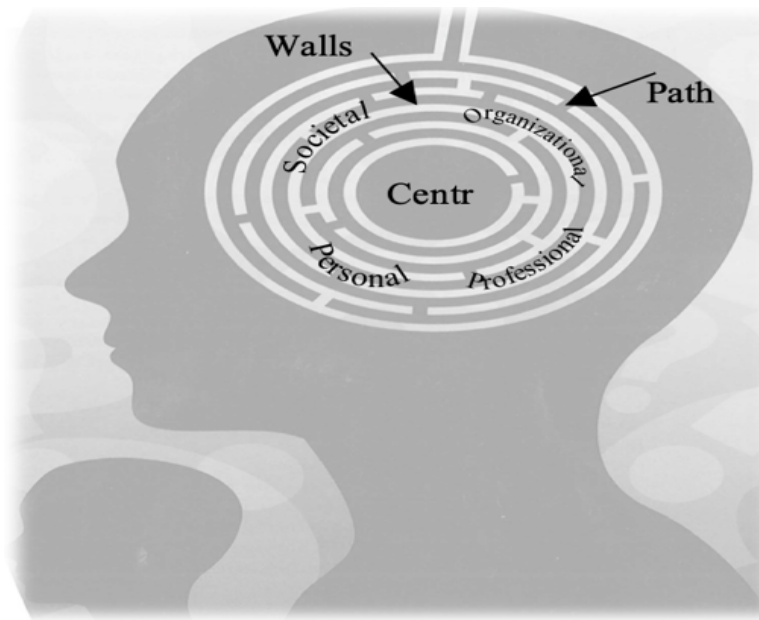
Women Leaders and the Labyrinth

In universities worldwide, women have continually outnumbered men in degree attainment and have achieved success in leadership positions, yet women are still not equally represented in collegiate leadership roles when compared to their male peers (Scott, 2018). A report by the *Digest of Education of Statistics* (2016) showed that in 2014–2015 women earned 1,082,265 bachelor's degrees compared to men who earned 812,669; women earned 452,118 in master's degrees while men earned 306,590; and in doctorate degrees, women earned 93,626 and men 84,921 degrees (Scott, 2018). This report painted a clear picture that “women are now represented at beyond equivalent numbers in the academy as students” (Scott, 2018, p. 2). However, the question of why women are not equally represented in leadership in PSIs remains unanswered.

In Saudi Arabia, although a considerable number of women graduated from universities, only 6.1% of them occupied administration and leadership positions, compared to males who occupied 44.4% administrators and leaders in PSIs (MOL, 2016). The underrepresentation of Saudi women in administrative positions is similar and even more exaggerated, to that of other women around the world. Despite the positive contributions of Saudi women leaders to organizations, they remain significantly underrepresented in administrative positions in PSIs, because they face more barriers when compared to similar positions in other sectors.

The contemporary symbolism of the ‘labyrinth’ that conveys the idea of a complex and complicated journey toward a desired goal that is worth striving for is used in this study to describe the journeys of Saudi female academic leaders. Also, it depicts the fact that women face a continual set of barriers along the way, such as societal, organizational, professional, and personal barriers to and through leadership in PSIs (Figure 2.4). These barriers affect women leaders’ mindset, increase their anxiety, stress, and decrease their self-esteem and form a labyrinth in their brain that makes it difficult for them to achieve success in leadership.

Figure 2.4. *The labyrinth of leadership, adapted from McDonagh and Paris (2012)*



The labyrinth for Saudi female academic leaders demonstrates that key societal, organizational, professional, and personal barriers are found within, throughout, and potentially at any stage of the journey. A passageway through a labyrinth is neither simple nor direct; it requires individuals to be persistent, to remain aware of their progress, and to carefully analyze the puzzles they encounter (Eagly & Carli, 2007). It also sometimes means that individuals must retrace their steps to find the correct paths. It is this meaning that I intend to convey in this study on Saudi female academic leaders who aspire to leadership positions in PSIs.

Routes to women leadership positions in Saudi PSIs exist, but they are full of twists and turns, with both known and unknown barriers and the occasional unexpected support (Eagly & Carli, 2007). The most important point to note, however, is that a labyrinth has a feasible route to the center (Eagly & Carli, 2007). Barriers add challenges and frustrations, particularly if those who wish to reach the centre are unfamiliar with the structure of the labyrinth. Women who are prepared and have a clear understanding of the routes can succeed in navigating the labyrinth. Therefore, this study focused on the experiences of Saudi female academic leaders' journeys in navigating the labyrinth of leadership in PSIs to support others on their leadership journeys.

Barriers to Leadership

Leadership cannot be efficient without considering the barriers leaders encounter. Only a few authors have considered the specific barriers faced by Saudi female academic leaders in PSIs

(Abalkhail, 2017; Al-Ahmadi-2011; Almengash, 2017). Among these barriers are the complex and dynamic social, economic, and political contexts that most universities operate within, as well as the outcomes of ineffective leadership in universities (Smith & Hughey, 2006).

Universities need to build developmental strategies to effectively promote future leaders by providing PD and training opportunities that “help emerging leaders learn how to effectively translate mission, vision, strategic planning, and concepts of leadership into practice” (Hamdan et al., 2016, p. 35). According to Almengash (2017), despite the many developments in the country, leadership training in PSIs in Saudi Arabia ‘remains scarce.’

The societal, organizational, professional, and personal barriers that hamper Saudi women’s empowerment are described in the next sections. It should be noted that some of these barriers might overlap because of their dual effect on women’s advancement. For instance, gender discrimination occurs because of misinterpretation of some religious beliefs and sociocultural influences that are found in Saudi Arabia (Almengash et al., 2007; Alsubaihi, 2016; Halawani, 2002). The influence of these barriers might vary among women, based on their experiences, backgrounds, and dispositions, all of which, therefore, complicate their ability to navigate the route to the centre of the labyrinth.

Societal Barriers

Education is key to Saudi women’s empowerment, and is the main area in which they experience progress (Almunajjed, 2009; Jamjoom & Kelly, 2013); however, social segregation is a major barrier to Saudi women’s upward mobility in PSIs and other working environments. Segregation is a challenge for women’s advancement, as it has greatly limited their mobility, contribution, and communication in the Saudi society which supports segregation between men and women especially in schools and other workplaces. Segregation prevents Saudi women from getting the same opportunities as men because male campuses receive better resources, including better professors and educational materials. Furthermore, Almunajjed (2009) maintained that persistent traditional segregation hinders Saudi women from obtaining equal leadership opportunities in PSIs.

The Saudi government seems to have recognized that segregated education is impeding women’s academic progress, and it is therefore working to increase their access to education by minimizing the gap between genders in certain educational levels and by implementing a new reform policy with *Vision 2030* (MOE, 2016). In recent years, opportunities in Saudi Arabia have

opened up and women have flourished in different sectors. Despite these advances, several studies maintain that Saudi women still face many pressures and barriers that hinder their transition to senior positions (Abalkhail, 2017; Almengash, 2017; Jamjoom & Kelley, 2013). Al-Jaradat (2014) argued that, globally, there are still far fewer women leaders than men, and the situation is worse in Saudi Arabia because of its unique culture. The country is known for its restrictions on women's liberties and for the lack of rights and opportunities available to them (Seikaly et al., 2014). It is evident that Saudi women have achieved remarkable progress in education and health, however, only a few professions were deemed appropriate for them until recently. Their paths to professional empowerment and fulfilment are "arduous and slow" (Seikaly et al., 2014, p. 18). The gap between genders in Saudi Arabia although decreasing is still chasmic.

The gender gap in leadership positions in PSIs is a common phenomenon in most, if not all, Arab and Muslims states, and it usually evokes perceptions of female disadvantage and male-domination (Al-Asfour et al., 2017). Al-Asfour et al. noted the widespread gender-bias in leadership positions in Saudi Arabia, stemming from social norms that emphasize the primary role of women as housewives and family caretakers. Women who deviate from this path are labelled 'social deviants.' Additionally, Vongalis-Macrow (2016) pointed out that gender issues among Saudi women remain largely unexplored, even though these issues limit Saudi women's leadership opportunities. Onsmann (2011) maintained that gender-based segregation is a concern that remains unsolved and uncontested within Saudi society and deters women's advancement to leadership roles.

Organizational Barriers

In the Saudi society, persistent cultural values impede women's effectiveness as leaders in PSIs (Al-Ahmadi, 2011). Al-Ahmadi conducted a survey of 160 females in leadership positions in Saudi PSIs with the purpose of identifying women's challenges in such positions. The results revealed that the main challenges for women in PSIs were related to the structure of the organization and the centralized decision-making process. Almengash (2017) claimed that as part of Islamic rules, men and women do not communicate in public workplaces. In PSIs they communicate only using mail, telephone, and closed-circuit TVs. This restriction in communication limits women's opportunities in gaining leadership preparation or attaining PD.

Saudi women are excluded from leadership positions because Saudi organizations reinforce the patriarchal/masculine culture and gender discrimination in hiring, promotion, and compensation (Almengash, 2017; Almunajjed, 2009). As a result of this patriarchal culture, Saudi women experience disparity in leadership positions in public sectors and in PSIs in particular (Abalkhail, 2017; Aldawsari, 2016; Alsubaihi, 2016). Furthermore, the authors asserted that due to gender discrimination, PSIs tend to favour men over women for leadership positions and women leaders are provided fewer opportunities in organizational development than men. Thompson (2015) argued that Saudi women have accepted their assignment to lower positions within organizations, and as a result, they have been consistently excluded from activities related to policy development and decision-making. The reason for this exclusion is related to gender-discrimination that reinforces stereotypes of men presumed superior ability to act independently, assertively, and use decision-making approach based on rationality. Men are also expected to adopt the autocratic leadership style. Contrarily,

women are expected to act collaboratively and give greater consideration to building consensus through a participative leadership style. In addition, women are also expected to use a decision-making approach that is based more on intuition than on rationality.

(Hamdan et al., 2016, p. 37)

Hamdan et al. further argued that “in the actual practice of leadership, men tend to adopt a task-oriented style, while women tend to adopt a relationship-oriented style” (p. 37). Arguably, the fact that most female leaders operate within ‘female-only’ environments should allow them the space to lead well regardless of gender expectations. However, the constant male intervention given Saudi post-secondary governance structure confines women’s freedom in decision-making, and restricts their effectiveness in leadership (Thompson, 2015) specifically in PSIs.

In addition, Metcalfe (2008) affirmed that Saudi women leaders in PSIs face a multitude of barriers that hinder their ascension to leadership positions, including insufficient networking, lack of communication skills, inadequate PD especially for those who transit from academic to administrative positions, lack of female role models, and lack of empowerment. Furthermore, Al-Kayed (2015) conducted a study of 19 female managers at Saudi public universities, this study revealed that women leaders face organizational barriers in achieving senior leadership positions such as lack of authority and long working hours. Another study conducted by Almengash (2017) revealed that organizational barriers such as poor networking with ineffective communication

decreased women's opportunities to access top positions in PSIs. According to Albarwani (2011), educational empowerment inspires women "to challenge themselves to take roles and responsibilities that enable them to be a catalyst of change in their homes, communities, and for some, the nation at large" (p. 215). The lack of empowerment is also a barrier to women.

Professional Barriers

Professional and organizational barriers are closely related. Work/family conflicts, for instance, overlap these two types of barriers. Some women have difficulty achieving the balance between work responsibilities and family obligations especially with long working hours and shortages in daycare offerings. Some women face unwelcomed behaviours from their colleagues at work that negatively impact their self-confidence (Alsubhi et al., 2018). Aldawsari (2016) stated that family's supports and mentorship are key factors for women to succeed in their professions as leaders and suggested that Saudi PSIs should encourage women to access top positions because this is a vital factor in the empowerment of women.

Mentorship is a critical strategy for strengthening women's career advancement in PSIs (Abalkhail, 2018). The author further stated that the lack of mentorship makes women "less likely than men to be appointed to top roles, ... [and] they may be more reluctant to go for them" (p. 4). In addition, Saudi women leaders in PSIs find it difficult to locate a mentor as there are not many mentoring programs in public organizations in general, and the few available programs tend to benefit men more than women (Abalkhail & Allan, 2015; Abalkhail, 2018). Abalkhail clarified that the cultural barriers that prevailed in the Saudi society "prevent women from using a male mentor in the workplace along with the absence of senior females who can mentor other junior women in the academia" (p. 4). The lack of networking can also be another barrier for women.

Networking is cited as a critical strategy for leaders because of the invaluable opportunity it affords them to build influential relationships. Networking increases women's visibility, knowledge, opportunities for professional training, and career development (Abalkhail, 2018). However, Saudi women do not gain as many advantages from networking ties as men do (Abalkhail & Allen, 2015). Finally, the lack of leadership development programs is another barrier for women's advancement in PSIs. As Abalkhail (2018) pointed out leadership programs can be helpful in developing leaders' capabilities, skills, networking opportunities, preparing them to be leaders, and helping them to identify their personal strengths.

Personal Barriers

For the purpose of this study, personal barriers are those obstacles that women leaders experience at the personal level which affect their output at work. Although Saudi women are highly educated and well-qualified to assume leadership positions in PSIs, several personal barriers hinder their motivation to such positions; these barriers are displayed in their levels of low self-confidence, fear of failure, and lack of PD. Work/family conflicts can become personal and organizational barriers especially for those who desire a career and a family. How to balance these two priorities becomes their biggest personal challenge toward leadership positions (Al-Ahmadi, 2011). However, other women “have been able to surpass this domestic barrier either by staying single, having one child or share responsibilities with a spouse” (Msila, 2013, p. 467). Almaki et al. (2016) argued that there are various factors that may be at play in preserving the inequality between men and women who occupy leadership positions in PSIs “family and personal obligations may be one of the most prominent reasons for excluding women from managerial positions in higher education” (p. 78). In addition, Mohajeri et al. (2015) argued that personal barriers can impede as well as provide motivation to women’s career development. Women academic leaders can view these challenges as opportunities for them to show their ability to find solutions and overcome difficulties.

Overall, Saudi women leaders’ barriers that have been emphasized in this literature review might be similar to other women leaders’ barriers elsewhere. However, societal barriers and some traditions related to Islamic norms significantly distinguish the Saudi society from others. Although these two factors have strong influence on Saudi public spheres and on women’s roles, the ongoing changes that are occurring in the Saudi society are offering hope for women’s empowerment. It is hoped that the changes that are been driven by Saudi *Vision 2030 Policy* might ease women’s paths to leadership and simultaneously help them improve their career ambitions. In addition, findings from the reviewed literature revealed some of the key barriers that limited leadership opportunities for Saudi women in PSIs. However, literature also identified some keys that promote women to leadership.

Keys to Navigating the Labyrinth of Leadership

There are several keys that can assist female leaders to comprehend the labyrinth of leadership and facilitate their effective navigation: *knowledge, skills, and behaviour* (KSB).

In other words, to break through the barriers in the labyrinth and reach goals, Saudi female leaders require knowledge to clearly understand the barriers that hinder their career trajectory; further, they also need effective skills to overcome these barriers; and to have appropriate leadership behaviors that help them achieve success as leaders. Hence, the successful navigation through the labyrinth positions Saudi female leaders as role models for others who aspire to lead in PSIs.

Knowledge

In terms of leadership knowledge, women who are interested in leadership must be able to obtain a conceptual understanding of the unique academic leadership contexts, as well as of the leadership roles of their positions (Gmlech, 2013). Knowledge motivates leaders to understand their responsibilities, the organization's rules and policies, leadership theories and practices that may improve the dynamics of the workplace, and relationships with others (Gonaim & Peters, 2017). Moreover, Delener (2013) argued that the base knowledge of academic leaders should be characterized by the following:

- (a) an understanding of good pedagogy; (b) a recognition of innovations that positively impact teaching, learning, and scholarship; (c) familiarity with local and global influence; (d) the ability to identify elements that support effective and efficient leadership; and (e) a comprehension of the strategies that build leadership capacity. (p. 29)

Here, Delener revealed the major factors of knowledge that leaders must acquire in order to be effective in their roles. In addition, knowledge helps academic leaders create positive teaching environments for faculty, staff, and students to provide learners with the quality education they deserve (Shahmandi et al., 2011). Knowledge is thus critical as leaders learn from their professional contexts about what could benefit their organization and the people around them, and thereby, secure success for those in the educational setting.

Skills

The second proposed key used to navigate the labyrinth of leadership is skill, which refers to an individual's ability and capacity that is acquired through "deliberate, systematic, and sustained effort to smoothly and adaptively carryout complex activities or job functions" (Kattan et al., 2016, p. 97). Evidence has showed a plethora of skills that leaders should acquire with their benefits. As Gmlech (2013) noted skills are necessary to achieve the organization and leaders'

objectives as they communicate effectively with faculty, staff, students, other administrators, and external communities. Kalargyrou et al. (2012) clarified the vital roles of skill to leaders by using Mumford et al. (2007)'s strata plex model in stating the essential skills that leaders should procure. This model consisted of cognitive, interpersonal, and strategic skills. According to Kalargyrou et al., each one is significant for effective leadership; cognitive skills, for instance, refer to critical thinking which is necessary for solving problems. Interpersonal skills are essential in interrelating with and influencing others through the development of social awareness and personal understandings. Strategic skills are described as high-level conceptual skills that “focus on managing complexity, ambiguity, and changes within the organization” (p. 41). Furthermore, Herwatic (2016) noted that women leaders should master certain skills, such as building good and effective relationships with their colleagues, developing networks, and establishing mentorship relationships. Herwatic also suggested that acquiring these skills, along with the ability to maintain equilibrium between the obligations of work and home, are crucial in understanding how to successfully traverse the labyrinth of leadership and reach the centre. Therefore, acquiring and using these skills facilitate women's success as leaders in Saudi PSIs.

Behaviour

The last proposed key to navigate the labyrinth of leadership is behaviour, which refers to the ability of leaders to acquire certain attitudes and conduct that can be used to influence others (Delener, 2013). This may also include the practice of reflection, to learn from past experiences (Gmelch, 2013). Also, Delener (2013) argued that leadership behaviours include:

the opportunity to reaffirm and reinforce the importance of listening to and understanding the perspectives of those served by the organization, engaging and valuing colleagues at all levels, promoting an open and constructive exchange of viewpoints, and encouraging collaborative leadership and accountability throughout the organization. (p. 22)

The ability to listen and understand the perspective of others lead to effective leadership behaviour as Delener stated. According to Gonaim, (2017) leaders' behaviours are characterized by mutual respect, teamwork, and building relationships with followers for the organization's success. In addition, the ability to listen attentively is tied with innovation, as Kouzes and Posner (2007) stated “innovation requires more listening and communication” (p. 177) for leaders to be successful in their roles.

Moreover, reaching leadership positions require women to be knowledgeable of various types of leadership behaviour and styles. Behaviour and styles help leaders to control their actions and attitudes, be good role models, develop collegiate environments, and be motivated to achieve the organization's goals (Barbuto, 2000). Barbuto further argued that leaders who acknowledge their behaviours, have a greater chance of making desired change in their organizations.

In the literature, several studies had highlighted the critical role of these KSB keys. For example, Hughey (2006) noted that leadership is affected by leaders' experiences and training, as these factors have the main roles in defining leaders' knowledge and skills. In addition, Gmelch (2013) argued that KSB keys are essential to develop leaders' effectiveness and that leaders' knowledge refers to the "conceptual understanding of the unique roles and responsibilities encompassed in academic leadership" (p. 27). Leadership skills help leaders create effective environments as they work with "faculty, staff, students, other administrators, and external constituents" (p. 27). Through their behaviours and the consequences of those behaviours, leaders learn the "practice of reflection to learn from past experiences and perfect the art of leading" (p. 27). Spendlove (2007) argued about some leadership competencies that academic leaders should have, and these competencies are entrenched in KSB. Concerning the ways in which these competencies can be developed, Spendlove stated that the development "need to begin far earlier in the careers of those who work in academe, so that success is built from below, rather than from above" (p. 414). Hence, KSB keys are highly significant for leaders.

Based on this literature review, I believe that the keys KSB are essential for female leaders to efficiently navigate the labyrinth of leadership in Saudi PSIs. Today, Saudi women leaders face indirect and often onerous paths to leadership, so they need the keys KSB to effectively overcome barriers and cope with constant changes in their organizations.

Rationale for the Current Study

Today's academic leaders face myriad challenges due to globalization, diversity, and information explosion (Smith & Hughey, 2006) in universities. Evidence showed that "leading universities may present a unique challenge. Because of the organizational complexity of the university, its multiple goals and its traditional values, the nature of leadership in higher education is ambiguous and contested" (Spendlove, 2007, p. 407). Yet, the strength of university system, according to Spendlove:

lies in the independent thought, creativity and autonomy of the people who work in them. Unilateral top-down leadership is clearly at odds with the traditional values of academic freedom and autonomy, democratic participation and the variety of academic interests. (p. 407)

Thereby, leadership as always, is a main ingredient in the ultimate success or failure of any organization including universities. For academic leaders to be effective, they must develop leadership KSB that support their journeys through the labyrinth of leadership.

Each female leader's journey is affected by her individual experiences, education, and training (Smith & Hughey, 2006). Although academic leadership varies from one context to another, academic women have begun to occupy integral administrative roles in PSIs in Saudi Arabia. This study of female academic leaders in the female sections of Saudi PSIs may enhance women's effectiveness in both academic and administrative roles. As Bryman (2007) pointed out, revealing women's barriers in leadership roles contributes to the development of effective practices to cope with current and future challenges. Thereby, obtaining a leadership position does not mean that barriers are absent along these women's route, but the influence of these barriers can be lessened as women become increasingly knowledgeable about how to overcome and manage them using the keys of KSB.

Given that few studies have focused on academic women's leadership in the Saudi PSIs and the mechanisms of support and their impact on shaping or improving the career trajectory of Saudi women (Almengash, 2017; Metcalfe, 2008), this study contributes to the literature that resonates with other female leaders in similar contexts. Therefore, the hope is that this research will catalyze policymakers to make positive changes related to the situation of women in Saudi PSIs. In addition, the findings of this study could potentially encourage the Saudi government to implement leadership preparation programs that reflect the experiences and leadership needs of female academic leaders in PSIs to meet the level of innovation that aligns with the objectives of *Vision 2030 Policy*.

Summary

In this chapter, I provided a brief background on the context (Saudi Arabia), the development of education, and the status of women in Arab and Muslim countries. I also provided details that linked leadership theory (the labyrinth) to the experiences of women leaders in Saudi PSIs. I concluded the chapter by discussing the critical barriers that have impeded

women's advancement to and through the labyrinth and suggested the keys KSB to navigate the labyrinth of leadership in Saudi PSIs.

In Chapter 3, I present the research design, methodology, and methods of the study, including the methods for selecting participants, data collection, analysis, and the ethical considerations that underpin the credibility of this research.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The best research method is one which provides answers to the research question about the phenomenon under consideration, while circumventing the greatest array of limitations presented by that phenomenon (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). There is no single, superior method for any study, but some methods may be more appropriate given the research question that is under scrutiny.

In this chapter, I remind the reader of the purpose of the study. I describe the research design, methodology, methods, sampling, and procedures of data collection and analysis that I used to understand female academic leadership in Saudi PSIs. I then outline the elements of trustworthiness, ethical considerations, and my positionality as a researcher.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the journeys of female academic leaders as they navigate the labyrinth of leadership in Saudi PSIs. I sought to gain better understandings of how these leaders overcame barriers and accessed supports as they progressed towards and through academic leadership positions in Saudi PSIs in the Makkah region. As mentioned in Chapter 1, three questions were explored to achieve this purpose:

1. How do Saudi female academic leaders in the Makkah region describe the ways in which they navigate the labyrinth of leadership?
2. What are the societal, organizational, professional, and personal barriers faced by Saudi female academic leaders in the labyrinth of leadership in PSIs in the Makkah region and how did they navigate despite these barriers?
3. What are the supports accessed by Saudi female academic leaders as they navigated the labyrinth of leadership in PSIs in the Makkah region and how did these supports facilitate their navigation?

Research Design

I selected an interpretivist qualitative approach for my research design and conducted semi-structured interviews with eight Saudi female academic leaders. Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding the interpretations of a phenomenon within a specific time and

context (Merriam, 2002). Qualitative researchers also “study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 3).

Another feature of qualitative research is that the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection, analysis, and interpretation of phenomena (Merriam, 2002). Through verbal and nonverbal communication, the researcher can develop understanding, clarify and summarize data, and check with participants for accuracy of the interpretations (Merriam, 2002). Patton (2000) argued that the aim of qualitative research is:

to understand situations in their uniqueness as part of a particular context and the interactions there. This understanding is an end in itself, so that it is not an attempting to predict what may happen in the future necessarily, but to understand the nature of that setting-what it means for participants to be in that setting, what their lives are like, what’s going on for them, what their meanings are, what the world looks like in that particular setting – and in the analysis to be able to communicate that faithfully to others who are interested in that setting ... The analysis strives for depth of understanding. (p. 1)

In sum, Snape and Spencer (2003) identified the key elements that discriminate a qualitative approach from other approaches:

1. provides in-depth and interpreted understanding of the social world;
2. chooses small and purposive samplings for participants;
3. builds close relationship between the researcher and the participants allowing for emergent issues to be explored;
4. provides fully detailed, rich, and extensive data;
5. allows for emergent concepts and ideas in analysis which may produce detailed description (p. 107).

In interpretivist research, the researcher’s main goal is to interpret social phenomenon and understand people’s perceptions (Collis & Hussey, 2014) as they construct meaning through interactions with their world (Hittleman & Simon, 2006; Merriam, 2002; Patton, 2000; Schwandt, 2001). Accordingly, people’s experiences of a social phenomenon may differ, and they may have varied perspectives and interpretations of reality that can change over time. The variance in these perspectives “add richness to our understanding, and our underlying aim is to apprehend and convey as full a picture of the nature of that multifaceted reality” (Snape & Spencer, 2003, pp.

19-20). Interpretivism is premised on the understanding that meaning is not intrinsic in an object; it emerges or constructs itself as human beings interact with the world (Collis & Hussey, 2014). In addition, interpretivism affirms that knowledge is based on subjective evidence accumulation. Through interpretivism, according to Creswell (2013), researchers seek to understand the world, and then develop meanings that are varied and adjustable.

My theoretical perspective for this research was interpretivism because my main goal was to interpret the phenomenon of Saudi female academic leaders' navigation in the labyrinth of leadership and understand their perceptions on the barriers and supports as they construct meaning through interactions with their world. I believe individuals knowledge of the world is based on their understanding which arise from reflection on events and lived experiences. In addition, I believe that women's perceptions and experiences of leadership and the context in which they lead are diverse. I chose to conduct an interpretivist qualitative research because it afforded me the opportunity to study the experiences of Saudi female academic leaders in their leadership contexts at a specific time and understand how they interacted with their social world.

Research Methodology

As Crotty (1998) asserted the methodological design of research provides structure, and guides researchers in selecting appropriate methods for data collection and analysis. Researchers must select a methodology that aligns with their assumptions and lens of interpretation to produce high-quality research (Caelli et al., 2003). It is necessary to differentiate between the two terms 'methodology' and 'methods' "when engaging in any qualitative research" (Caelli et al., 2003, p. 6). Methodology focuses on understanding how one knows the world and gains knowledge of it (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). It is also a "strategy, plan of action, process or design lying behind the choice and use of particular methods and linking the choice and use of methods to the desired outcomes" (Crotty, 1998, p. 3). On the other hand, method refers to "the techniques or procedures used to gather and analyze data related to some research question or hypothesis" (Crotty, 1998, p. 3). The methodology for this research was a case study and I used semi-structured interviews as the main method for collecting data.

Case Study

Case study is a popular design in qualitative research that focuses on depth of data rather than on breadth (Cohen et al., 2011). A case can be a person, process, event, group, or organization (Schwandt, 2001; Yin, 1993). As Cohen et al. (2011) argued, a case study provides

“a unique example of real people in real situations, enabling readers to understand ideas more clearly than simply by presenting them with abstract theories or principles...[and] [enabling] readers to understand how ideas and abstract principles can fit together” (p. 289). Yin (1993) further argued that a case study is “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real context using multiple sources of evidence” (p. 1062). Case study methodology enables researchers to fully understand social phenomenon from the perceptions of individuals in a specific context (Patton, 2000). Moreover, it is useful, especially when researchers need to understand a specific situation in great-depth, and where researchers can identify cases rich in information (Noor, 2008). My case study studied a group of Saudi female academic leaders in PSIs in the Makkah region of Saudi Arabia. Its intent was to understand the barriers that impeded women’s progression in leadership and the supports that enhanced their progression. This single case study focused on a specific group of people (Saudi female academic leaders), in specific context (Saudi public PSIs) and region (Makkah region). The use of case study helped me to understand these leaders’ experiences and perceptions to and through the labyrinth of leadership in PSIs.

Research Method

Semi-structured interview was chosen as an appropriate data collection method for this study. The following sections detail the development and enactment of the interviews with female academic leaders in Saudi PSIs.

Semi-Structured Interviews

Interview is a commonly used method when collecting qualitative data that provide depth and richness in qualitative research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Interview is a fundamental process through which knowledge and reality about the social world are constructed in normal human interaction (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). Semi-structured interview was chosen because it:

1. Provides “sufficient flexibility to approach distinct respondents differently while still covering the same areas of data collection” (Noor, 2008, p. 1604).
2. Provides researchers with leverage to prompt the interviewee and probe for further data.
3. Develops rapport between the interviewer and the interviewees (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).
4. Facilitates greater interactions between interviewees and interviewers as they are “an interchange of views between two persons conversing about a theme of mutual interest” (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 2).

5. Provides comparable and reliable qualitative data and allows the participants the freedom to express their views on their terms, and without restrictions (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006).

In addition, semi-structured interviews allowed me flexibility to gain in-depth and rich data during my interactions with the participants. Hence, they were deemed suitable for this research.

According to Kvale and Brinkmann (2009), researchers should initiate interviews with general questions and then proceed to narrow or more explicit ones. General questioning covers a wide range of participants' experiences and perceptions, while narrow questioning focuses on precise information to elicit specific details. Also, Cohen et al. (2011) declared that prompts enable interviewers to clarify topics or questions, especially when the interviewee wishes to ask for clarification from the interviewer. Cohen et al. further stated that probes allowed interviewers "to ask respondents to add more and clarify their responses, thereby addressing richness, depth, comprehensiveness and honesty which are some of the hallmarks of successful interviewing" (p. 420). In this study, I employed semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions which I developed in advance. Unplanned, unanticipated probes were also used; these allowed me to gather in-depth and rich data from participants.

Interview validation

To improve the internal validity of the semi-structured interviews questions, I reviewed them with my supervisor and created a table to ensure that each question was linked to the overarching research questions. I then conducted three pilot interviews with three of my colleagues to assess the clarity of the questions and the interview process. The pilot interview process was conducted in similar fashion as was intended for participants of the study. During these pilot interviews, I used the interview guide and questions to solicit feedback about their suitability and to improve them before using them in the study. The pilot process also helped me to improve my interviewing skills especially regarding the use of probing questions to gather more in-depth data from the study's actual participants.

Interview procedures

The interviews for this study were conducted in Arabic because it is my native language as well as the native language of the respondents. Participants were more comfortable engaging in conversations that were conducted in their mother language. Furthermore, as a qualitative researcher, and as Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) stated, I tried to "understand the world from the subjects' [participants] points of view, to unfold the meaning of their experiences" (p. 1).

Initially, I had planned to conduct face-to-face semi-structured interviews in participants' offices or in rooms that were conducive for interviewing. However, during the COVID-19 crisis travel was limited and Saudi PSIs instituted social distance parameters, therefore, interviews were conducted electronically via the Zoom application. A basic outline and timeline of the interview procedures is outlined below:

1. Interview Invitation: An interview invitation (Appendix A) was sent via email on February 17th, 2020. The invitation contained information about the study and how the results would be used. It also contained an interview guide (Appendix D), and a copy of the ethics form from University of Saskatchewan Research Ethics Board (Appendix C). An RSVP was requested so that the interviews could be completed by early June of 2020. However, COVID-19 impacted the study, resulting in delays as universities in Saudi Arabia shifted to remote learning. Differences in time zone between Canada and Saudi Arabia also made scheduling of the interviews difficult; I was able to complete the scheduling of the interviews and collect data between March and August 2020.
2. One-on-one Interviews: All interviews were electronically conducted and each lasted between 45 and 60 minutes.
3. Follow-up Interviews: Follow-up interviews were sought from some participants in order to obtain more information, clarity of responses and feedback to improve my understanding and analysis of the data. The follow-up interviews were facilitated through the "Consent Renewal" box at the end of the Participant Consent Form (Appendix B). Participants were asked to indicate if they were available for follow-up interviews, and they did. The last follow-up interviews with participants were conducted at the end of August 2020.

In addition, for each interview, I followed a standard procedure:

1. I disseminated the invitation letter via emails, as mentioned previously, pertinent information about my study and the relevant contact information. Participants indicated their availability via email.
2. Once participants agreed to participate in the study, I sent them a package that contained the interview guide and questions (Appendix E), their university's approval letter to conduct my study, the University of Saskatchewan Research Ethics Board's approval and a diagram of the labyrinth with brief information about the metaphor. Allowing

respondents to view the interview questions prior to conducting the interview gave them the opportunity to prepare their responses.

3. I sent the Participant's Consent Form to each participant via email before conducting the interview and asked them to read, request any clarification, and sign before participating in the interview.
4. Participants communicated the time and day that suited their timetables for the interview. Accordingly, the interview was scheduled in Zoom.
5. Each participant received an email from me that had a Zoom link attached. They had to click on the link to join me for the scheduled interview.
6. Each interview lasted approximately 45 to 60 minutes and was audiotaped and transcribed verbatim in Arabic.
7. To be consistent in all interviews, I personally conducted and transcribed the interviews. I also personally translated significant quotations from the interviews' data into English. These translations were edited and revised by a certified translator (Appendix H) before they were used in the data analysis as direct quotes. A note in the Participant Consent Form informed participants about this process; I also reminded them about this at the end of the interview.

Sampling

Careful sampling is essential for acquiring the greatest amount of relevant information. Practitioners of qualitative research have pointed out the importance of the sample itself, the setting, and the value of "information-rich cases" (Creswell, 2013). Information-rich cases are those from which researchers can unearth deeper knowledge about the issues of central importance to the purpose and questions of the research.

Sample Size

In most interpretative qualitative studies, the sample size is relatively small since this type of research aims to get to the meaning of the collected data rather than making generalizations (Cohen et al., 2011; Patton, 2000). Furthermore, Patton argued:

there are no rules for sample size in qualitative inquiry. Sample size depends on what you want to know, the purpose of the inquiry, what's at stake, what will be useful, what will have credibility, and what can be done with available time and resources. (p. 244)

The authors argued that the small size in qualitative research aims to obtain deeper understandings and rich descriptions of the social phenomenon and, further, to create a more fulsome opportunity for the development of trust between researcher and participant. The participants in this study were eight Saudi female faculty members (current and former) who held formal leadership roles as head of departments or senior positions in three Saudi public PSIs in the Makkah region. I selected this sample size as I believed that this number of participants would supply me with sufficient data to get a clear understanding of the phenomenon. Participants' experience in leadership ranged from early years in leadership to highly experienced leaders, with several years of experience. The diversity of female leaders with different experiences and perspectives provided critical information about their leadership journeys in the labyrinth.

The Participants

Purposive sampling was used to recruit participants. As Cohen et al. (2007) noted purposive sampling is used “to access knowledgeable people, i.e., those who have in-depth knowledge about particular issues” (p. 157) and because the “social world can be understood only from the standpoint of the individuals who are part of the ongoing action being investigated” (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 19). Also, Robson and McCartan (2016) noted that the selection of purposive sampling is “the researcher’s judgment as to typicality or interest. A sample is built up, which enables the researcher to satisfy their specific needs in a project” (p. 281). Therefore, purposive sampling is aligned with my specific interest in investigating the experiences of Saudi female academic leaders employed in leadership positions, such as heads of department and above, at three Saudi public PSIs in the province of Makkah. The selected respondents had instructional and administrative responsibilities in their university. In this research, five current and three former academic leaders accepted the invitation to participate. I did not know the statuses of these respondents until they responded to the invitational emails. The process of selecting my participants proceeded as follows:

1. I created a list of thirty Saudi female academic leaders from the three targeted universities' websites - where their updated professional profiles were displayed, beginning with a group of eight for initial contact. Invitation emails were individually sent to eight participants to enquire if they were interested to participate.

2. There were no responses to the invitational emails, so after a week I sent follow-up emails.
3. When no response came from these participants after the follow-up emails, I continued down the list of possible respondents.
4. I selected another eight participants from the list and again sent the individual invitational emails.
5. Five participants responded to the second set of emails and indicated that they were willing to participate. Of this number, two were former leaders and three were current leaders.
6. Follow-up emails were sent as well to those who did not respond within a week. When no response came from them after the follow-up emails, I continued down the list of possible respondents.
7. I then sent out invitation emails to another five participants and all five responded. One was a former leader, and the other four were current leaders. I selected the former leader and, through dialogue with the other four current leaders, I was able to select two more participants based on their availability during the projected time frame of my data collection. I thanked the other two participants for offering to participate in the study.
8. All correspondence with participants was in Arabic and individually transmitted through emails.

Potential participants met the following criteria to be eligible for participation in my study; be Saudi female; be or have been employed as an academic leader in a public Saudi university, and be willing to describe their personal journeys to and within the context of an academic leadership position in a Saudi PSIs.

Table 3.1. presents a brief overview of each participant's position and their number of years of experience in leadership in Saudi PSIs. Pseudonyms have been used for all participants to afford confidentiality.

Table 3.1. *Participants' information*

<i>Participant's Name</i>	<i>Leadership Experience #</i>	<i>Position</i>
Alice	2 years	Current vice-chair of department
Faye	3 years	Current vice-chair of department
Nicole	6 months	Current vice-chair of department
Isabella	2 years	Current vice-chair of department
Ariana	6 years	Current vice-chair of department
Maya	25 years	Former vice-chair of department
Sophie	12 years	Former vice-chair of department
Angela	16 years	Former vice-dean of Faculty

The Settings

I conducted this research with participants from three public Saudi universities in the Makkah region, which is one of the most populated regions in Saudi Arabia. This region is in the western part of the country and is known for its vast diversity in population and social class. People who live in this city are less conservative and are regarded as being more open-minded to women's issues. Therefore, females in this part of the country have more opportunities to acquire leadership positions in PSIs than in other rural areas of Saudi Arabia.

The Makkah region has various public and private universities. One of these universities is a pioneer institution in scientific research and innovation in other disciplines. It bears the name of the first King of Saudi Arabia; thus, it receives exceptional support from the government. The major differences between public and private universities are the large student populations and the vast number of scientific fields of study offered to students in public universities. Each university in the Makkah region has colleges for undergraduate and graduate students and offers highly recommended majors that are not available in other regions. In comparison to the offerings and investments in some of the public universities in the Makkah region to other universities in Saudi Arabia, Makkah region universities supersede other institutions by far.

As mentioned in Chapter 2, Saudi universities are bilateral universities where males and females study on the same campus, albeit in different locations. Each location of the campus is equipped with separate educational, cultural, recreational, and athletic facilities for students and staff. Also, due to the expansion that has occurred in Saudi PSIs, new branches for females have been created.

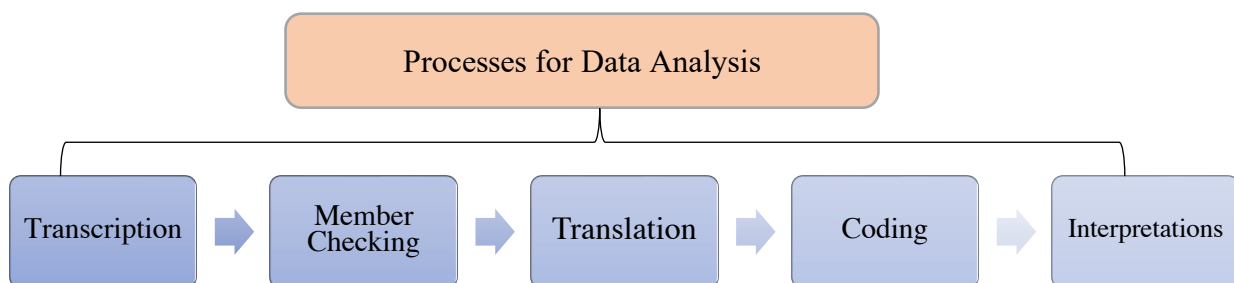
The number of female leaders at the different campuses of public universities varies according to the size of the student population. From a personal point of view, I was interested in studying the universities of this region because I am from this region. I have intimate knowledge and understanding of the culture of the universities, and this helped to provide a richer understanding of the experiences of the participants. In addition, my acquaintance with my sample location allowed me to access the resources needed to complete my project within my budgetary and time constraints.

Data Collection and Analysis

Following receipt of Saudi universities' approval letters, I began the recruitment process as outlined earlier. Interviews were conducted online via Zoom based on the participant's availability. I made every effort to respect participants' time by closing the interviews within the established allotted time and by maintaining the confidentiality of the respondents. I had to conduct interviews around Canada and Saudi Arabia time zones. The time difference between Saudi Arabia and Canada (9 hours) was somewhat challenging for me, as some interviews were scheduled in the early morning between 3:00 a.m. and 5:00 a.m. Saskatchewan time. At the end of each interview, I sent each participant an email expressing gratitude for their time and willingness to participate in the research.

Data analysis, which is a challenging but exciting stage of qualitative research, requires a blend of creativity and systematic searching. Data analysis was achieved through five stages which are depicted in Figure 3.1.

Figure 3.1. *Processes of data analysis*



Transcription

Transcription was the first stage of data analysis; I conducted all interviews in Arabic. I listened to the audiotapes and transcribed (verbatim) the interviews into written forms (in Arabic). I double-checked the transcription by re-listening to the audio and comparing the audio to the written document to ensure its accuracy.

Member Checking

Member checking was the second stage of data analysis. Within three days after each interview, I emailed the transcripts to participants for them to check if what I had transcribed represented their shared experiences and perspectives. A deadline of three weeks from the receipt of the transcript was given to each participant to peruse, edit, and ensure the transcriptions reflected their accurate information. I noted to participants in the email sent with the transcript that failure to respond within the timeframe of three weeks was an indication that they accepted the transcribed documents as accurately representing what they had shared in the interview. All participants responded via email after checking the transcript. I ensured that all participants signed the Transcript Release Form (Appendix F) and proceeded with the analysis of the data.

Translation

Translating was the third stage of data analysis. I translated the key information from the Arabic transcripts into English, after which I enlisted a certified translator to verify and ensure the consistency of the Arabic terms with the English terms (Appendix H). I personally ensured that all manuscripts had pseudonyms in place of actual names. In addition, the certified translator signed a confidentiality agreement prior to interacting with any data. As a final check of the accuracy of the translation, I returned to the original audio recordings to compare the participants' responses with the respective English transcripts.

Coding

The fourth stage of data analysis conducted in this study was coding; it was completed in Arabic and English. Cohen et al. (2011) defined coding as “the translation of question responses and respondent information to specific categories for the purpose of analysis” (p. 559). Cohen et al. further noted that coding represented the labels that researchers assign to a piece of text that contained ideas in the collected data, and these labels can be decided in advance or emerge in responses to the data that have been collected. In this case, I selected some of the in advanced labels based on the keys KSB and on my literature review. I read the transcript sentence-by-

sentence and highlighted data related to the keys and ideas of interest that were relevant to answering the research questions. This technique in coding was used by Charmaz (2014) as initial coding. The initial coding is also known as a ‘complete coding approach’ and “gives a feeling that nothing has been left out” (Glaser, 1978, p. 58). I also followed the focused coding technique for Charmaz (2014) who stated that this coding involves:

concentrating on what your initial codes say and the comparisons you make with and between them ... you are a part of your analytic work. You bring your analytic skills and perspectives to bear on the analysis through-out the research process – and that can be a gift. (p. 140)

After the initial coding, I selected the most significant and/or frequently mentioned codes related to KSB and started to sort, synthesize, integrate, and organize large amounts of data. I also concentrated intensely on the emerged themes and their relation to the research questions for in-depth analysis of the data given my research intent.

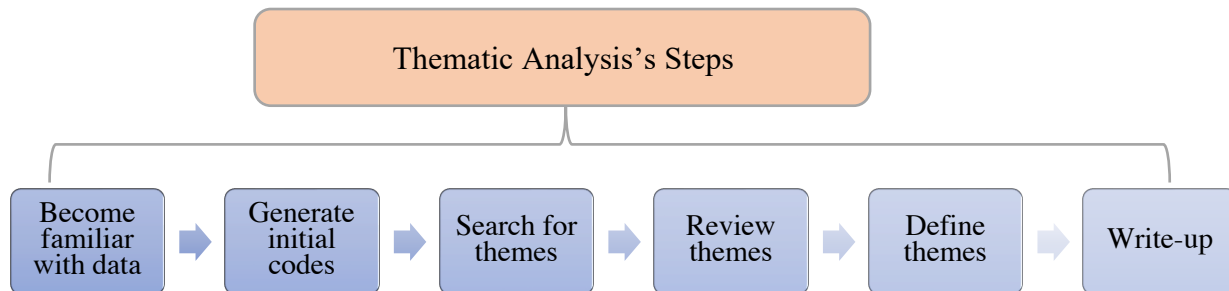
Interpretations

Interpreting the results was the last stage of analysis. Data analysis requires immersion into the data to obtain better understandings and interpretation of their meanings. Merriam (1998) argued that data analysis in qualitative research “involves moving back and forth between concrete bits of data and abstract concepts, between inductive and deductive reasoning, between description and interpretation” (p. 147). Data analysis is an ongoing process which needs to begin at the stage of data collection. Klenke (2011), asserted the importance of considering data analysis at an early stage of the data collection process. The initial early analysis of data helped me to ascertain if there was a need to gather additional data from respondents. I also used the interview notes with the audiotaped recordings, to interpret the interviews. Cohen et al. (2011) stated that it is important for researchers to take notes during interviews because notes can assist in clearing up areas in the recordings where there are glitches or where the recorder may have failed to record. All of these steps enabled me to have better descriptions of the phenomenon (the underrepresentation of Saudi females in leadership position) that was under investigation.

During analysis, I used the analytic framework KSB to extend the conceptual framework ‘labyrinth.’ Based on my literature review, I found that these keys provided support for women leaders to navigate the labyrinth and overcome barriers. I also came across Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis which aligned with my analysis of the data. Thematic analysis is the

process that helps the qualitative researcher to identify the themes from the collected data (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017), analyze, and then report the patterns that emerged from the data. These steps are illustrated in Figure 3.2.

Figure 3.2. *Braun and Clarke's 6-steps framework for making a thematic analysis*



To become familiar with the data, I reviewed the purpose and research questions, highlighted keywords, read and re-read the Arabic transcripts, and made notes. Then I used the NVivo software to organize the data and generate initial codes in relation to the research questions. I searched for themes by examining codes that related to KSB; I also looked for emergent or similar themes. I reviewed and defined the sub-themes; this enabled me to be better prepared to compare the essential data that answered my research questions before I started to write the report of the study.

I used Microsoft Word in transcribing the data and I uploaded the transcripts to the NVivo software to manage and organize the data. NVivo is software that is used widely in qualitative research. NVivo promotes the credibility of research because it reduces inevitable human errors that usually result from the manual analysis of data (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). Therefore, it enables researchers to demonstrate the integrity, strength, and trustworthiness of data. Another feature of NVivo is the ability to record researchers' views and coding processes alongside, but not within the data analysis (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017).

For the accuracy of data analysis, significant sentences in the transcripts were highlighted and coded. Data were copied and pasted into a Microsoft Word file with participants' direct quotes in Arabic and their translation in English for accuracy purposes. This process helped me to identify similarities and differences among participants' data, to reduce the conflation of ideas

between languages, and guided the categorization of data and the development of sub-themes. In this phase, I reviewed the purpose of the study and the research questions to ensure the relevance of my analysis.

Establishing Trustworthiness

When interpreting and presenting qualitative data, the researcher needs to focus on the goal of the study to inform the readers and reduce the likelihood of misinterpretation of the findings. Moreover, the quality of qualitative research can be judged on its trustworthiness, which helps to ensure the validity and reliability of the research (Smyth, 2008). Trustworthiness consists of four criteria: *credibility*, *transferability*, *dependability*, and *conformability*.

Credibility

Credibility is akin to internal validity which evaluates the truth of data, their interpretations, and the various perspectives in the mind of informants (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Qualitative research is credible when it presents a faithful interpretation of human experience (Guba, 1981; Nowell et al., 2017). Credibility in this research was established in the alignment of the interview items to the research questions. In addition, credibility was increased through piloting the interview questions and process with three colleagues from the Department of Educational Administration at the University of Saskatchewan. The piloting process allowed me to fine-tune my items and ensure that they would unearth data that were relevant to my study. The credibility of the data was also achieved by giving participants time to make clarifications during the interviews as well as through member checks and a translation audit of the transcript.

Member Checks are the heart of credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985); the process refers to “taking data and interpretations back to the people from whom they were derived and asking them if the results are plausible” (Merriam, 2002, p. 31). The main reason for member checks is to avoid errors due to researchers’ weak memories or errors in transcribing (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Member checks also help to ensure that the data obtained are accurate and present the participants’ actual thoughts. Within the context of this study, I ensured that all research findings drawn from the interviews were grounded in the informants’ perspectives by citing and using verbatim interview statements frequently (as noted above, in both Arabic and English).

I coded the transcribed manuscripts and used pseudonyms in place of actual names to maintain participants’ confidentiality. I encouraged participants to review and, where necessary, make comments on the transcripts. As Merriam (2002) pointed out, the purpose of doing member

checks in this study was to eliminate any researcher bias when interpreting and analyzing data. Because the study involved the translation of key quotations of respondents from Arabic to English, it was necessary to conduct a translation audit as an additional check between the enquirer's data and interpretations (Guba, 1981). The translated quotes were forwarded to the certified translator to review the consistency, accuracy, and appropriateness of the translation.

Transferability

The second criterion of trustworthiness in qualitative research is transferability, which may be considered the equivalent of generalizability in qualitative research (Guba, 1981; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Transferability applies to the degree to which the results of qualitative research can be transferred or shifted to other research settings with different participants. In a qualitative research, data are intended to derive meaning not to be generalized (Cohen et al., 2011). The exploratory nature of this research excludes any declarations of generalization to other contexts or populations.

In transferability, the researcher's role is to "facilitate the transferability judgment of a potential user through 'thick description' and purposeful sampling" (Bitsch, 2005, p. 85) researchers who seek to transfer findings should judge transferability (Nowell et al., 2017). The clear articulation of sites, participants, the research process, and the data analysis provide a thick description that may offer the opportunity for the data to resonate with others in different settings. The decision to use purposive sampling of Saudi female academic leaders across a variety of Saudi universities may provide some opportunity for the findings to resonate with women across Saudi universities, though it is not claimed that this will necessarily be the case.

Dependability

The third criterion of trustworthiness is dependability (consistency). Guba and Lincoln (1985) suggested that dependability is a substitute for reliability. Researchers might achieve dependability through several ways such as: (1) declaring their positions, (2) using triangulation of multiple methods of data collection and analysis, (3) fully describing how data will be collected, (4) involving participants in the evaluation of interpretation and findings to ensure that this evaluation is supported by the data gathered from the informants of the study, and (5) using an audit trail. The audit trail in qualitative research "describes in detail how data will be collected, how categories will be derived, and how decisions will be made throughout the inquiry" (Merriam, 2002, p. 27). In other words, an audit trail is a thorough and comprehensive

description of the methods and procedures that are used and the decision points in the proceedings of the study. To increase dependability, I declared my position as a female Saudi researcher, and I performed an audit trail in the research analysis to ensure that all data were accounted for within their final presentation (Guba & Lincoln, 1985). The audit trail was managed by the cataloging of data, coding, analysis, findings, interpretations, conclusions in my researcher's notes (Nowell et al., 2017). I also included member checks and employed a certified translator to ensure that the original data and the English translation of the data was dependable.

Confirmability

The last criterion of trustworthiness is confirmability, which evaluates the correctness of the information rather than the inquirer's objectivity (Guba & Lincoln, 1985; Nowell et al., 2017). Confirmability also refers to acquiring direct and sometimes repetitive declarations of the researcher's collection of data through sensual perceptions, or experiences with the phenomenon under investigation. It is established by emphasizing the critical role of member checks and the audit translator, which ensure that researcher's bias is reduced and that the research results reflect the participants' actual experiences and perceptions, not those of the researcher. Confirmability can also be ensured by using researchers' notes throughout the entire process of the research.

To sum up, the methods for creating trustworthiness overlapped in some cases to meet the criteria of credibility, transformability, dependability, and confirmability in this study.

Ethical Considerations

Ethics are policies and principles that govern human behaviours and relationships with each other. Ethical guidelines must be adhered to in any research to protect participants' rights, and to ensure that their careers are not affected by the information they share.

As this research involved the acquisition of participants' personal information, before proceeding with data collection and analysis, all ethical guidelines were considered, acknowledged, and followed. Two sets of guidelines were followed: those from the University of Saskatchewan Behavioral Science Research Ethics Board and those from the targeted Saudi universities. Thus, in this research, by adhering to all relevant ethical requirements, I assured that study participants were treated with respect and dignity.

The purpose of this research was clearly explained to participants to ensure that they understood their rights. The investigator acquired permission from the targeted Saudi universities, as required within the Saudi context. Participants were provided with an Arabic

informational statement, along with a clear description of the study. All participants signed a consent form acknowledging the agreement to protect their confidentiality. After the completion of their interview, participants were given the opportunity to edit and review the information within three weeks following the receipt of the transcript. More details for protecting participants' confidentiality are stated below.

Confidentiality

1. I arranged and conducted individual, one-on-one online interviews via Zoom with Saudi female academic leaders.
2. I assigned each participant a pseudonym for use in any data reporting and acknowledged that university names would not be mentioned in any publication.
3. As all interviews were conducted in Arabic. I transcribed each interview audio recording into written Arabic and—for the purpose of member-checking—I shared each participant's transcript with only that specific participant.
4. I chose participants from different departments, and different Saudi public universities in the Makkah region—a large region in Saudi Arabia with a provincial area of over 150,000 km² and with a population of roughly 9,000,000 inhabitants—to help to bolster participant confidentiality.

Storage of Data

Initially, my personal laptop (secured with a protected password) was used to store the electronic data. All collected data (papers and audio tapes) were uploaded to the University of Saskatchewan's OneDrive for backup. I erased any data on my personal laptop once they were uploaded to Usask OneDrive with a program that will not permit data recovery. All ethical long-term data storage requirements of the University of Saskatchewan after the required five-year retention period will be respected.

Right to Withdraw

Respondents were informed prior to the interview that their participation in the study was voluntary, and that they could answer only those questions with which they were comfortable. Participants were reminded that they could withdraw from the research project for any reason, at any time without explanation or penalty of any sort. Participants were told during the interview that they could ask to pause the recording or end the interview at any time. If they wished to withdraw, they could do so up until the time of data analysis. At that time, their data would be

removed from the analysis, destroyed, and would not be included in the study. However, if they withdrew after the beginning of the data analysis, data reporting and dissemination of findings, it would no longer be possible to remove their data from the analysis. All participants remained as active respondents in this study; there were no withdrawals.

My Positionality

This study focused on the journeys of Saudi female academic leaders in navigating the labyrinths of leadership to gain better understandings of how they overcome the barriers and access support as they progress towards and through academic leadership positions in Saudi universities in the Makkah region. As an interpretivist, I believe that people can have different outlooks of a single reality that they have experienced, therefore how they construct meanings may also be diverse.

I believe that meanings can be mutually constructed through interpretive dialogues and acknowledge that people have various perspectives and ways of knowing that reflect symbolic interactions through human communication, language, and meanings (Charmaz, 2014). I believe that Saudi female academic leaders in PSIs have perspectives which vary according to their background, history, education (knowledge), and encounters. In other words, participants may have various perspectives and diverse experiences that support or hinder their navigation to and through the labyrinth of leadership.

Interacting with people through interviews allowed me to explore participants' perceptions in greater depth and, at the same time, enabled them to share and express their insights and feelings openly. As a Saudi woman who is interested in leadership, I am interested to learn how social developments and current changes in Saudi PSIs are impacting female leaders during this period of reforms (*Saudi Vision 2030*). I was honoured that my participants agreed to participate in this study so that I could learn more about their social world. I acknowledge the role that my subjectivity played as an emic and etic researcher, so in coding and analyzing the data, I was careful to use the actual words and terms used by respondents to minimize my own bias.

My positionality and knowledge of the Saudi context and culture played a critical role in the process of inquiry. To depict the truth and reality of a culture, both emic and etic views had major roles. The emic view refers to an insider's or informant's way of understanding people's perspectives and experiences in the setting or a specific culture of interest (DePoy & Gitlin,

2011). An etic perspective, on the other hand, refers to the outsider view, the structural aspects, or those that are external to a group (DePoy & Gitlin, 2011). This outsider view or the etic standpoint is “held by those who do not belong to the group being investigated but who select as analytical and epistemic lens through which to examine the information” (DePoy & Gitlin, 2011, p. 98). I considered myself to occupy the position of both an emic and etic researcher. According to DePoy and Gitlin (2011), the emic perspective is known as the insider’s view of reality and is a vital element to understand how individuals perceive the world around them.

Being a Saudi woman who is acquainted with my participants’ location, language, and culture gave me access to the resources needed and the ability to clearly interpret their meanings. Moreover, I have the advantage of developing an etic perspective as a Ph.D. student studying in Canada who has had the privilege of studying, conceptualizing, and understanding global social factors that are central to female academic leaders’ experiences/perspectives on leadership.

Being able to shift between an emic and etic standpoint helped me to develop a holistic understanding of academic leadership and how women navigate the labyrinth of leadership in PSIs. When contradictions arose between these two perspectives, I clearly explained the emic views conveyed by participants, and then I reflected on these views by analyzing through an etic perspective that also allowed for greater understandings to emerge.

Summary

In this chapter, I provided a detailed description on the research methodology, method, philosophy, design, and my position as a researcher. I described the process of data collection and analysis, the establishment of trustworthiness, and the ethical considerations for participants’ confidentiality. In Chapter 4, I present the transcripts of the data collected and the thematic clusters that appear because of the research design outlined in this chapter.

CHAPTER 4: INTERVIEWEES' EXPERIENCES/PERSPECTIVES

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the journeys of female academic leaders as they navigate the labyrinth of leadership in Saudi PSIs. I sought to gain better understandings of how these leaders overcame barriers and accessed support as they progress towards and through academic leadership positions in Saudi PSIs in the Makkah region. Participants from two stages of leadership were interviewed: five current Saudi female academic leaders and three former leaders. To ensure confidentiality, pseudonyms were assigned to interviewees and the names of their universities have been omitted. This introduction offers a description of participants' perspectives on their leadership journeys in the labyrinth. The chapter is organized around each woman's pathway into leadership, the barriers she faced, the strategies she used to overcome them, the supports she enacted along the journey, and the advice she would offer to those interested in obtaining leadership positions.

Alice

Alice is a departmental vice-chair with almost two years of experience in leadership. She was excited to share her experience with me. Her road to leadership as she described it was short and not smooth. Alice stated that she was granted a scholarship from her university to pursue graduate studies abroad, after completing her studies, she returned to her work at the university. The faculty vice-dean and the previous vice-chair, who were Alice's supervisors, nurtured and recommended her for a departmental vice-chair position in the first year of her work. She was appointed because of her qualifications and prior experience in administration; she had chaired several committees before studying abroad. Alice stated also that her colleagues acknowledged and appreciated her interpersonal skills, especially her empathy, her level of consideration for others, and the understanding that she demonstrated when they came to her for advice or direction.

Alice stated that she got her experience in leadership during her previous role as assistant to the former vice-chair (who happened to be also her role model): "I was the chair of several committees in my department before I started my journey. Along with my personal efforts to

improve my skills, these experiences provided me with the basic knowledge of leadership.” In addition to having some practical experience, Alice enrolled in managerial courses while she was studying in [City]. She participated in a one-week academic leadership course and completed a semester-long course that focused on *Management and Leadership*. She declared that those two courses helped to shape her knowledge, skills, and behaviour in leadership. She added that she loves reading about leadership and management, and she was currently reading a book entitled, *How to Manage People at Work*.

Alice would not describe the journey to be a leader as a ‘labyrinth’ because her path was short. However, she explained that the ‘labyrinth’ began when she took over the leadership position. She noted that the road that will lead her to top leadership positions in the university is indeed a labyrinth that is full of obstacles. To reach top leadership positions, Alice stated that she must be effective and work hard in her current duties. At the same time, she has to devise ways to improve professionally and build positive relationships with faculty members and administrators. Alice emphasized the need for female leaders to be creative, knowledgeable, and communicate effectively, since these are vital elements in steering through the labyrinth. Because of this, Alice stressed the importance of developing good networks and abiding by the university’s rules and regulations, so that individuals in senior administration will notice, acknowledge and compliment her achievements.

At the beginning of the interview, Alice declared that academic leadership “differs” from other kinds of leadership because, as she declared, “I have to manage my colleagues, those whom I studied with, and manage my professors, those who taught me when I was a student.” These factors required her to be fair and cautious in her dealings with her colleagues, especially when attempting to defuse conflicts before they arise. As an example, Alice cited an incident with a faculty member who was not satisfied with the distribution of scheduled work. She explained that to solve this issue she had to communicate effectively with the colleague. Alice asserted that being aware of how to manage people and communicate with them according to their personalities are key aspects of leadership as they neutralize conflicts before they arise. Alice emphasized that fairness is a very important aspect of a leader because it acts as a critical key that guides decisions and behaviours. She also indicated that her colleagues gave her positive reviews and feedback because she was known for being “patient, wise, intelligent, organized, and had a sociable personality.” Having to listen and respond to the requests of colleagues and students

when they needed it required a lot of her time, but Alice believed this was critical for building good relationships.

Alice noted that there are many barriers that females must overcome in order to advance as a leader. She declared that organizational impediments are the major barriers, followed by professional barriers. Although she did not suggest that societal barriers directly affected her experience, they were tied together with what she described as organizational barriers. For Alice, personal barriers exist, but she has found ways to overcome them.

There are several organizational barriers that Alice encountered. She suggested that the main barrier was having to deal with men from the male section of the university who manage and make decisions for the female campus. The “centralization of decision-making and the limited authority of women” are what irritated her the most as a female leader. She stated that in Saudi Arabia the chair of departments in PSIs are males; “there are no female chairs, only vice-chairs.” Alice also stated that some chairs (on the male campus) do not share their decisions with the vice-chairs (on the female campus), which leads to misunderstandings and conflicts in roles. She cited an example of when she requested a change in the matriculation for admission to graduate studies at the university where she worked. Her request was sent to the Dean of Graduate Studies in the male section. After waiting for a while without receiving a response, she made some enquiries about the request and was told that the Dean wanted more information. She said, unfortunately, “I have no authority to respond or follow up on the request with the dean; I have to depend on my chair (in the men’s campus) to do so.” In her words: “Although it was my request, I had no idea what happened to it.” She concluded that “male intervention restricted my effectiveness and limited my opportunities as a leader.” Although Alice articulated that societal barriers were less concerning for her because she worked on a female-only campus, her example illustrates that sex segregation due to societal tradition impacts strongly women’s abilities to make decisions, engage in professional learning, and advance in leadership. The strong segregation of the sexes limited her communication with men, who supervised the female campus of the university. Alice noted, “I believe I might face even more societal barriers if I work in a mixed-work environment.”

When I asked about professional barriers, Alice declared “work takes most of my time, I feel pressure because there are a lot of things that I want to do but I do not find the time to do them.” She pointed out that networking and how to access PD training at the university were her

concerns. Alice declared that there is “discrimination” in the process of selecting individuals to participate in professional training opportunities; and these opportunities are extended only to select people with no consideration to their position or needs. Alice suggested that there would be some degree of fairness if there was a system that allowed leaders to register for these trainings on their own. She said that if a registration process was implemented, individuals could be selected based on their experiences or needs but she stated, “unfortunately there is no such procedure, so selection is based on relationships or associations.” She further reported “It is ‘who knows who’ that fuels the process. If the individuals who are doing the nomination don’t know you, it is difficult for you to get selected for PD training.”

Alice’s major personal barriers were stress, pressure, and fear of failure. She stated repeatedly “stress, stress, too much stress.” Her stress level was heightened because she believed she needed to respond to every message she received from her staff even if these messages arrived late in the night. The fear of failure was at the top of her list of anxieties. Fortunately, her confidence in her own abilities countered this anxiety and provided her with encouragement to learn from her failures and move forward to new experiences.

To overcome the barriers, Alice declared that she relied on and was guided by the wise words of the proverb, “choose your own battles”, before dealing with any challenge. This practice has helped her to be “wise and patient” in her efforts to reach the right solutions to problems. She noted that being “flexible” was important in dealing with obstacles because rigid adherence to rules and regulations without flexibility only adds to further frustration and does not lead to effective solutions. She repeated the need to “Listen! Listen! I always listen” to emphasize the importance of listening. She said, “whenever there is a conflict among faculty members, I allow them to share their side of the story and I listen carefully to understand the situation and then I share my perspectives and advise with them.” She pointed out that “listening, flexibility, and firmness are important elements of leadership, a person has to be firm to manage” it is like holding the stick from the middle. She pointed out that many conflicts occurred in leadership, and the strategy of careful listening was key to resolving them. In addition, what motivated her to proceed in navigating the path to leadership despite all the barriers was her faith, self-confidence, and determination that one day she would achieve the goal for which she was striving. Alice emphasized the value of gaining knowledge; she believed that it was the gateway to leadership. She claimed, “knowledge increases awareness of your skills and guides how you behave around

people.” Alice declared that knowledge motivated her to work hard, make constructive changes in the department, improve on her areas of weakness, and recognize followers’ types of character. Developing her skills, knowledge, and appropriate behaviours were critical components of her ability to be successful in leadership.

Support, particularly family support, was important for Alice. She received support from her father whom she consulted about issues relating to her role. Alice suggested that university support was restricted to certain people and was mainly dependent on *wasta* (social connection) and relationships with administrators. The faculty vice-chair had supported and selected her to take a professional leadership program at KAUST, but unfortunately, she was not able to attend because it was cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak.

Alice also spoke of support from the Saudi government to women who have two years of experience in leadership positions. Female leaders who met this requirement were allowed to access a website called “*Misk*” where they could list their experiences and explore increased opportunities that they would not be able to access elsewhere. Yet, this website is still in its initial phases.

Alice emphasized the role of self-education, training, and experience; she believed that experience was the key element for her successful navigation through the labyrinth of leadership. Her belief in the value of experience translated into her work with staff, as she continually found opportunities for them to grow in their own leadership experience. As a leader, Alice supported her staff by providing them with collaborative leadership opportunities. Staff members were encouraged to freely discuss certain topics in departmental meetings, tasks were delegated to them, and Alice included them in decision-making processes. Alice stated that involving them (staff members) in these activities helps in preparing them to be creative and effective leaders in the future.

Alice’s advice to potential leaders was to “trust God, believe in yourself, work hard, improve your skills, create good relationships, be patient, considerate, and respectful to everyone.” She also advised prospective leaders to accept every opportunity to serve on departmental committees to gain experience because they would not be accepted to leadership positions without first traversing these paths.

Faye

Faye was a vice-chair at the university where she worked. She had been in this position for almost three years. She indicated that she would leave this position because she did not want to renew her appointment due to several issues. Faye's voice exuded a lot of confidence, and she was extremely excited to share her experience with me. She had been an international PhD student, so she knew the importance and challenges that students face in this phase of research.

After completing her first degree, Faye said she became intensely fascinated with leadership. Her passion for leadership was ignited during a workshop that she attended which focused on leadership. The presenter used a picture of migratory birds flying in a V-shaped formation to explain leadership. By flying in this formation birds cooperate with each other and are able to get to their destination quickly and efficiently. She stated that "the V formation allows birds to improve their speed by 75% faster than if they flew alone." Faye pointed out that the use of migratory birds as an example of leadership "caught my attention" and "inspired me" to learn more about leadership and its significance. This new passion for leadership resulted in her pursuing graduate studies in educational leadership. In addition to engaging in formal study, Faye was a keen reader on leadership. She suggested that her interests in reading about personality and emotional intelligence helped her to understand people and how to deal with them. Faye stated that she depended on her "personal effort" to professionally develop as a leader.

Faye pursued her studies in educational leadership abroad; after completing her studies she returned to work at the university. She has chaired several committees, including the administration development committee and the promotion committee in her faculty. These leadership opportunities have enabled her to enhance her skills and knowledge in leadership. Faye indicated that the chairs of departments at her university are usually not trained for such positions because the perception of senior administration was that this was a temporary task, a two- year-appointment.

Faye described her journey through the leadership position as a 'labyrinth' but also the effects of it were like moving through an Electrocardiography (ECG). She characterized her pathway this way because she had fluctuating experiences navigating the labyrinth of leadership. She likened the manner in which a chair was appointed in her department without previous preparation as akin to "white water rafting without a life jacket and not knowing how to swim."

Faye was recommended for the position of vice-chair by the vice-dean and previous vice-chair because of her active role in chairing department committees. She noted that “there were no specific standards for leaders’ selection, and placements were often made on recommendations.” Faye said, “the selection of department chairs is based on the traditional belief that if a lady is excellent in teaching and conducting scientific research, she will be good as a department chair.” She added that “there is no consideration of the leadership capabilities and no professional preparation for the administrative position” and these complicate leaders’ role and path.

When I asked Faye about the barriers that she encountered on her journey to leadership, she paused momentarily and then said, “where should I begin?” Faye explained that the male-dominated culture is what complicates the process of female leaders’ paths. From a societal perspective, Faye articulated that a significant barrier to women’s leadership stems from tradition that favors men over women and grants more authority to men, hence their dominance in leadership positions; this then creates several organizational barriers for women. The limited authority that female leaders have hinders them from effectively and freely performing their roles. For example, Faye explained that she proposed a new idea to her department, but this idea could not be implemented until it got approval from her chair in the men’s section. Unfortunately, her idea was rejected. Faye said, “I felt that I hit the wall of the labyrinth” or “I was stuck in the middle of the mud” because she did not get enough support from her manager due to poor communication. Faye identified several other hurdles such as “marginalization, administrative complication, poor communication between men and women’s campus, the constant changes in rules and regulations, and the lack of clarity in regulations” as major organizational barriers.

Faye indicated that there were some professional barriers that impeded leaders from effectively performing their roles, these were: limited authority and opportunities for professional training specifically for female leaders. She gave an example of an incident where a graduate female student wanted to defend her degree. Faye said she had no authority to decide a day for the defence, because the male manager was the one who made the decision. She further lamented that “there are no female mentors,” which complicates the path of leadership for women.

When I asked Faye about the personal barriers that she encountered she sighed and said, “being a perfectionist especially in a male-dominated context.” She continued by stating, “my attempts to be a perfectionist put me under pressure.” She added, “I know that I have to do things

better than perfect. However, after getting tired psychologically, I just confessed to myself that human beings make mistakes, but the good thing is to learn from these mistakes.”

The second personal barrier Faye stated was related to “overthinking” especially in making serious decisions. She said that overthinking impacts her ability to create a balance between work responsibilities and social life. According to Faye “the overload of work impacts my mind, so I keep thinking about work issues at home and this sometimes prevents me from my social life.” She pointed out that it happens even during her visits with friends. Faye indicated further “I can’t disengage my mind.”

Faye said that she overcame her barriers through her spiritual values and faith in God. As a devout Muslim, her trust in God helped her to deal with leadership challenges. She declared, “I believe working with human beings is always challenging, but I have to be patient.” She said “with my morals, I know that I will be able to cope with the tough situations because values are there. I just need to pick the tenets and allow them to be a part of me in everyday situations.” The deep faith that Faye has in God was also what she depended on to take her over or through the challenges of life that she faced.

For Faye, support was a key element that motivated leaders to navigate the labyrinth of leadership. Regarding organizational support, Faye stated that she had to seek these opportunities on her own. She was quick to point out that the university offers only two days of professional learning activities for educational leaders during the academic year; however, this is woefully inadequate because not everyone gets the chance to participate. She indicated that there are more opportunities for upper-level leaders (males) to attend training sessions, both at the local and international levels.

Faye placed specific emphasis on family support; she pointed out that women, like all individuals, need someone with whom to communicate (a sister, a brother, a husband, a daughter), after a long day at work. She said, “all I need is someone to listen, and this helps me to release my stress.” Faye stated that her husband had been extremely supportive, and he was her main support after stressful days at work.

Faye’s advice for current and aspiring leaders was “believe in yourself and never give up.” In terms of what leaders need to succeed, Faye stated, “give your staff the sense of belonging and respect them because they are human beings, not machines.” It is highly important

for a leader to know how to treat her team, invest, and discover their abilities so that they become creative, she further added.

Faye stressed the importance of faith, self-confidence, self-awareness, and “never ever comparing yourself with others.” She indicated that leaders have to focus on their goals and devote their efforts to improve their managerial and interpersonal skills.

Lastly, Faye pointed out that the journey to leadership would not be easy; it would be full of obstacles. Her advice to Saudi prospective female leaders was “your belief in yourself and your abilities will make you strong people capable of resisting and not giving up in difficult times.” These were the words of encouragement and caution that she gave to aspiring female leaders.

Nicole

Nicole was vice-chair at the university, a position which she had held for six months. Although her leadership experience was limited, she agreed to share the knowledge she had gained since occupying this position. Nicole had studied abroad, and, upon returning to Saudi Arabia, she acquired a new job at the university. Before I began interviewing her, Nicole declared, “I have little experience in leadership” and inquired if her perspectives would be beneficial. I assured her that her short time in leadership was not an issue because I was also interested in hearing about her journey prior to securing this leadership position.

When Nicole was asked to describe her path to leadership and how she navigated the labyrinth, she sighed, paused for a while, and then murmured “vague and dark” she continued with her description by stating that it was like “passing through a forest that is dark and full of known and unknown hazards.” She indicated that leaders must be cautious in their navigation because of all the dangers that exist. Nicole maintained that she started to navigate the labyrinth with no plan or compass to guide her along the way: “I wish there was a guide or a job description, a mentor or coach to brighten the road and make it clearer.” She stated that the lack of these tools resulted in her having “numerous headaches.”

Nicole said of the administrators at the university, “they expected that I would know how to manage the work with no assistance just because I had published several papers and participated at several conferences when I was abroad.” Nicole had published in several journals, and these had helped her acquire the leadership position because the administrators believed this experience was valuable. Nicole declared that before accepting the leadership position, the only

knowledge she had about leadership was from her personal reading on leadership and management. In referring to the diagram of the labyrinth in the interview guide, she stated, “I did not start from the entrance of the labyrinth, I just found myself in there somewhere, and from the center, my journey started.” Nicole further pointed out that the environment at work was discouraging, depressing, and demotivating; hence, it was difficult for a leader to effectively perform leadership roles. Because of her struggles in the leadership position, Nicole emphasized the role of leadership preparation for aspiring leaders before they undertake their journey.

As we continued our conversation, Nicole declared that she believed that knowledge, skills, and behaviour were essential for leaders. She suggested that it would be extremely beneficial, especially for new leaders, if vice chairs could meet occasionally and share their failures, success stories, and experiences with others. She felt that this would greatly assist in encouraging and developing the leadership skills of other leaders. Sharing knowledge and experience play a key role in creating collegiality in the work environment. According to Nicole, effective communications in the department increase the ability of leaders to make changes that move the organization towards a brighter future. She used Palmer and Zajonc’s book *The Heart of Higher Education: A Call to Renewal* as a source for creating change in her department as it outlines approaches that honour human beings—mind, heart, and spirit. As Nicole stated, “Knowledge always leads to change, changes in personality that increase a leader’s ability to understand people around her, to build effective relationships, and to improve teamwork.” Nicole also indicated that knowledge allows leaders to acquire and develop new skills that will be reflected in their actions and attitudes toward others.

From Nicole’s perspective, great leaders should have qualities such as “faith, patience, courage, cooperation, a sense of responsibility, the ability to create a safe and respected work environment, to provide feedback, provide sources of knowledge, support, encouragement and appreciation of team members.” Nicole emphasized that she was trying to create a culture of “appreciation” and “gratitude” in the department because she believed that these elements played a major role in building a motivated and cooperative team.

As Nicole navigated the leadership labyrinth, she stated that she faced numerous hurdles. She said that the major hurdles were related to the structure of the organization. She was appointed vice chair on the female campus, and her counterpart was a man on the male campus. Nicole said that her role was similar to that of other female vice-chairs—to implement the

decisions handed down by men from the male section. Women are excluded from and are not allowed to contribute to the decision-making process. Nicole stated that the segregation of the female campus from the male campus complicated and limited the process of communication between administrators.

Nicole pointed out that female leaders communicated with male administrators in the male section mainly by telephone, WhatsApp, or official documents, so COVID-19 did not change communication styles. However, it transformed face-to-face learning to distance learning, adding more time to the workday, according to Nicole. Vice chairs, for example, had to work 24/7 with administrators, she said, "I received messages all day, even at midnight and on weekends." The additional work hours put Nicole under pressure. In addition, due to poor communication among administrators, she noted that sometimes vice-chairs were not updated on new policies, which placed them in embarrassing situations when dealing with students. Another organizational barrier for Nicole was the limited authority of female vice-chairs, she stated that limited authority restricted women's freedom to effectively perform their roles.

For Nicole, professional barriers were closely interrelated to organizational ones. The first professional barrier that she identified was the lack of a job description outlining her roles and responsibilities, which made her journey vague and reduced her ability to see and correctly interpret signals from others. The second professional barrier was the absence of female mentors or coaches, while the third was the lack of preparation for prospective leaders before they were assigned to their position. Personal barriers included the heavy workload and time constraints, which prevented her from conducting scientific research, writing publications, and reading in management/leadership. The workload created high levels of fear, stress, and anxiety.

Another category of barriers that Nicole identified was societal. The main societal barrier she identified was isolation: As she puts it, "the position isolates me." Much of the isolation, as she described it, were derived from the prevailing male-dominated practices, which restricted her networking relationships. All of these barriers hindered, inhibited, and thwarted Nicole's efforts as she took her first steps on the journey of leadership, but professional barriers came at the top of her list. The stress and anxiety caused by these barriers led her to consider resigning, but her chair stood with her and provided the support that she needed.

Nicole used several methods to overcome the barriers she encountered. She said that one way she coped with them was to ask her chair and subordinates to assist her on the leadership

path. She learned and gained courage from hearing about their experiences in leadership and administration. Another action that helped her was writing down her experiences in administration. Nicole began recording her responsibilities, the major barriers, and how she overcame them. She expressed hope that by keeping a record of these events, she could also lighten the work of potential leaders. Yet another coping mechanism was spirituality. Nicole emphasized the importance of spiritual values, not only for the leader's benefit but also for the benefit of those under the individual's charge. She maintained that leaders who have faith in God display integrity, honesty, dignity, and build effective relationships with others based on trust. Along with the support of her chair and subordinates, Nicole's faith and belief in God enabled her to overcome the barriers.

For Nicole, support was essential in navigating the labyrinth of leadership. She indicated that her family provided her with emotional support and motivated her to pursue the leadership journey. As a mother of two children, Nicole had a busy home life, but she indicated that her husband's support and understanding helped her as a new leader. In addition, she stated that her father provided her with constant support, which motivated her to pursue upper leadership positions in the future. As for organizational support, Nicole maintained that although the university administration offered a few workshops, generally, the support was "insufficient" and the university did not provide female mentors. In searching for professional training that fit into her tight schedule, Nicole maintained that she depended on her personal effort.

When asked what advice she would offer to potential leaders who wished to follow a leadership path similar to hers, Nicole offered four pieces of advice: (1) "build a learning network relationship with other leaders to learn from their experience;" (2) "do not hesitate to ask about things you do not know," (3) "search for knowledge that is suitable for your role;" and (4) "have faith in God, and do your work, do not procrastinate." This was Nicole's advice to potential leaders who wished to make a smooth transition into a leadership role.

Isabella

At the time of the interview, Isabella had completed a two-year in the position of vice-chair at the university. She stated that while she was in high school, her friends always saw her as a leader with a winsome personality as well as a person who had "the ability to plan, organize, and think." She further stated that "they were always influenced by my words and opinions."

However, for Isabella, leadership in high school was not too challenging because she only had to deal with students' activities and clubs, which did not involve great responsibility.

After she returned from studying abroad to work at the university, she indicated that she never really considered or planned to be in a leadership position: "leadership was not my goal." Nevertheless, she served on several departmental committees and eventually was selected to be the chair of a department. Isabella stated that she initially rejected the position as she had other goals to achieve, but a number of her colleagues encouraged and persuaded her to accept the position. Their confidence in her, along with her desire to effect change in the department, inspired her to become a leader.

At the beginning of her journey in her new leadership role, Isabella said she faced numerous challenges. She was disheartened because the department was neither encouraging nor welcoming to new and creative ideas. Her disappointment was so great that she indicated that she relinquished this position after only a short period. A year later, Isabella said she was asked to take on another leadership position. This time, she was under pressure from her supervisors, and she was persuaded again by others to accept the leadership responsibility. Isabella stated that she had been informed by her supervisors that she had the requisite qualities and qualifications for the position, and she was the only one in the department who had no additional organizational responsibilities other than teaching. Isabella said that after thinking for a long time, she reluctantly accepted their offer. In declaring her reason for delaying the acceptance of the position, she stated, "I have other goals related to teaching and promotion," adding that she was not concentrating on becoming a leader.

Isabella described her second experience in navigating the path of leadership as a little more convoluted and different from the first. First, to improve her leadership and managerial skills, she attended a workshop on women and leadership, which she found extremely beneficial and played a major role in her success. Second, she stated that "this time I had experience," which she maintained was "critical in dealing with the role," she further added, "I learnt a lot from the challenges faced in the previous position." Isabella's previous leadership experience helped her to navigate the labyrinth of leadership more effectively than she did the first time.

Isabella described the leadership path as being "like a clown that holds balls in her hand and tries hard not to let any fall," she added, "I have to deal with my role, duties, and at the same time manage my colleagues." From Isabella's perspective, a "labyrinth should have multiple

entrances and not a single one, because each leader has different experiences, abilities, and skills to navigate.” Leaders who navigate a path in the labyrinth, according to Isabella, “are not sure if the path they are on is the correct one, but they are obliged to continue the journey until they get to the end.”

Isabella indicated that on the female campus at the university where she worked, there was great competition for leadership positions, and individuals who held these positions had to battle through hardships: “I felt that people around me fought me more than supported me.” Because of this opposition, Isabella said she was not able to assemble an ideal team with which to cooperate or consult at the beginning of her career progression in leadership. Therefore, she relied on her experience and constantly reviewed the organization’s policy and regulations when making decisions and managing her work. Although she tried to be independent in her decision making, she at times consulted other chairs to ensure that she was being fair with everyone.

The leadership position had a significant impact on Isabella’s social life. She said, “I feel isolated, I have lost my social life and some friends.” She found herself backing away from some personal relationships to maintain professional distance and ethical conduct. Isabella said she found this very difficult at first, but realized she had to move beyond worrying about what others thought of her decisions. Despite the feelings of isolation, Isabella managed to continue to navigate the leadership journey.

Isabella explained that her high levels of social intelligence (SQ) increased her knowledge of and ability to understand the people around her and how to interact positively with them. Later, she managed to be successful in building good relationships with some colleagues. Isabella was aware of her lack of leadership preparation; hence, she was always looking for professional development training to gain new skills. She read intensely on SQ and attended workshops in management and administration, such as *How to Communicate with People*, and these experiences influenced her leadership behaviour as well.

To be effective in leadership, Isabella indicated that leaders should rely on their spiritual values and acquire knowledge and skills to help their staff to develop their creativity and think outside the box. Isabella declared that she inspired faculty members to bring out the best in themselves and share their knowledge and experience in departmental meetings.

Isabella indicated that, like all vice-chairs, she encountered numerous challenges. She was irritated by the structural barriers that marginalized her at times, setting her apart from some

students and faculty members, especially when they (students and staff) requested her help but then bypassed her and sought assistance (through family members) from her counterpart, the chairperson in the men's section. To overcome this challenge, she maintained that before doing anything "I have learnt to ask individuals who come seeking my assistance if they intend to ask for help elsewhere (in the men section). It doesn't mean that I don't want to help them, it is just to save my time and effort."

The other organizational hurdle that Isabella faced was poor communication with male administrators, especially on urgent matters. This situation, she said, "delays and complicates her work." The professional barriers that Isabella mentioned were the lack of female mentors, the absence of a job description, and her limited authority. For example, even though her secretaries worked under her supervision, Isabella said she could not conduct their annual appraisals, because appraisals were completed by male managers. She further stated that she had no idea about "how many vacation days these secretaries had." As Isabella described it, this lack of authority, "complicates the process of my work." Thus, for Isabella, restricted authority for female leaders was a significant barrier which was enabled by the dominance of men and the centralization of decision making. Isabella stated that men made all the key decisions without consulting with or sharing ideas with women leaders.

In addition to professional barriers, Isabella was also asked about personal and societal hurdles. She indicated that personal hurdles were imposed by people around her, especially by her family, who did not fully understand her role and work obligations. For example, her family members were annoyed when she received calls and text messages from work at all times of the day, even at midnight. Isabella said that if she did not respond to these calls or messages, it placed her in a difficult position and implied that she was "not a cooperative person who understood the nature of the work, which is completely untrue." Isabella did not recall facing any societal barriers, but she referred to the culture in which men are dominant and indicated that this culture was behind the organizational and professional barriers that she had to overcome.

Strategies to overcome barriers, Isabella revealed that "honouring my responsibility, striving to achieve, and having a sense that I succeeded in making a change for others are what motivated me to continue on the leadership path despite its obstacles and challenges." She added, "I learned how to get things done, how to communicate with people, how to develop good relationships with people." In addition, Isabella stated that constructive comments from students

and faculty members regarding her achievements also made her happy. She further discussed what inspired her to pursue the leadership journey despite all the hurdles:

the acute sense of accountability. As long as I am in a leadership position, I have to take responsibility for all matters related to the position. I try my very best to make sure that I succeed in the position so that no balls fall during my tenure in the administrative position.

Isabella stated that support played a significant role in helping her to overcome leadership barriers, especially family support, which she affirmed was the foundation for her effectiveness, although she mentioned that it was not complete support for her. Isabella also stated that “rewards and recognition are also important elements for motivating leaders, but they are not included in the organization’s policy.” Isabella realized the critical role that professional training played in support, and she tried to enroll in as many of these workshops as time allowed. Most of her professional training came through her own efforts because of a lack of opportunity in the organization.

Isabella’s advice to current and potential leaders was “to build good relationships with people around you to support you when you need them and be fully aware of the organization’s rules and regulations and articulate them.” Her second piece of advice was to “treat everyone fairly, respectfully” and to “love and care for them.” The last piece of advice she offered was to “try to delegate,” adding that “delegation means you trust the people you work with, and this motivates them. Have a goal, and plan to achieve it with faith and trust in God.” She concluded that “time management, focusing on achievement, and not procrastinating to complete tasks” can assist leaders in navigating the labyrinth of leadership.

Ariana

At the time of the interview, Ariana was vice-chair of an academic department at the university, having been in that position for six years. In the past she had been a leader for students, but she did not hesitate to admit that academic leadership was different. Ariana had been assigned to the leadership position through the recommendation of her previous manager who was also her role model: “I worked closely with her and acquired a substantial amount of managerial knowledge from her.” Because of this, she said her manager “noticed that I had some attributes that made me suitable for the position, so she chose me.” Ariana indicated that her former manager was a good role model who helped to shape her leadership skills.

When I asked Ariana to describe her path to leadership, she noted that it was uneven, especially because she did not go through any leadership preparation or training prior to occupying the position. Ariana also described her navigation in the 'labyrinth' as "hiking with my colleagues; at times I lead them from the front, but sometimes I am positioned in the middle and other times I am at the back of the group because we are working as a team." She stressed the importance of empowering team members with the autonomy to move forward.

Ariana faced many challenges at the beginning of her career, she further indicated that what she faced was more than a 'labyrinth'. She felt that she was in the 'labyrinth' when she was "thinking about issues ... outside the scope" of her "authority such as financial issues." She also felt that she was in the labyrinth when immediately after she started her position, her chairperson, who had been in the post for 13 years, suddenly left the university. These situations created several challenges for her because she did not fully know all the procedures of the department, but she managed to cope. Ariana declared, "when I found myself in the labyrinth, I did not wait for doors to open, I had to think, act, and find solutions" this is what a leader must do.

Ariana stressed that generosity, humility, fairness, and delegation were critical components of her effectiveness in all of her six years as a leader. She elaborated that a leader should be generous to her team. She said, "the more generous you are with your team and put their needs above that of yourself, the more successful you will be," she added, "I put my team's name on any departmental achievements not only my name because I must acknowledge their efforts." Ariana also pointed out that she was not keen to say, "my department" or "my staff"; instead, she preferred to use "the university's department" and "my colleagues" to create a friendly environment that supported creativity and generated new ideas. Another point Ariana made was this: "I don't love the position per se, I love the work that I do in serving people." She reflected on her leadership journey this way "part of my responsibility is to have an openness in thoughts, be as equitable, fair, transparent as possible in my structure. Treat colleagues with dignity, respect, and goodwill." Based on this quote Ariana stated that dignity, respect, and care for others were integral to her leadership role.

Ariana reflected on how she accumulated knowledge and developed her talents and approach to leadership. First, she took part in PD. She participated in a one-year course entitled *Transformational Leadership for Leaders* and completed a semester-long course from *Leadership Management International (LMI)*, where she learned about effective leadership, motivated

leadership, and strategies for effective leadership. She said that these two courses shaped her leadership skills. Second, Ariana's knowledge, skills, and behaviour improved as she tackled the various tasks associated with the position. In other words, she learned 'on the job.' She indicated that there are some leadership skills that are innate, but experience plays a major role in shaping and enhancing these skills. It was significant for her to focus on the organization's visions and be able to articulate them to her colleagues. Knowledge is the path that helped Ariana to gain new skills. She also believed that appropriate leadership behaviour is strongly linked to skills and knowledge.

Ariana faced several organizational and professional barriers. The main organizational barrier was related to the men's campus, as most of her work had to be approved by men from this campus. She maintained that the intense male bureaucracy extended the time to complete tasks. The professional barriers that Ariana faced included limited authority, lack of female mentors, and ambiguity of rules and regulations. She stated that these barriers complicated her work and restricted her from performing effectively. When I asked Ariana about her personal barriers, she laughed and said, "low self-confidence regarding my abilities, especially in the first two years of being a leader, fear of making mistakes or being unfair with my colleagues." She added, "I don't want to upset anyone, I want to be fair with everyone, another one was comparing myself with others was painful." Ariana's said that because of these barriers she developed low self-esteem which complicated her numerous struggles and battles in her role. To overcome the struggles, she took courses on how to believe in oneself and gain confidence. Ariana could not think of any societal barriers, although she referred to the tradition and culture that prevailed in Saudi society, indicating that she didn't let them stop her.

Ariana declared that her experience was a valuable guide in knowing how to deal with and overcome work obstacles. She indicated, as well, that because she was a leader who valued respect, conviction, wisdom, and had strong belief and faith in God, she was encouraged to continue on the journey and overcome these barriers.

Ariana agreed that all types of support—personal, familial, social, organizational, emotional, and financial—were important for leaders. She focused on family support and shared how her husband was extremely understanding and constantly provided her with the support she needed. Ariana also indicated that the ages of her children helped her to spend long hours at work, she said, "if my kids were young, I would not be able to work effectively." When asked

about organizational support, she indicated that the university offered some workshops, but still, the opportunities for professional developmental training were inadequate. Most of the professional training that she participated in was a result of her personal efforts. Ariana professed that she had an intense passion to learn and gain new skills, which propelled her to seek opportunities to improve her abilities.

Ariana had several pieces of advice for current and potential leaders. First, “don’t love the position, let the position love you.” By this, she meant that leaders should not be proud because of their positions, but they should do their work professionally. Second, “Knowledge and experience are the two main keys to open the door of leadership opportunity.” Third, leaders should read and understand all university’s policies, rules, and be observant to gain knowledge that is not written in documents. Finally, she encouraged leaders to put their trust in God to reach their goals.

Maya

Maya was a former vice chair in the university who had been promoted to several other leadership roles over the 25 years that she worked there. She resigned two months before the interview. Each role that Maya had increased her leadership capacity, which resulted in her receiving increased responsibilities.

Maya’s engagement in leadership began at an early age at home, where she was given opportunities to develop her skills because she was the eldest child in her family and had been described as “a leader by nature.” She was responsible not only for her siblings but also for her cousins, and from these experiences, she learnt the importance of responsibility, trustworthiness, and care for others. While in school, Maya occupied several positions of leadership; she was in charge of students and school activities. In describing her experiences, she said, “my passion for improving and caring for others pleased me.” These early experiences were foundational to her development as a leader.

Maya began her tenure as a faculty member before being promoted to a faculty leader and then eventually to division chair. Throughout her journey, she was responsible for several committees including public relations and graduate studies. She was also responsible for students’ activities and was an academic mentor for undergraduate and graduate students. She had served in several administrative roles in student services for three years. Maya shared that she had worked closely with the faculty’s vice-dean and other supervisors and absorbed all their

responsibilities. She said, “working with people who were leaders helped me to develop and gain leadership skills... it was like give me more work, I am happy to do it, I want the experience.” Nevertheless, Maya described her academic progression to leadership positions as a journey that was not easy and was full of twists and turns as she faced prejudice from male colleagues, so much so, that eventually, she resigned from leadership positions.

Similarly, to other women leaders in the Saudi context, Maya had faced various barriers in leadership positions. The major barriers were related to the organization’s structure such as the dual chain of command at the university, the dominance of the male section, ineffective communication between the administration of the two campuses, and men’s constant control of women. She explained that sometimes when a female vice chair wanted to implement a new idea or improve work strategies, her request had to be approved by several individuals, starting with the chair of the department (in the male section) and moving up to the top leader in the hierarchy. To compound the situation, sometimes the request was approved by the vice-dean of the female campus and rejected by administrators from the male campus or vice versa. Maya said, “this puts additional pressure, stress, and frustration on me because I cannot fully explain my own idea or request.” To avoid being distracted, “a leader has to acknowledge the policy, regulations, understand her own roles at work, and who to communicate with according to the organization’s hierarchy.” Maya asserted the importance of impartiality, particularly in the female section. She also argued that leaders should be “fair, respected, and patient at work in order to cope and manage.”

Regarding professional barriers, like other Saudi female leaders, Maya was not able to contribute to decision-making because, according to her, “men have to dictate their rules and we [female leaders] have to implement them.” She pointed out that female leaders could not oppose the decisions that males made they had to show their agreement even if it was something they disagreed with. If females showed any signs of disagreement, they could be victimized by men, or their leadership career would be over. Maya provided an example: Many years ago, she and other female colleagues had supported a female professor whose promotion was opposed by leaders from the male campus. Later in her career when Maya was supposed to be promoted as well, she stated that the promotion was deliberately delayed by the male section because she had supported her friend against a directive from the male section. She declared, “justice,

transparency, and equity should be actions, not just written words, and they should be for everyone.”

Another professional barrier for Maya was a lack of financial resources. Her department was responsible for providing developmental training for administrative, faculty members, and staff. However, due to insufficient funding, there was no training, this forced Maya to use her critical thinking skills to find alternative solutions and figure a way around the policy. Maya identified qualified senior faculty members who could conduct training sessions and recruited these individuals to provide free and accessible training in the organization. This was a ‘win, win’ situation she declared because by convening the workshops, the faculty members received credits, which increased their opportunities for promotion. Maya described her innovation in using staff members to do workshops as a “transformational point” of her career; she stated that it caused the senior faculty to trust her more, and she was able to develop extremely strong relationships with other staff members.

Being ‘*hurma*’ (a female) leader was a professional barrier for Maya. She related an incident that took place while she was in one of her leadership positions and being supervised by a man. She said she tried to make some changes in the work procedures, but her supervisor refused to sanction her proposed changes, rejecting them without providing reasons. Maya believed that her ideas were rejected because her manager viewed women negatively based on cultural and traditional practices; men do not want a “*hurma*” to be seen as more creative than they are or to be dictating to them: “It was like reaching a dead-end, nothing worked with him,” Maya said. However, refusing to surrender to this barrier, she tried to work with him and provided him with support, but without success. She lamented, “he is a man, and whatever a man says is true, unlike women who don’t understand, and are emotional” according to the perspective of the Saudi society. She stated that the Prophet said, “take wisdom from *alhumira*’a [the Prophet’s wife Aisha],” indicating that the Prophet encouraged and advised his people to consult women. She argued that religion was fair between men and women and gave women their rights, adding that although the government supports and empowers women, especially with the announcement of *Saudi Vision 2030*, women were not yet equal; men still do not yet fully accept women as leaders. Maya also stated that “*wasta*, favouritism, and inequality” were also causes of major conflicts with her manager, forcing her to eventually resign from the position.

When we discussed the personal barriers that Maya faced as a female leader, she sighed and said, “I am a workaholic, and this has had a bad effect on my health mainly due to stress and pressure.” Societal barriers for Maya confined her as a leader. The patriarchal society that favours men over women strongly influenced the organization’s culture. Because of this, Maya found herself sometimes selecting a strategy to avoid any conflict with men’s views.

Maya stated that the decision to resign from her leadership position reverberated continuously in her mind. Nevertheless, what motivated her to keep on navigating the labyrinth for 25 years was her strong faith in God, her patriotism for her country, and her belief that “picturesque paths cannot be discovered without getting lost.” She also stated that her leadership was guided by spiritual and ethical values (morality) that helped her to have confidence in her performance, role, and that her state of mind may have provided additional strength in handling multiple tasks that came with higher expectations. Thus, during Maya’s career trajectory, she gained valuable experiences that assisted her in navigating the labyrinth and turned barriers into invaluable opportunities.

Family support had played a critical role in Maya’s success throughout her navigation of the labyrinth. Maya said her husband understood her role as a leader and provided her with constant support. In addition, Maya’s friends were strong sources of motivation and support. She said she consulted them when contemplating serious decisions and listened to their valuable insights to learn beneficial lessons that helped her to navigate the labyrinth.

In terms of professional leadership development, Maya attended several training programs to develop and enhance her leadership skills. She said, “I depend on myself to search for the professional training that I need, and I read a lot about leadership and management.” She added that the training available at the universities was too general and not specific enough on developing leadership or building effective teamwork. However, Maya noted that there was discrimination in some of the university’s professional training because it was only available to men, especially if it took place abroad. In addition, Maya indicated that compensation and rewards were provided to men in leadership positions, whereas none was provided to their female counterparts.

Maya’s advice to aspiring and current female leaders was, first, to be “capable and assertive enough to make difficult decisions and manage difficult circumstances while still working to create a collegial and cooperative environment.” Second, know your “roles and

responsibilities,” learn “the organization’s rules and regulations and protect yourself.” She encouraged women leaders to “record everything you do.” Third, “never ever agree [to] any request by phone, make everything official” because men are waiting for any mistakes that women accidentally make. Lastly, she stated that female leaders should focus on “self-confidence, knowledge, integrity, honesty, respect, trust, and justice, and make them their lights in navigating the path to leadership along with their trust in God.” These were Maya’s words of encouragement to aspiring female leaders.

Angela

Angela was another former leader who had occupied several leadership positions in a university for 16 years and resigned from the position three months before the interview. At the beginning of the interview, Angela seemed excited to share her stories and experiences with me, as the title of my study attracted her.

Angela’s background in administration and leadership was derived from her Master and Ph.D. degrees in Leadership Policy and Planning. In addition, she was a member of several departmental committees on which the dean and vice-dean also served. This gave her the chance to observe and learn from them. These contributions increased her knowledge and experience in formal leadership and improved her ability to communicate with people. Angela was a keen reader of administration and management, which she did to keep herself updated and improve her leadership capacity. She loved to read Frederick Taylor’s theories and practices on how to manage people and increase their motivation at work. She had a website where she provided administrative consultations and had written some books on the topic.

The path to leadership, as Angela described it, “was complicated and dark” at the beginning. Angela said she struggled as a female leader who worked in a patriarchal society, where men have the privilege to occupy upper positions and women are relegated to lower positions in the administration. Her vision as a leader was to be fair with everyone and to ignore *wasta*. She professed to having a strong belief in God: In her view, no matter what she faced in her career, she believed that God would help her, as everything functions in accordance with God’s will.

Angela observed that reaching the top female position in her university was not a difficult mission; her quick path to the top female rank meant that “a person had to kiss hands or be under wings.” These are Arabic idioms meaning that an individual had to always obey, agree with

everything, and refrain from complaining even if decisions and policies contradicted the person's beliefs. Sometimes, reaching top leadership positions, as Angela pointed out, depended on "nepotism, not on leadership capabilities and abilities," and this was what irritated her while she was a leader. However, Angela's grit and fortitude were her primary tools in navigating the labyrinth of leadership. Angela was not able to continue her leadership path, so she gave the opportunity to others.

Angela pointed out that she faced many barriers during her journey. The generation gap between her and other faculty members was one of her major challenges. According to Angela when she started out, she did not find a welcoming and warm atmosphere in the department because she was the youngest and most qualified individual in administration; therefore, her colleagues were concerned that she might replace them in their positions. However, when they got to know her better and realized that she was an active member of the department who was simply committed to doing her best, the administration asked her to get involved with several committees. Angela suggested that instead of calling the challenges she encountered in the organization 'organizational barriers,' she preferred to call them 'organizational culture barriers' because organizational and cultural barriers are strongly connected and have great influence on leaders, administrators, and faculty members' performance and effectiveness.

Based on Angela's years of experience, she stated that "individuals who have limited knowledge about the organization's rules, regulations, organizational structure, and leadership skills" could find the leader's role complicated. Angela commented on some pertinent issues relating to organizational barriers that women face. She said,

in governmental sectors such as PSI, women still face many challenges, perhaps the most prominent of which are organizational challenges. For instance, administrative and financial dependency, the limited powers granted, the length of power and central lines, the limited opportunities available for professional growth and advancement, the lack of participation in decision-making, and the weakness of the allocated budgets.

Angela also stressed the need for administrators to have clear standards before selecting a leader because these standards are significant in defining a leader's strength and weakness; they should also form the basis for essential professional training. Angela believed that organizations with no standards create professional barriers for female leaders. *Wasta*, for Angela, is another

professional barrier because as she stated “it is a source of injustice and unfairness” as it supports some women’s career progression and inhibits the careers of others.

Angela also referred to the impact of personal barriers in navigating the labyrinth of leadership, emphasizing that it is important for a leader to separate personal issues from work responsibilities to be fair. Although Angela had a good relationship with fellow faculty members, she found some difficult to get along with. To perform her job, she had to effectively communicate with staff and delegate some duties to them. “The inability to balance family obligations and work responsibilities” was a personal barrier for Angela. She indicated that fear, stress, cantankerousness, and hastiness in making decisions were her weaknesses. To overcome them, she attended workshops and training programs and learned the strategy of counting to 10 to remain calm and be patient.

The societal barrier for Angela was the dominance of men in the Saudi society, which is tied to the organizational structure as well. Angela was frustrated that departmental chairs’ perspectives were not taken into consideration in the university council, whereas the university council’s perspective was considered in department committees. As women’s campuses operated under the umbrella of male campuses, men tended to dominate the university council, meaning women’s opinions were mostly ignored. In addition, she stated that the constant intervention of men diminished women’s freedom to make decisions.

To overcome the barriers and successfully navigate the leadership labyrinth, Angela stated that “commitment, fear of God, the separation between work and personal life, and admission of my mistakes” were tools she used to proceed along the leadership path. She also stated that KSB were her keys to overcoming the barriers. She stressed the importance of knowledge as it improves leaders’ skills, provides them with a foundation from which they can understand people, and helps them to communicate effectively.

Although Angela confirmed that family support was a key element for a leader’s success, she had little support. As a result, she struggled to pave her path and achieve her goals. Angela described herself as an “*iron woman*” because she had to deal with children, family obligations, work responsibilities, and societal activities with no household helper to assist her. Because she had no help, she faced conflicts in balancing her work and family duties. Angela indicated that during her time as a leader, women had no rights to apply for domestic assistant—only men

could— but thanks to the new *Saudi Vision 2030 Policy*, women today have more rights and can apply for domestic help.

Angela indicated that the university where she currently worked provided support for faculty members and staff but added that this support was inadequate for most women leaders, especially those who were focusing on professional development in leadership and management. Angela explained that because her background was in management and administration, “I provided support and training for faculty members and anyone who sought my assistance” to help them in navigating the labyrinth of leadership.

At the end of the interview, when she was asked to give advice to current and aspiring leaders, Angela said, “fear God and be fair to everyone.” She also provided the following poignant recommendation to help leaders succeed in their roles. First, obtain the basic knowledge of leadership and management; second, acknowledge the organization’s rules and regulations and the position’s roles and responsibilities; third, empower oneself by increasing knowledge and seeking opportunities to learn leadership skills; fourth, do not hesitate to ask for help from experienced people; fifth, be creative in solving problems; and, finally, communicate effectively and build positive relationships.

Sophie

Sophie was a former vice-chair for a department in the university where she worked for 12 years but had recently resigned from the position. At the beginning of the interview, Sophie’s voice was a little bit apprehensive; however, when I started to explain the purpose of my research and the meaning of ‘labyrinth,’ which is similar to a common TV program called “The Fort,” she relaxed and gladly shared her experiences and how she navigated the leadership labyrinth.

Sophie’s experience in leadership was initiated from working closely with department chairs for several years. Acknowledging that she lacked formal preparation for the position, she improved her leadership abilities by attending courses and workshops on leadership. She managed to attend more than 50 national and international workshops and developmental training courses (in leadership, management, effective communication, administrative development, time management, and other topics) sometimes she attended workshops on the same topic more than once just to gain more knowledge.

Sophie stated that she would do any tasks that her supervisors asked her to do, did them perfectly, and never expected a reward or even praise. She eagerly looked for any opportunity

that aided her leadership development. These opportunities enhanced her abilities and experience and convinced her manager in upper administration to promote her to a leadership position.

Sophie's path in navigating the labyrinth of leadership was complicated, as she did not find a paved road or a role with clear responsibilities. In her view, leadership is not related to a specific position, she said whenever there is a cooperative team, understanding, and achievement, there is effective leadership. She manifested her spiritual values through exemplary behaviour when performing her duties as a leader and through her relations with others:

to be a great leader, I have to rely on and trust God, and ask for his guidance and support throughout the day. Humility, if you are not humble, you don't respect people and you are not honest with them. Demonstrate our Islamic qualities such as integrity, honesty, patience, fairness, etc., you will not only grow but also excel.

As this quote indicates, Sophie firmly believed that the key for leaders' success was their relationship with God. As she added, "trust and fear God." Sophie also explained that, in her view, the labyrinth and leadership are dissimilar:

a leader has a vision, a long-term plan, knowledge of her role, an effective team, and always expects what will happen in the future, whereas in a labyrinth, in my perspective, there are walls, dead ends, and muds that will prevent a leader from reaching the goal. Furthermore, the labyrinth's walls are strong with no gaps or soft walls that a person can find a way out and there is no way to return. For all these differences, I don't see my path of leadership as a labyrinth.

Sophie continued by declaring, "*Alhamdulillah* (Praise be to God) I enjoyed my path of leadership even when obstacles are there, I am always enthused to tackle them because leaders are risk-takers."

In terms of obstacles, Sophie noted that there are many obstacles that female leaders face. Organizational barriers were her main concern. She drew attention to the fact that unlike universities in most other countries, Saudi universities are divided into two sections (male and female) on the same campus. She explained that because of the structure of society, men are given "more authority" than women; thus, most leadership positions are occupied by men. She added that because women have recently entered the general workforce, there are very few in upper leadership positions. The main reason for their absence at the top is the male-dominated, paternal culture, which Sophie identified as a barrier, especially in decision making, in which

women do not participate as they have limited authority. At first, Sophie could not recall any stories about professional barriers from her time in leadership positions, but, on reflection, she declared that the lack of job descriptions and clarity in rules at the university were professional hurdles at the beginning of her career. Sophie indicated that she could separate personal issues from work issues and that this ability had enabled her to build effective relationships with her administrators, faculty members, and students. During the interview, she mentioned that personal barriers for her were the workload and pressure, saying “pressure, pressure, pressure.” The stress severely affected her social life because it hampered her ability to socialize. She said she had almost no time at all for social activities.

Sophie also identified the background and qualities that successful leaders need to overcome barriers like the ones she identified. First, she said experience plays a crucial role in preparing leaders to be strong and able to overcome adversity. Second, knowledge, skills, and certain leadership behaviours are critical for a leader. Knowledge can be obtained from “what you read, your training, your observations. Knowledge is the basic structure that guides leaders to acquire new skills and learn behaviours that are appropriate for a leader.” Third, according to Sophie, intention and goals were also essential for leaders to navigate the labyrinth of leadership. Fourth, successful leaders must have certain qualities. In Sophie’s view, they must be patient, prepared to take risks, open, courageous, knowledgeable, able to think critically, brave enough to identify solutions, respectful and respected, and loved by the people with whom they work. She emphasized the word “giving” twice as she continued to speak about leadership. Sophie argued, “Leaders should give endlessly without asking for anything in return in order to gain the experience and capabilities of leadership that make them successful in navigating the leadership path.” She mentioned that on the leadership path “you reap what you sow.” Sophie beamed with pride as she indicated:

Alhamdulillah I didn’t feel afraid, neither was I fearful of responsibilities in this position because when a leader has a thorough understanding of her role and the organization’s rules, regulations, and visions and is able to articulate them to the staff, she will have courage to navigate the path of leadership.

Experience in prior leadership roles at the university helped Sophie to effectively balance home responsibilities and work obligations. She also stated that she had a helpful and understanding husband, adding, “this is really what encouraged and motivated me” as a leader.

Sophie also highlighted the role of support for leaders. Although she did not receive much support from the organization, she stated that she depended on herself to search for and select the appropriate training and workshops to enhance her knowledge and skills. The last professional training that Sophie attended was entitled *Leadership Management International (LMI)*. She said that it consisted of five sessions on effective leadership, transformational leadership, and many other roles for leaders. She emphasized the advantage of preparing others to be leaders; therefore, she organized some workshops and mentored students. When asked about *Vision 2030*, Sophie noted that this vision has greatly empowered women and provided them with the support that helps to smooth their path in navigating the labyrinth of leadership, yet there are many more areas that need improvement. She said that before the Saudi *Vision 2030*, women were under men's umbrella because of the policy of guardianship, but now a lot of things have changed, especially regarding women's issues; women are allowed to drive and can travel without a male guardian's approval. Sophie also mentioned that she received significant support from her father whom she considered a role model. She attributed all her success to her father.

At the end of the interview, Sophie's advice to current and potential leaders was "don't take work issues personally and remember that a leader has to separate her work life from her home life to stay healthy and reduce stress, pressure, and other health issues." She also advised potential leaders "to be aware of the organization's rules and policies," to avoid letting "temporary obstacles" stop them from reaching their goals, to "be patient and devise strategies to overcome challenges." She added, "work hard, give up some things to learn, and understand every detail to gain knowledge and experience." Lastly Sophie stated, "trust in God," she stressed this advice three times, while stating, "don't spend your time trying to satisfy this individual or dissatisfy others; "to manage effectively, just be fair to everyone." To Sophie, trust was extremely important, and she concluded her advice to potential and current leaders with that important element of leadership.

Summary

In this chapter, I presented participants' perspectives regarding their journeys in navigating the labyrinth of leadership, the barriers that they faced, how they overcame them, the kind of support that was provided throughout their journeys and end with their advice to prospective or fellow leaders. A total of eight participants were interviewed once, however, some follow-up interviews were also conducted to obtain a clearer and deeper understanding of the

data that they presented. The purpose of this chapter was to provide readers with clear insights into the interview content before embarking on the analytical phase. In the next chapter, I present findings and analysis of data with themes that emerged themes.

CHAPTER 5: ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

This chapter presents the analysis and findings of my research. The purpose of the study was achieved by analyzing the KSB that Saudi female academic leaders used in navigating the labyrinth of leadership in three public PSIs in the Makkah region. According to most of the respondents, navigating the labyrinth of leadership can be both a rewarding and exhausting experience. The experience was rewarding because of the opportunities that the respondents gained in leadership that allowed them to develop skills and expand knowledge in fulfilling their roles. At the same time, the experience was exhausting because of the numerous barriers they faced in the labyrinth that necessitated their constant attention.

Research Question 1

The first research question was, ‘how do Saudi female academic leaders in the Makkah region described the ways in which they navigate the labyrinth of leadership?’ In the data collected on respondents’ experiences, the overarching theme from this research question was “women’s pathways in navigating the labyrinth of leadership.” Findings coalesced around five sub-themes: (a) leadership pathways; (b) influential individuals; (c) career progression in accessing the labyrinth; (d) leadership opportunities; and (e) *wasta* (nepotism) and leadership. Each of these sub-themes are discussed in the following section.

Leadership Pathways

Participants in this study gave unique descriptions of their pathways to and through leadership, even though they worked in the same region. In this study, the labyrinth metaphor is used to encapsulate the winding paths, dead ends, and maze-like pathways full of challenges and supports that women traverse as they accessed and maintained leadership positions (Eagly & Carli, 2007). Almost all participants agreed that the metaphor ‘labyrinth’ mirrored their leadership paths. They noted that moving through the labyrinth was often cumbersome and slow, similar to their progress to and through leadership.

Maya, for instance, described her path as being “complicated” and revealed that as she moved along the path, her self-awareness and knowledge helped her to work to change the

negative perceptions that some men had of women in leadership. In addition, the barriers she faced with her male director relating to work procedures made her leadership path full of twists and turns. She stated how being patient assisted her to overcome the conflicts with her director. According to Maya “he [the director] did not want ‘*hurma*’ (a woman) to tell him what to do at work.” Therefore, she had to understand his mindset and personality to know how to deal with him, and how to confront his bias.

In a similar manner, Angela described her path as being “complex.” She said that during her time in a leadership position, she observed that leaders were often expected to follow an unwritten rule, that of “kissing hands,” meaning that progression through the labyrinth would be easier if a leader was fully obedient to senior management without question. She felt that this manipulation of the system negatively affected leaders’ ability to be true and nullified the use of evaluating individuals based on leadership standards.

Sophie, on the other hand, did not agree that her leadership pathway should be described as a ‘labyrinth.’ Her view was somewhat contradictory to what I found in literature. She indicated that she was knowledgeable about the role of leaders and felt that her leadership skills and knowledge had helped her to navigate her journey with enjoyment. However, even though she claimed that her pathway could not be described as a labyrinth, she alluded to some challenges and regular daily barriers such as: pressure, the overload of work, male interference, and isolation at the beginning of her journey. Even though she felt that she was able to navigate her way through these challenges, she acknowledged that they did exist.

All other participants revealed that their leadership pathways were challenging and complicated. They also suggested other metaphors that could describe their leadership journey; although they did not provide specific Arabic metaphors, they imaginatively described the pathways of leadership with the following descriptions: walking in a forest, swimming in the deep ocean, hiking in a mountain without knowing what is there, as an ECG reading that is always fluctuating, and feeling like a clown who has to play with balls and never let them fall. In addition, some of the descriptive languages that they used to characterize their paths were “full of obstacles”, “long”, “vague and dark”, “complex”, “uneven”, “uneasy”, and “indirect path.” Although most participants painted gloomy descriptions of their leadership pathways, they all wanted to make things better for their staff, colleagues, students, the community, and their

country. Therefore, they engaged in the labyrinth of leadership to solve its puzzle and pave the paths for other females to be successful leaders in Saudi PSIs.

Influential Individuals

Another sub-theme that surfaced was the role of influential individuals who supported Saudi female academic leaders' entrance and journey to and through leadership. These individuals varied among participants; for example, three out of eight participants stated that their fathers were role models who influenced them to pursue leadership positions. Alice professed that her father was a professor at the same university (in the male campus), and he was and still is her role model. She stated that "my father knows most of the university's rules. Whenever I am overwhelmed at work or disappointed because I got rejected for a project, I consult him; he guides me to the path that I should take." Sophie also indicated that her father was her role model. She stated:

my father was not an academic, but from an early age, he instilled in me the need for equity and frequently told me, to "be like a man [a metaphor used for strength], don't ever underestimate yourself." Even when I cry for something I want, he tells me "Don't cry, be strong, try to solve your issues by yourself, depend on yourself." He raised us [me and my siblings] with leadership attributes, such as independence, persistence, and self-confidence.

Nicole was fortunate to have her father who was a senior colleague as an ardent supporter of her leadership endeavours. She stated, "I always seek my father's advice all the time, and he pushes me to move forward. He is so proud of me and inspires me to reach the highest positions." Nicole noted that she is the first one in her family to pursue graduate studies.

Some participants declared that members of the senior administrative team in the female section provided them with support and worked closely with them while they were faculty members. These participants expressed their gratitude to those seniors for identifying their leadership capabilities. They stated that had it not been for the nurture, encouragement, and guidance that these leaders gave to them they would not have pursued and succeeded as leaders.

Support also came from close friends, Isabella indicated that her friends boosted her confidence and ignited her pursuit of leadership. On the other hand, two participants did not recall any individual who encouraged them; they indicated that their own passions and interests in leadership motivated them to pursue graduate studies in leadership and administration.

Career Progression in Accessing the Labyrinth

As mentioned earlier, influential individuals supported participants in accessing the labyrinth. It was also crucial to unearth participants' progression experiences that led to their acquisition of leadership positions. The years of experience in formal leadership roles for participants ranged from 2 to 25 years. The data collected from a newly appointed leader to some highly experienced leaders enriched my research with valuable lessons that participants learnt about the navigation of the labyrinth. Participants had unique journeys because of their diverse circumstances, and this was what made this section noteworthy.

The data revealed that all participants had quite direct access to leadership but progressed along different paths through the labyrinth. The direct path (or, metaphorically, accessing a key to the gate of the labyrinth) became available for participants of this study. The prior leadership careers among these participants varied. Some participants declared that their career in leadership started when they were active leaders while they were students in high schools, or while they were studying abroad and pursuing their graduate studies in leadership and management. Others shared stories of how close friends noticed their talent in leadership while they were school monitors, so they worked to develop this talent. However, regarding leadership in PSIs, seven of the eight respondents stated that their career progression to leadership started when senior administrators at their university motivated them to chair departmental committees. These senior administrators noted participants' success in such committees and recommended them to be leaders. Maya, for instance, shared that at work, senior administrators constantly noted that she was "a leader by nature." In her discussion, she stated:

at home parents made me responsible for my siblings and cousins as I was the first grandchild in the family. During my years at school, I was seen as the ideal student and the monitor. I had to take on roles of responsibility from an early age and this shaped my personality and developed my leadership capacities.

Maya declared that she had 25-years-experience as a leader and worked in several leadership positions in a PSI, and these positions enriched her leadership knowledge. Maya also noted that accessing the labyrinth of leadership was an inevitable result of working hard and mimicking her senior administrators. Although she declared that she had no PD in leadership at the beginning of her career progression, her contributions to administrative tasks in the faculty honed her skills and expanded her knowledge.

Sophie's progression to leadership was also a result of her long experience in a PSI and hard work. She had 12 years of experience in leadership. She declared:

from the beginning of my trajectory, I did not object to doing any kind of work assigned to me by my seniors. I used to do it without asking for a reward or showing any reluctance. I always asked for work, 'more work means more experience' to learn. I also enrolled in several courses and workshops more than sixty, sometimes I took the same course twice to get more knowledge. These gave me experience and extensive knowledge of administrative matters. The senior administrators saw that I could run and manage a department with no conflicts or complaints, thereby, they selected me as a leader.

All these factors helped Sophie to pursue her career in leadership, starting from teaching as a faculty member till she was promoted to the position of a leader.

Angela, who had 16 years of experience in leadership, had occupied several leadership duties at the university. She declared that there was a lack of PD for female leaders at the university. Nevertheless, her determination to pursue the journey and change the stereotypical picture of women leaders gave her the power to navigate the labyrinth. She shared her effective participation in faculty committees, and how these committees helped her demonstrate leadership capabilities that she felt influenced her transition into the deanship at the university. Faye had a similar career progression to leadership as some of the other participants. She stated:

after coming back from abroad, I started as a faculty member and chaired several committees such as the students' practical training committee, and quality management committee, by serving on such committees I got valuable opportunities to shape my administrative skills and equipped me for leadership duties.

Faye's administrative knowledge and skills resulted in her being promoted to the position of vice-chair of a department for almost three years. According to Faye, her career progression was challenging, and she had to struggle for a while. Faye also declared the influence of ambition and eagerness on her career progression. These factors mobilized her to invest heavily into reading and learning about leadership. Her interest in reading about personality and emotional intelligence helped her to better understand people and be more empathetic to their needs while she was a leader.

Similarly, Alice shared that her role in chairing faculty committees was instrumental in honing her skills and knowledge about leadership. She stated that while studying for her Ph.D.

abroad, she gained the opportunity to take two courses in management and leadership to prepare herself before coming back to work. Those courses of leadership made her aware of leadership and management. So, when she received the degree and came back to the university, senior administrators nominated and appointed her as a vice-chair of the department. This position gave her the opportunity to practice what she had gained from her studies in her new role.

In terms of visibility in the career progression to leadership, participants stated that their visibility to senior leaders highlighted them as potential leadership candidates and led to their appointments in formal leadership roles. Isabella purported that “leadership placements in the university are often based on recommendations and or on relationships with senior supervisors.” Therefore, she argued that “it is essential to market yourself, to let them get to know you.” Ariana as well made herself visible through her hard work and commitments. She also emphasized the role of having good relationships with senior administrators “I worked closely with my supervisor who noticed my administrative talents, and that qualified me for a leadership position.” In addition, she pointed out that she recognized the value of participating in PD courses to maximize her potential as a leader. She further reported that by “participating in PD courses, my knowledge about leadership strategies and practices has increased and the new knowledge is assisting me to perform better in my role as a leader.” Nicole’s career progression and accessing the path to leadership were anomalous to the other leaders in this study. She noted that her multiple paper publications and conference presentations facilitated her entry into leadership. She further stated:

I was appointed to a leadership position at the university within a few weeks after being employed. Woefully, I received no prior preparation nor guidance for the position to which I was appointed. My appointment to the position was at the end of the semester. I had to register and check students’ grades. I found myself in a critical position as I had no experience nor clear picture of my role.

To crown it all, participants had relatively similar career progressions to leadership and accessing the labyrinth either before or after their appointments. All participants started their careers in teaching in the PSIs; over time they were awarded tenure and promoted to positions of leadership with their doctoral degrees. Participants also revealed that although PD in the PSIs was not adequate for female leaders, they pursued their career progression in the labyrinth of leadership depending on other strategies/keys. In sum, serving in various administrative roles in

the university, visible engagement in committees, and building good relationships with seniors, facilitated Saudi female academic leaders' progression and success in leadership.

Leadership Opportunities

Almost all interviewees admitted that they would not be where they were if they had not taken the opportunities for leadership as soon as they were presented. Academic females who are interested in administrative roles should pursue and look for leadership opportunities that allow them to prove and showcase their leadership capacities. It is not necessarily that those opportunities must be directly focused on administration. However, it becomes the responsibility of those potential administrators to find the niche in which leadership can be shown and practiced. In this regard, Sophie reported a detailed guideline for current and potential leaders on how to take advantage of leadership opportunities. In her words, aspiring leaders should:

take every opportunity to lead that comes their way because often it is the gate that opens the pathway to greater things. Do whatever needs to be accomplished, try to understand the organizational culture and the major and minor elements that are at work. Practice what you learn and read about leadership to fully understand it. Do not ask for a prize or reward because these opportunities will shape your personality later and make you fully aware of things around you.

Sophie further emphasized the need for aspiring leaders to give of their time and service to obtain new skills and gain knowledge. She stated that:

a prospective leader must give initially and indefinitely so that she can be able to work and reach the position of leadership. Work involves giving and taking and giving must be very large. Giving sometimes involves your time, health, or money, but at the end of the day, you will gain a lot, such as experience, personality style, and knowledge. Simply, give and you will receive at the end.

The participant explained that hard work might be exhausting but the reward would be beyond expectations. Sophie further stated that “knowledge should be associated with practice, and experience should be demonstrated otherwise it would not be valuable.” Giving was also identified by Isabella as an important element for prospective leaders to consider. She stated “successful leaders are able to give. Giving in time, efforts, rewards, and ideas that help to bring out the best of staff.” She also mentioned that “the act of giving helps to boost followers’ satisfaction and improve their sense of well-being.” Maya indicated that “women working in

Saudi universities should seek and accept every opportunity to lead because they may come and go in a nanosecond.” In terms of acceptance of leadership opportunities, Maya stated that “it is all about your decision to take the opportunity and make use of every advantage that it presents.” Maya also spoke about hard work, and how it helped her to gain leadership opportunities. She stated:

I found myself in a position where I was in a leadership role after coming back from the scholarship, so I worked hard to prove my ability to others. I had been responsible for arranging courses for students and at the same time worked as a coordinator for student distance exams for five regions in Saudi Arabia. I worked hard to manage and prepare exam questions with different samples for these regions and for university students at the same time. So, people in academia knew my name through my achievements. Then I was appointed to my first leadership position in the organization because of my professional reputation and hard work.

Regarding opportunities, timing is a critical factor. Isabella, for example, stressed how it is important for individuals to react in a timely manner. She noted, “if you do not take the opportunity as it pops up, you might not get it again for some time.” In support of Isabella’s view, Nicole said:

I was appointed vice-chair of the department in the university within the first month of hiring. Although I knew how difficult it would be for me as a leader with no experience, I did not want to lose the opportunity. I accessed the labyrinth with no map or compass. My entry into leadership was rough but being in tough positions forced me to learn more in a short time.

Overall, these women viewed leadership opportunities as great sources of exploring and accessing leadership positions in Saudi PSIs. They believed that if leadership opportunities were not taken, they will pass like clouds, so the wise thing for female leaders to do is to take advantage of these opportunities.

***Wasta* (Nepotism) and Leadership**

Wasta/Nepotism was a sub-theme that emerged from respondents’ data. Three participants indicated that *wasta*/nepotism was an indirect path to the labyrinth of leadership. Angela declared her objection to some people’s use of ‘*wasta*’ to fulfil ambition and described it as a short, but unfair path through the leadership process. She indicated that *wasta* “destroys any

form of equality in work” and increased leaders’ psychological distress (stress, anxiety, depression) because of the unfair treatment of others. She gave examples of some new appointees who became leaders in her department because of *wasta*, their family’s high societal status or the fact that their father was a leader who occupied a top position of leadership in the region. She stated that *wasta* had negative impacts not only on the person but on the educational setting as well. As these newly appointed leaders lacked knowledge in leadership, and this resulted in conflicts in the department based on some of their decisions and/or indecisions.

In the same vein, Alice expressed with sorrow that *wasta* was instrumental in preventing her from accessing the opportunity to enroll in professional training. She stated that the training was offered only to certain individuals who were favored through these social networks, thus, *wasta* prevents individuals from getting what they deserve and gives others what they do not deserve.

Maya declared that some women described *wasta* as simply getting support from their male guardians (a male family member), to help them acquire what they want such as professional learning or promotion; they totally ignored the unfairness of the practice. She was frustrated with *wasta* especially when she found an issue in her department that was related to it. She shared an incident that happened with some faculty members and staff who had the opportunity to attend a training session for several years in a row. Participation in such sessions was limited to a certain number of participants. She noticed that the repeated participation of these individuals was preventing other female leaders from having the opportunity to attend these sessions and thereby limiting their chances of promotion. To solve that problem, Maya said she investigated participants’ enrollment sheets and discovered that for several years approximately twenty names were always on the list of participants. She notified her supervisor and asked for the permission to act. She limited these individuals’ participation in the training sessions and gave the chance to others who had not had the opportunity to attend before. It was hard work for her, but she managed to provide more equitable opportunities for staff and faculty members to improve themselves by participating in these sessions. In sum, *wasta* might be an easy means for some individuals in traversing the labyrinth, but its negative consequences last forever. Table 5.1. displays the overarching theme and the sub-themes from respondents’ perspectives regarding research question 1.

Table 5.1. Summary of findings for research question 1

Overarching Theme	Sub-themes	Findings
Experiences of navigating the labyrinth of leadership	-Influential individuals.	- Father, close friends, and senior administrators.
	-Career progression in accessing the labyrinth.	- Visibility, committees, and family members.
	-Leadership opportunities	- Taking advantage of opportunities, giving, hard work, and self-development.
	-Wasta (Nepotism) and leadership.	- The negative consequences of <i>wasta</i> on leaders.
	-Leadership pathways.	- Women’s paths to leadership were cumbersome and full of twists and turns.

Overall, Saudi female academic leaders had several influential individuals who encouraged them to pursue the leadership pathways. However, their pathways were indirect and full of twists and turns. Data revealed that Saudi female academic leaders took opportunities to lead in accessing the labyrinth as soon as they were presented; these opportunities allowed them to showcase their leadership capacities and become leaders in the Saudi PSIs.

Research Question 2

The second research question was, ‘what are the societal, organizational, professional, and personal barriers faced by Saudi female academic leaders in the labyrinth of leadership in universities in the Makkah region and how did they navigate despite these barriers?’ The overarching theme was ‘leadership barriers and overcoming strategies.’ The data showed that Saudi female academic leaders faced numerous barriers in leadership, with each turn in the labyrinth requiring a decision. Participants revealed that their representation was not fairly proportioned in top administrative positions in PSIs as compared to males; their paths were more complicated if they desired to ascend to the few available top leadership positions for women. The Saudi culture and traditions favour males over females and some females still accept this societal view of leadership. The narrowed or complicated paths of leadership in the labyrinth described by some participants revealed the cumbersome ways that women move through and around the barriers to achieve their goals. This section presents an analysis of the four types of barriers: societal, organizational, professional, and personal that obstructed women’s

advancement in the labyrinth of leadership in Saudi PSIs. Sub-themes are also included in relation to each barrier.

Societal Barriers

The conservative and male-dominated culture that prevails in the Saudi society hinders female academic leaders from ascending to leadership positions in PSIs. The following barriers are strongly related, and they encapsulated the main impediments to Saudi women's progression. These sub-themes are: (a) male-dominated culture; (b) stereotypes/discrimination; and (c) sex-segregation policy.

Male-dominated culture. There was a consensus among all participants that the intervention of men was beyond frustrating. Faye, for example, explained that the male-dominated culture complicates the advancement of female leaders. She articulated that a significant barrier to women's leadership stems from the tradition that favors men over women and grants more authority to men, hence their dominance in leadership positions. She expressed her annoyance by declaring:

why is a woman always restricted by a male manager? Why can't she be the dean and vice-dean? Why do those positions have to be held by men? Why can't a woman be the chair of a department with a man as her vice-chair? Why do men have to be administrators to women in leadership positions?

In the same vein, Maya explained how patriarchal cultural norms had shaped her role and restricted her success. She indicated that these norms prevented her from achieving her leadership potential in PSIs because "men always feel they are superior and that they know better than women." Alice's reflection mirrored Maya's. She noted that the male-dominated culture had strongly impacted women's abilities to make decisions, engage in strategic plans and PD programs, and advance in leadership. She provided the following example: "The position of chair of departments is only occupied by men, females are not entitled to be in such positions." Alice continued by stating that "most upper-level leadership positions are dominated by men, lower-levels were for women." Sophie declared that there was hope that this situation would change with the new *Vision 2030 Policy*. She pointed out that a few female vice-deans have attended meetings with men in male campuses, but "still we [female] are not allowed to attend formal meetings that are held with the university council and the MOE due to the male-dominated culture in our society."

Overall, participants agreed that the male-dominated culture negatively influenced their effectiveness and limited their freedom as leaders in Saudi PSIs.

Stereotypes/discrimination. Two participants referred to the negative perceptions of men towards women in using the word *hurma*. *Hurma* (a woman) is a term that was derived from the Turkish language and referred to the emperor (Sultan)'s wives and the female servants in his empire. In the Saudi society, it is considered a slang term, which means a minor, or a subordinate in a demeaning manner. Angela purported that this word annoyed her as it did not relate to the status of adult females and especially female leaders in academia.

Participants explained that stereotypes or negative perceptions of female leaders exist and were held by some men and women in PSIs. Maya, for instance, expressed her struggle to work along with her manager, who was a male in the men's section. She further stated that he had negative perceptions about her as a woman. Maya stated, "that man [her manager] did not expect me as a woman to be in leadership. He ignored me all the time and communicated directly with my staff without my knowledge." Maya further noted that she complained about her manager to the upper management, but they did not support her because "he was a man and men are always trustworthy." After a year and a half of her struggles with him, he was terminated. She commented that "the sad thing is he was terminated just because another man complained about him not a woman." Maya found it depressing that nothing was done about all her complaints, but action was taken because a man made a complaint.

Although women leaders faced discrimination mainly from men it was certainly not confined to them only. Discrimination was also present among females in the female campuses. Alice declared that discrimination existed in the process of selecting individuals to participate in PD courses, as mentioned earlier in Chapter 4. She further added "there are some gatekeepers" for PD training and how to get past them is difficult.

Sex-segregation policy. Participants discussed how sex-segregation restricted their networks, opportunities for building professional relationships, and access to knowledge resources. They felt that the policy of sex-segregation should not prevent academic female leaders from acquiring equity in top positions. Faye, Isabella, and Alice shared similar experiences pertinent to sex-segregation policy. Due to culture restrictions, they struggled to communicate with men when they tried to share their perspectives related to work procedures. Angela and Maya declared that because of sex-segregation policy, academic female leaders were

not allowed to share in strategic decision-making and were not allowed to attend the university council meetings. Ariana agreed with these statements and further wished that the policy of sex-segregation was replaced with a mixed-environment policy in Saudi PSIs.

Organizational Barriers

Due to the patriarchal culture in the Saudi society and the influence of tradition and religious practices, participants lamented several organizational hurdles that impeded their ascension and effectiveness as leaders. The organizational barriers that were most mentioned by participants and considered as the sub-themes were: (a) limited authority, (b) unclear rules and responsibilities, (c) centralization in decision-making, (d) marginalization, and (e) dual chain of command.

Limited authority. Limited authority was one of the major organizational barriers that participants experienced in their journeys. Alice and Faye shared their disappointment when their developmental plans for their departments in the female campus were rejected from male manager in the male campus. These respondents bemoaned the limited authority and inability to contact the dean or the rector [in the male campus] because it was not expected that women should disrupt the hierarchy. According to Alice, “I have no authority to respond or follow up on my requests, I have to depend on my chair to do so, male intervention restricted my effectiveness and limited my opportunities as a leader.” Alice mentioned that she could be more effective if she did not have to be constantly beseeching and depending on males from the male section of the university.

Faye declared that many females in her faculty did not want to be leaders because of the limited authority that restricts their creativeness. Angela, a former vice-dean, also declared that her position was considered a top leadership position, yet she had limited authority. She stated, “If I want to make a change in my department, I have to obtain my dean’s approval from the male campus, if I don’t, it will be rejected.” Sophie echoed that limited authority “restricted our creativity at work and it has a bad impact not only on faculty members but on students as well.” Respondents were of the view that if they were given greater autonomy, they would be more successful at leading.

Unclear rules and responsibilities. Participants were discontented with the lack of clarity of rules in their organizations. The vague or unclear rules led to uncertainty, and ambiguity in expectation or output. Faye indicated that the ambiguous rules placed her and other

female leaders in embarrassing situations with students and faculty members, especially if they were enquiring about issues relating to the department. Ariana pointed out that the lack of clarity of rules in the organization tremendously impacted the progress of work and delayed activity. This was noted by the delays in getting replies to requests from the men's campus as all official requests had to be approved by them.

Nicole revealed her struggles to access the department rules and regulations, because "even when I ask, I don't get accurate answers," she said. Nicole further stated that "sometimes I faced issues at work which need urgent clarification and I don't know how to deal with them because of the ambiguity in rules and policies." The lack of job descriptions and clarity of leaders' responsibilities "made me feel as if I had been lost in the forest and I have to figure out how to exist." Nicole's struggle with the lack of clarity in PSI was also shared by other respondents.

Isabella and Ariana also pointed out that constant updates and changes in the organization's rules and regulations were also a challenge for them. Continuous changes in policies create confusion and "foggy views" which need to be cleared to effectively deal with the situations. Maya stated "it is important to know rules, policies, and responsibilities" for work to flow smoothly.

Centralization in decision-making. The centralization in decision-making and the exclusion of academic women leaders from this process due to sex segregation were organizational hurdles that respondents had to overcome. Participants declared that they had limited opportunities in sharing and making decisions as leaders. Faye gave an example of an incident where a graduate female student wanted to defend her degree in the female section, however, "I had to ask my chairperson [in men's campus] to identify a suitable day in his timetable" for the defence. She further added, "I had no authority to decide on a day for my student although it would be held in the female section." Isabella and Maya declared that most decisions were made in the male campus, and female leaders had to implement these decisions. Ariana stated that the centralization of decision-making prevents academic female leaders from contributing to the strategic plan related to the university.

Marginalization. Marginalization was another organizational hurdle for two of the participants. Although participants admitted the role of the new *Vision 2030* in empowering Saudi women and how their situation was flourishing more than ever before, they lamented that

some men still did not accept the idea of women's empowerment in PSIs. Ariana stated that she experienced marginalization as a female leader at the beginning of her journey in leadership with her previous manager, who used to mute her while they were in a video conference. She referred to the negative perceptions that men had of women and the stereotypes that remained entrenched in the society. She further stated that this perception was slightly improved with the new *Vision 2030* policy, but not yet fully understood and accepted by men. Isabella declared how marginalization from her male chairperson placed her in embarrassing situations with students or faculty members. She said, "he didn't update me with the new policy/decisions" that were discussed in the departmental meetings and sometimes "I found things happened without my knowledge." Thus, being marginalized complicated women leaders' advancement in the labyrinth of leadership.

Dual chain of command. Another organizational barrier for participants was the dual chain of command on sex-segregated campuses. Maya shared her experience of how the dual chain of command negatively influenced her performance and increased her stress. She offered an example of when she proposed a training program with her supervisor's approval. However, when the supervisor sought the final approval from the chairperson in the men's campus, it was rejected. She further stated that to avoid such confusion "you must understand the organizational structure of your department and the whole organization" as the domination of men is still prevalent. Sophie had a similar perception to Maya's. She stated that the dual chain of command exists because of the complicated organizational structure of the two campuses which complicates the process of work. Sometimes she got an update to a policy from the vice-dean and another conflicting update to the same policy from the dean, so "I got confused regarding which policy I should follow." Getting directives from two different sources also presented barriers for female leaders to overcome in the labyrinth of leadership.

Professional Barriers

Participants suggested that professional barriers are strongly tied to organizational barriers; they stressed the importance of: (a) professional development (PD) (included female role models/mentors, and job descriptions), (b) technology (networking and communication) and I have used these as the sub-themes.

Professional development. All participants declared that there was no formal preparation for their transitions from academic roles to formal leadership. Although they alluded that their

participation in the departmental committees enhanced their managerial and interpersonal skills. However, they indicated that being in the position of leadership was completely different. They spoke about the importance of being prepared before taking on a leadership role. These women leaders felt that leadership preparation should be provided either through a mentor or professional training. The absence of mentorship or training programs complicated women's leadership paths and sometimes resulted in them quitting their roles as leaders.

Faye likened her appointment to the position of vice-chair at the university, as closely akin to "first time rafters who are unable to swim trying to successfully do white water rafting without a life jacket." The lack of leadership preparation was also mentioned by Nicole, a new leader, who stated that she had no clue what her role in leadership encompassed. She discussed her need for a role model, mentor, and job description, especially during the first month of her appointment to guide her through her journey, but she received none. Faye said she struggled a lot to figure out her role and duties but noted that what she had learned was valuable and beneficial. She pointed out that her lack of training and the stress that it caused her motivated her to draw a leadership map for aspiring leaders. She continued to document her responsibilities in a folder that could be used as a reference by those interested in pursuing leadership opportunities in Saudi PSIs.

Most participants revealed that they had to obtain professional training on their own. Two of the respondents referred to some PD courses provided by the organization as shaping their leadership styles, but Alice declared that these trainings were not enough and there was discrimination in the process of selecting the individuals to participate in them. In addition, respondents pointed out that they had to use their personal initiative to obtain PD activities which they believe are necessary to hone their craft and enrich their networking relationships. Despite of that, women's limited networking reduced their opportunities to reach senior leadership positions in Saudi PSIs.

Technology. Technology was also noted, particularly during COVID-19, as a tool that enabled women to work and remain in contact with supervisors and students. However, technology had positive and negative consequences for Saudi women leaders' work/life balance. Deciding when to make themselves accessible for meetings or replying to inquiries were ongoing challenges, particularly for women leaders with families. It was true that technology allowed participants to be flexible because it provided them with more choices in communication and

easier ways to integrate work and family life. However, it also blurred the boundaries of work and family time for participants. Respondents reported that because most of their work activity was through virtual means, they were constantly being contacted. Participants stated that they received work related emails at odd hours of the night and were expected to respond to them. They stated that they tried their best to keep up with the flood of emails and this meant that they had to spend considerable amount of family time doing work related activities.

Personal Barriers

Personal barriers are those obstacles that academic leaders experienced at the personal level that affect their work setting. These barriers could be seen in: (a) pressure of work, (b) fear of failure and low self-confidence, (c) leading diverse personalities, (d) isolation, and (e) work/life balance as the sub-themes. Family/work conflicts are both personal and organizational barriers and they affect especially women leaders who desire a career and a family; these female leaders must overcome the challenge of how to balance these two priorities.

Pressure of work. The overwhelming load of work was the key personal barrier for all participants. Alice stated, “the working hours are not sufficient to deal with my tasks, so I have to complete my work at home; I spend most of my working hours listening to students and faculty members’ complaints.” She said repeatedly “stress, stress, too much stress.” She stated that her stress level was heightened because she believed she needed to respond to every message she received from her staff even if those messages arrived late in the night.

Sophie also spoke about the pressure of work. She indicated that there was always stress at work, and she had little or no time for her social life. Similarly, Faye stated, “the overload of work impacts my mind, so I keep thinking about work issues at home and which sometimes prevent me from my social life.” She also pointed out that the current situation due to COVID-19 added more pressure than before.

Fear of failure and low self-confidence. Some participants shared that their low confidence made them fearful of making bad decisions or failing as leaders, especially at the beginning of their journeys. The fear of failure was at the top of Alice’s list of anxieties. She stated that she felt she had to be cautious “not to have red flags if I want to ascend to top position.” Ariana stated: “I have low self-confidence about my abilities, especially in the first two years of being a leader; I hesitated to make urgent decisions to avoid mistakes.” Fear was another personal barrier for Ariana who professed “I don’t want to upset anyone; I want everyone to love

me.” Similarly, Maya was fearful of making mistakes at work, especially at the beginning of her career. However, her self-confidence improved to a high level as people around her constantly encouraged her. At work, she developed an understanding of her department’s policy so she could confidently negotiate/argue with men. Sophie on the other hand did not recall any fear of anxiety during her leadership; she said fear of failure is something that was inevitable. She felt that making mistakes makes one wise as people learn from mistakes. In addition, she stated that low self-confidence and anxiety were not characteristics of effective leaders; good leaders must be courageous, confident, and risk-takers in order to be able to lead others.

Leading diverse personalities. The ability to deal with and manage diverse personalities at work was a personal hurdle for some participants, especially those who were relatively new to leadership. Alice’s major concerns were as she said, “how to manage people and effectively communicate with them according to their personalities especially when there was a conflict among faculty members or students.” Isabella faced difficulty in dealing with colleagues at work, especially as she stated with “rigid faculty members who were fearful for change and resisted any notion of innovation.” She continued by noting, “as soon as I became a leader, masks on people’s face dropped and I knew who my friends were and who were hypocrites.” In contrast, Sophie and Angela did not recall that many difficulties in leading diverse personalities; they believe that their long histories of dealing with people might have contributed to this. Nonetheless, they pointed out that diversity in personalities may be the main reason for conflict among faculty members and they emphasized the need to understand how to deal with diverse personalities.

Isolation. This sub-theme was mentioned by two of the participants. It appeared that participants who had greater social experiences were better able to understand the informal side of the organizational life where information exchange and networking took place. Sophie stated that the overload of her work duties and pressure isolated her from social life. However, she declared that this isolation might have contributed to her success in leadership as she totally focussed on her work and not on social activities. Conversely, it might be a determinant for her not ascending to top positions because she has limited relationships. In the same manner, Isabella stated that she worked in isolation as the work environment and some of her colleagues were not encouraging or welcoming to her. She continued by declaring that the leadership position had negatively affected her relationships with others “relationships with my close friends changed, they are apart from me” because she had no time to spend with them as before.

Work/life balance. Another barrier that some participants faced was the issue of work/life balance. Respondents stated that this was particularly prominent at the beginning of their leadership journeys. Angela stated that she faced many challenges and stress, and she was not able to balance family and work due to the lack of support from family at the beginning of her journey. She noted, “I had kids, and I was pregnant, and I had to deal with research and activities.” She further stated that “the inability to make the balance between work and life, pushed me always to think about quitting the position.” However, she said that she managed to pursue the journey with the support of her close friends. Nicole indicated that she has two children, a young girl and an infant boy who need most of her time. She declared, “I cannot find time to work on research or publication.” Similarly, Isabella shared her experience “it is hard to make the balance especially if my family don’t fully understand my role as a leader.” Although Isabella believed that family had great impact on her progression, she sometimes faced struggles because her family did not understand the commitments she had to make at work. Isabella recalled:

the lack of understanding from people around me about the nature of my work; I got busy as soon as I receive a message or call on the mobile at any time, which happens a lot during my family time. My parents complain, husband grumbles, sons as well. So, they sometimes ask me not to answer the calls or to hang up the phone, which I can’t. Because when I turn off the mobile and go to work, I find a lot of things happened without my knowledge. This put me in embarrassing situations resulting in my supervisors viewing me as ‘uncooperative,’ which is not true.

Because of this incident, the respondent suggested that the Saudi society should be made more aware of the role of women as leaders.

Ariana revealed that she had two children, and although she was still young, she was not thinking of having more as she had no time for family. Ariana said, “I wouldn’t reach to where I am if my children were younger.” In contrast, Sophie, Alice, and Maya indicated that they had no struggle balancing work and life; it seemed that they had a more stable home life that allowed them to progress in their careers. Alice declared: “I am single, and my family understands the nature of my work and supports me.” Maya noted that she has a supportive and understanding husband and her children are not young, thus, the structure of her family allowed her to balance between being a mother and a leader at work. Sophie alluded to benefit of an understanding

husband who helped her at home. Her response related to the conflict between home and work she stated that if the mother does her part at home and the father as well, there would be no such conflicts.

Table 5.2. summarizes the overarching theme, key barriers, and sub-themes based on participants' responses to research question 2.

Table 5.2. Summary of findings for research question 2

Overarching Theme	Key Barriers	Sub-Themes
Barriers to leadership	Societal barriers	- Male-dominated culture - Stereotypes/discrimination - Sex-segregation policy
	Organizational barriers	- Limited authority - Unclear rules and responsibilities - Centralization in decision-making - Marginalization - Dual chain of command
	Professional barriers	- Limited professional development - Technology (limited networks)
	Personal barriers	- Pressure of work - Fear of failure and low self-confidence - Leading diverse personalities - Isolation - Work/life balance

Overall, interviewees spoke of difficulty in balancing family with work, but none of them stated that this balance was impossible. Respondents suggested that if they focused on their career goals, they would be able to manage and organize their personal lives accordingly. Participants also suggested that having an understanding family and spouse were significant in maintaining the balance between their dual responsibilities.

Keys that Facilitate Navigation in the Labyrinth of Leadership

This section highlights the keys that facilitated Saudi female academic leaders in navigating the labyrinth of leadership in Saudi PSIs: (a) Knowledge, (b) Skills, and (c) Behaviours (KSB). Two more keys were generated from the collected data (d) Experience and (e) Spirituality.

Knowledge

Based on the collected data, knowledge was the first key that enabled participants to navigate the labyrinth of leadership in Saudi PSIs. Seeking knowledge is encouraged in the *Qur'an*, “My Lord, increase me in knowledge” (20:114), and in *Sunnah*, “whoever treads a path searching for knowledge, God makes his way to paradise easy” (Sahih Muslim, n.d.). Participants’ levels of knowledge varied due to their diverse educational backgrounds, experience, and training. However, there was consensus on how knowledge impacted their paths to and through leadership and assisted them to develop expertise in their roles. Several participants indicated their belief that great leaders are those who translate their knowledge into initiatives for the benefit of their universities. Great leaders are also those who share their knowledge freely and proactively with others. Participants in this study drew on their knowledge to successfully ameliorate the challenges of dealing with different personality types. The use of knowledge in comprehending the multiple personalities of members of staff generated a collective and cordial foundation of understanding and made communication easier.

Based on interviewees’ perceptions of what suited them to the role of leaders, knowledge was demonstrated in three aspects: (a) self-knowledge, (b) acquired knowledge gained from experts, and (c) knowledge of the organization’s rules, responsibilities, and policies.

Self-knowledge. Self-knowledge was a sub-theme that participants shared. It is the accurate comprehension of one’s own behaviours, attitudes, and personal skills, and how these impact others. Knowledge of self allows leaders to have a better understanding of themselves by identifying their strengths and weaknesses. Respondents also declared that self-knowledge assisted them in getting to know and express themselves as unique and independent individuals. Self-Knowledge enabled leaders to empower themselves first in improving their areas of weaknesses and then building on their strengths. The following section presents examples of how participants’ self-knowledge assisted them in their roles as leaders.

Self-knowledge was obvious from Angela’s perspective:

my experience in leadership helped me to understand my capabilities, what motivated me and others, people’s personalities, how to communicate with them, and how to spread positive words. Being fair and respectful of others’ views, they in return respected me. I am bad-tempered sometimes, this is my weakness I admit, but being aware of this helped me to control my attitude especially when conflicts arose among faculty members.

Similarly, for Faye, self-knowledge was clear when she declared that being a leader helped her to be empathetic, so she hoped followers imitate her. She declared, “I always put myself in others’ shoes, to serve people, prioritized their needs over mine, motivate my staff to not only do their work but also to give the best they have.” Self-knowledge increased her reflection and made her realize that “what I learned during my studies was different from the practical life at work, so I have to improve myself professionally and pay attention to everything.” Faye also declared that self-knowledge made her aware of her weakness of ‘being a perfectionist’ and how this increased her pressure. Ariana stated that “knowledge and experience are the main keys that open the doors of the labyrinth for individuals to start the journey.” She believed that what helped her in the labyrinth was her knowledge of how to satisfy followers and respect their perspectives. Self-knowledge also helped Arian to reflect on her decisions afterwards to learn lessons about their successes and/or failures. She noted:

I spend time thinking about the decisions that I had made, what was wrong, what was right. Doing this increases my self-confidence and boosts my ability to be creative as I better understand my strength and weakness. Even if I found out that some of my decisions were not appropriate, at least I tried, and I learnt a lesson from it.

It is noteworthy to mention that self-knowledge can be achieved through several practices, and one of these practices is reading. Six out of eight participants spoke about the importance of reading to increase one’s knowledge of their own character, and people’s personalities. Alice pointed out that:

reading increases my knowledge of leadership and my own personality. It also helped me to acquire different styles, practices, and attributes. Reading helped me to define my goals and how to achieve them. In fact, leadership was not my major, so I read to enrich my knowledge.

Faye, Isabella, and Nicole were also keen readers of leadership and management. They read extensively on personality and emotional intelligence because they believed these areas helped leaders to understand and manage people better. Sophie emphasized the role of reading, but she also asserted that knowledge could be complemented through observation. She shared how she advised students to gain knowledge through observation especially when they attend a workshop in which they have little interest. She stated:

if you attend a workshop and you feel that you will not benefit from it, or its topic does not interest you, do not make a prejudgement that you will not get any benefits. You can gain a lot of knowledge. How to register for workshops is acquiring knowledge. When you make a comparison between good and bad topics, the presenter's style, and how she deals with participants are important pieces of information. This information will help you in the future on how to choose what best matches your needs, so you gain knowledge. The leaders' own knowledge guided them through their navigation of the labyrinth of leadership and their understanding of people and work procedures.

Acquiring leadership knowledge from experts. The sub-theme of acquiring knowledge from experts was mentioned by four participants. Maya declared that knowledge comes from different sources. For her, knowledge and experience were similar to a GPS device that guides leaders in the journey of leadership. She further stated:

for me, I did not hesitate to ask my previous supervisor questions on issues that I did not know about; I did this not only at the beginning of my journey but throughout my career. Now that I have resigned, I still ask questions and I am being asked too, because knowledge has no limit.

The participant also declared that her years of experience as a leader increased her knowledge in dealing with conflicts that occurred in her department and/or on the male campus.

Sophie noted that the long years of leadership experience helped her to gain a wide range of knowledge. This valuable knowledge was basically acquired through questioning. She confidently professed that her knowledge of her role and the organization's policies and rules made her brave and not afraid of facing challenges in her way. She also noted that she would not succeed in leadership if she did not ask others about things she did not know. Ariana indicated that she had no hesitation to obtain knowledge from her seniors by asking about what she did not know:

asking others doesn't mean that I am not qualified or don't know my role, the fact is that my experience made me believe that knowledge is so broad, and everyone has unique knowledge so by asking them, you widen your base of knowledge.

To exchange and benefit from the knowledge of others, and to encourage others to ask, Nicole recommended having regular faculty meetings, she stated:

these meetings should include the faculty vice-dean, vice-chairs, and faculty members to ask and share knowledge, experience, success, and failure stories, so that we can learn from each other. The faculty has individuals with different knowledge and experience especially those who have studied abroad. Meetings will break the ice and encourage everyone to participate by sharing their insights.

Nicole further said, “I still asked my colleagues and other vice-chairs about things that I don’t know, it is not embarrassing to me; it encouraged others who didn’t use to seek guidance to do so.” She concluded by stating that asking for support helped her to learn new skills.

The need for leaders to acquire knowledge from others whether from attending PD trainings or reading in the field of leadership was highlighted by participants. Angela believed that having knowledge of leadership prior to occupying the position of a leader would make the journey smoother and save leaders’ time. Sophie emphasized the need to have concrete knowledge of leadership for potential and aspirant leaders. She stated that having knowledge about leadership would make them aware of the need to be role models for others as they shared their knowledge.

Knowledge of responsibilities and rules. Participants acknowledged their responsibilities as leaders, and that they follow the organization’s rules. Although they lacked job descriptions especially at the beginning of their journeys, some of them effectively managed to document the responsibilities of their roles and made themselves accessible to potential and aspirant leaders. Maya noted that “it is important for a leader to acknowledge the university’s policies, rules, and objectives.” She recorded her responsibilities and valued the new knowledge she gleaned from workshops. Her newly acquired knowledge helped her to increase her confidence. She was able to better explain any misunderstanding in work procedures to her staff, thereby improving the level of trust between herself and her followers. Similarly, Angela stressed the importance for leaders to be aware of their roles, work procedures, and leadership styles. She stated that even the occasional use of dictatorial leadership was crucial, but leaders had to be wise about when to use it and with whom. Sophie shared an incident that she experienced with a high-ranking administrator in the university, and how her knowledge of the university’s rules and regulations saved her from a dilemma in her position.

I was responsible for the ... center at the university, this centre is important for promotion and has a lot of financial rewards. It happened that someone wanted to chair the centre

because of its rewards and the prestige that it offered the chair. This individual who was interested in the position started to spread rumours about me. I requested a meeting with the dean of the university and explained my situation, objectives, responsibilities that align with the university's policy and how the centre works, etc. The dean realized how professional I was in my work and the wealth of knowledge and experience that I had, so he decided that I should retain my position at the centre.

Although participants worked in sex-segregated settings with barriers that impeded their progress, they had confidence in making decisions, sharing knowledge, and cooperating with their staff to create collegial environments at the workplace.

Skills

Skills are important in achieving the organization's objectives and effectively communicating with others. The following section demonstrates the vital skills that Saudi female leaders used during their tenure in leadership: (a) the critical thinking skills, (b) interpersonal skills, (c) social and emotional intelligence skills, and (d) management skills.

Critical thinking skills (Cognitive). Critical thinking is the skill that enable leaders to think rationally and analyze a situation based on what they believe. It also helps leaders to adapt their approach to decision-making and problem-solving due to the constant changes in their organizational environment. Critical thinking enabled participants to understand the impact of having their decisions aligned with the organization's goals. The ability to think critically allowed participants to be introspective about their decisions and mistakes and learn from them. Critical thinking also required leaders to make long-term plans for their departments by aligning their faculty's objectives with those of the university. Participants shared several situations where they demonstrated their critical thinking skills as they carried out their roles.

Most participants desired to prepare potential leaders by ensuring that the path to leadership was clearer than theirs had been. Ariana, for instance, shared that one of her priorities was to strategically ensure that she prepared individuals who are confident, capable, and ready to step into her position as a leader. She pointed out that when the time came for her to leave the position, she wanted to ensure continued success in her department. In a similar fashion, Faye and Alice emphasized the importance of planning for sustainability at all levels of leadership and shared insights related to their intention to prepare and inspire others to occupy their positions. Alice shared an example of how critical thinking helped her to manage a conflict that arose with a

colleague in her department who was not satisfied with the distribution of scheduled work. The participant declared that “being a leader required me to be cautious with my colleagues and learn how to deal with such situations especially since I was at the beginning of my journey.” She continued to describe the situation by stating that:

although a colleague blocked me from social media [WhatsApp], I sent her an email for clarification, but with no response. After I made several attempts to communicate with her, she [the colleague] came and expressed her annoyance. I did not react to her in an aggressive manner instead, I met her with a smile and explained my reason for the decisions that I made. She understood my explanation and agreed with me.

The second example of critical thinking for Alice arose from conflicts and how to deal with students who complained against faculty members, how to inform those faculty members about these complaints without causing harm. She stated that thoughtfulness, understanding, and critical thinking helped her to overcome these barriers. The implementation of those skills at work inspired her colleagues to give her positive reviews and feedback which motivated her to continue her journey in leadership.

Ariana recalled a story of how her ability to think critically benefitted her when she was stuck at a point in the labyrinth. Her department had an essential need, and she was having difficulty in getting her request to her supervisor in the male section of the university. She stated that while she was attending a conference for which she had registered, she noticed that her manager was also in attendance. During the conference, she strategically went into areas where she would get the chance to speak with him. In her statement regarding this occasion, she described herself as “a drowning person who clutches at straw, supposing that the straw might be able to save her.” The conversation with her manager resulted in her getting the request rapidly.

Isabella also declared that she used her cognitive skills in consulting others before making major decisions. She said, “I really like to consult. In consultation, you listen to people with different experiences, knowledge, and insights. They provide you with several options to think deeply before making final decisions.” In addition, Isabella declared “whenever I make a decision, I have to ensure that it causes no harm to anyone and that it aligns with the department and university’s goals and objectives.” The respondent’s perspective was that consultation was crucial for leaders to be successful.

In addition, to decision-making and problem-solving skills, participants also noted their ability to think “outside the box” and encourage staff and faculty members to be creative as critical tools for leaders. For instance, a part of Faye’s leadership role was to think creatively, particularly during difficult times, such as dealing with faculty members’ conflicts pertaining to teaching schedules. She said:

I have to be so patient and understanding when conflicts among my colleagues arise. I listen to them and respect their points of view. I must have a complete understanding of their dissatisfactions to find good solutions. My years of working with them have helped me to understand their personalities and gain their trust which makes it easier to accommodate them.

The participant stated that conflicts among her colleagues are sensitive issues, but experience has taught her how to deal with such situations. In addition, she stated that she had to make long-term plans to develop her department, cooperate with colleagues, and inspire potential leaders. A part of her plans as she reported was that:

working in academia necessitated me to be self-reflected, to give and share my knowledge with others. To let my staff, have a sense of belonging by working and cooperating as a team. Mutual respect is important because they are human beings, not machines.

It is evident that having the ability to create a collegial environment, and making positive changes were what motivated Faye to persist in her role as a leader.

Interpersonal skills. Participants referred to several types of interpersonal skills that assisted them in overcoming the barriers of managing their department and dealing with others. These skills included communication (verbal and/or non-verbal), listening, negotiation, persuasion, influence, and understanding of people’s personalities.

The ability to listen carefully to colleagues and students with empathy was critical for learning, understanding, avoiding conflicts, and/or building social capacity. According to respondents listening is a key factor in leadership, and it generates insights and ideas. The ability to listen keenly was pointed out by all participants, but its importance was stressed by five of the eight participants as it allowed them to understand the perspectives of others. For instance, Ariana noted:

being a leader helped me to learn how to listen before talking to my colleagues, staff, students, and administrators. It gave me the ability to think and understand before

engaging. In fact, working in a sex-segregated setting without meeting my chair required me to listen deeply to his instructions in order not to make mistakes.

In this excerpt, Ariana emphasized the role of listening in her interrelation with people around her. She also argued that self-awareness made her realize the importance of “inspiring, motivating, and cooperating” with her staff. She stated that listening with understanding and working with them as a team helped to build a strong rapport with them. She pointed out that followers, in return, listen to their leaders and gain confidence in performing what is expected with minimal follow-up.

The strategy of careful listening was also pointed out by other participants. Alice, for instance, argued that “many conflicts occur in leadership either from the side of male campus or with faculty members; listening was a key strategy for resolving these conflicts.” Regarding her staff and colleagues, she stated:

I must let them know that I am here for them. I must give them the opportunity to think and share their perspectives, even in difficult times. I find and solve the daily challenges at work, and thereby, build their skills as well.

Maya noted that listening was an important skill for good leaders. She stated, “honestly, I had never thought of listening as an important aspect in my communication, but I am aware of it now. I think that perhaps 80% of my work as a leader depends on my listening skills.”

Sophie stated:

my position requires that I work with students, especially those who have ... issues in the university, I must give them the chance to talk, and I listen carefully to them before giving any suggestions or solutions. In this way, they can think and decide how to pursue their careers.

Careful listening with the ability to tactically peruse given situations increased Sophie’s popularity in accommodating and supporting students in their times of difficulty. Although Sophie noted that meeting with students took much of her time at work, she suggested that “putting myself in their [students] shoes, listening to them, supporting them” were her greatest achievements as a leader.

Participants stated that working in a male-dominated setting necessitated that they learn how to negotiate disparate viewpoints amongst subordinates. Developing this skill fostered leaders’ confidence in their capacity to be assertive enough to make decisions during challenging

circumstances, and at the same time work to create harmonious environments within the organization. In that regard, Alice shared a story that highlighted her self-control as a leader that helped her to keep moving forward despite many barriers. She said:

I worked with my team to develop a specific program in my department, and it was sent to the top management by my chairperson. Unfortunately, the program was not approved for unknown reasons. This incident depressed me badly. I had worked hard to achieve it, but I learnt a lesson, not to let such things take control of me or impede my progression. I must be patient, positive, and have a long-term view. Because if it was not successful, at least I learned from the experience and became familiar with how to propose it next time.

This incident made Alice more understanding and aware of her mistakes so she could avoid them in the future. It also highlighted the importance of flexibility and how to manage in difficult circumstances so that she would “try to hold the stick from the middle.” Alice stated that these are some of the skills that leaders should have to succeed in the labyrinth of leadership. In addition, the ability to know how to negotiate and communicate were discussed by a participant. Faye stated that leadership increased her self-confidence and made her able to become a good negotiator to achieve her goals in several situations. She shared a story of how she used her negotiation, persuasion, and influential skills to help a student who wanted to quit her master’s degree a few weeks before defending. She stated:

due to unforeseen setbacks, the student decided not to complete the degree. Because of the situation and personal stress, she acted rudely with her supervisor and that put her in a critical situation. I tried to communicate with the student, demonstrated empathy, trust, and compassion. Communicating with her was not easy, because of her poor behaviour toward me. But I knew that she was not aware of what she had said. After several attempts at persuading her, providing emotional support, and meeting with her personally, I succeeded, praise be to God, in convincing her to continue her degree. I was able to get her to believe in herself and complete the final weeks of her four years of diligent studies. Her success was my success as leader.

In this excerpt, Faye described the importance of leaders’ being supportive to their followers or those whom they supervise; she identified that moment of support as a great achievement of her leadership.

Social and emotional intelligence skills. Although aspects of social intelligence (SQ) were implied in conversations with most participants during their interviews, they were explicitly stated by Isabella as the main of her success as a leader. She argued, “social intelligence made me able to understand and manage my own and others’ emotions and the implications of behaviours and attitudes.” Isabella pointed out that SQ helped her to understand that people have different points of view and allowed her to see things from their perspectives. Seeing things through the eyes of others provides leaders with valuable lessons and allows them to gain respect and engender the trust of others. She further emphasized the value of SQ skills in helping her to deal with colleagues. In her statement, she declared, “when I became a leader, I was able to know who was being a ‘hypocrite’ (double-faced) with me as most masks began to drop.” Nicole alluded to emotional intelligence, stating that “leadership helped me to be empathetic, considerate, and able to look after others’ concerns and effectively interact with them.” These skills assisted her to improve her leadership abilities.

Management skills. It should be noted that in my analysis I use management and leadership skills interchangeably. Management skills encapsulate several other skills that were used by participants such as time management, delegation, and decision-making in difficult situations. Ariana discussed the importance for leaders to delegate tasks to followers to build trust, motivation, encouragement, and preparation for the future. In her words, “delegation means you trust people whom you work with, and this motivates and inspires them to give the best they have.” Sophie highlighted time management as a skill that assisted her to improve her leadership capacity. She stated that even with a busy schedule she managed to arrange specific times to meet students and discuss their future with them. Management skills can also be demonstrated in how leaders address conflicts that rise among faculty members as was revealed by respondents. An Arabic proverb states “one hand can’t clap,” this refers to the importance of cooperation in working with others as team to achieve the common goal.

Behaviour

Faye suggested that engaging in leadership behaviours without skills or appropriate knowledge of leadership would not be a complete formula for effective leadership. Participants of this study agreed that their behaviour reflected their values, which enabled followers to develop confidence, and trust, and thereby made them successful in leadership. After coding data relating

to leaders' behaviours, leaders' behaviours tended to be articulated regarding their relationships with followers and teams.

All participants pointed out that appreciating, respecting, and motivating followers to give the best that they could, were important factors that shaped how leaders behaved with others. Ariana attributed the achievements in her department to her team's efforts. She did not accept personal recognition of success; instead, she insisted that it be associated with the team's name and not her name. She also declared that she liked to be generous with her team; she prioritized their services, was humbled by them, and firmly believed that this was what made her a successful leader. She further stated, "I am blessed with the team with which I work, we motivate each other." Ariana also stated that delegating tasks along with follow-up and feedback were ways to inspire, motivate, and reinforce trust with followers. She stated,

in the department, we created a supervisory process in which we developed and established a team. I created the structure in a precise manner, and each one knew and performed her duties; I delegated many things to my team and followed-up with them. The strategy became very efficient, and I was able to provide my staff with remote supervision.

In terms of behaviour, Ariana further clarified that a leader must think about her colleagues, be close to them, understand, and meet their needs. She stated:

to be a leader means I must ask myself do people know that I love, care for, and value them. Everyone wants to feel that. I don't say that I'm successful with all that, but I believe it is a worthy aspiration in my leadership journey.

Ariana stated that, although these factors might be minor actions, they meant a lot to people around her.

Sophie emphasized that demonstrating behaviours that acknowledged and appreciated others served to motivate followers; she stated that appreciation was like fuel for them. When followers were appreciated, they exerted extra effort. She gave an example by stating that:

there was a conference at the ... held in male and female campuses. At the end of the conference, male students were taken on stage and thanked for their efforts in making this event successful. The female students were on the second floor due to sex segregation policies and their names were not mentioned although they worked hard and contributed to making that conference a success. After they finished calling the male names, I was

invited to the mic; I thanked my team from the list that I had prepared in advance without referring to myself. Afterwards, one of my team members came and thanked me as well. Because I recognized and placed the team before me the members were pleased and appreciative of what I did for them.

Sophie noted that her action on part in acknowledging the team members' efforts, increased their self-esteem and made them feel that their work was valuable.

Nicole who was new in leadership argued that recognizing others' achievement and motivating them to succeed are vital keys in influencing and empowering others. Because of that, she created a 'reward and recognition' policy in her department to motivate her subordinates and students; this activity demonstrated to these individuals that they were appreciated. When I asked her to provide an example of how this policy worked, she mentioned that she sent electronic 'congratulation cards' to all students who had completed their courses of study but were not able to have a graduation ceremony due to COVID-19. She also stated that she displayed their graduation projects on the faculty website. Nicole said she publicly acknowledged and stated her appreciation for all staff and colleagues who helped students during the academic semester.

Supporting and inspiring followers with kind words, rewards, and/or public recognition were mentioned by some of the participants. Alice pointed out that giving colleagues the opportunity to chair some of the departmental committees and participate in decisions by sharing their perspectives made them feel that they were valuable and encouraged them to hone their leadership skills.

Participants also acknowledged that engaging in apposite leadership behaviours influenced and empowered followers. Influence is the ability to influence others' character, behaviours, and development, Sophie stated. She continued by saying that the ability to influence others necessitated a work environment where teams (staff, colleagues, etc.) felt empowered and courageous enough to act. Faye spoke directly about the influence of leaders; this is her ability to articulate a shared vision with colleagues and staff. Angela emphasized the act of empowering others with knowledge, specifically on leadership and management prior to their appointment to leadership positions. Having specialized in leadership studies, she provided several professional trainings to colleagues. She said, "I like to share my knowledge with people around me." She continued by declaring that by sharing her knowledge she was making the members of her department more efficient in carrying out their functions.

Participants identified numerous behavioural qualities that assisted them in their navigation of the labyrinth of leadership. Three of the participants argued that their ability to build teams and have good relationships with staff, administrators and colleagues helped them to acquire leadership positions and at the same time promoted a dynamic work environment. For instance, Alice pointed out that her relationships with the vice-dean at the university and the previous vice-chair led to their willingness to nurture her professional skills and advocated for her leadership development. She stated that over time, and with experience, they recommended her for a leadership position; based on their recommendation, she was successful in getting the position. Ariana pointed out that she saw herself as a member of the team and treated her employees as colleagues. These were some factors that made her suited for this leadership role. When she spoke of the techniques that she used, she emphasized activities such as motivating staff members, delegating tasks and providing constructive feedback to help her colleagues improve as being vital to her success. Collaboration and service to others as a leader resonated with Ariana. Her perspective was clear as she stated:

being a member of the team, made me ready to trudge through the trenches with them, especially in challenging times. I always acknowledge and constantly reminded myself that it is my responsibility to ensure that my department proceeded smoothly with the ultimate goal of effectively serving our students.

Faye emphasized the need to build effective relationships with team members through activities that were held inside or outside of the organization. She indicated that her position “implies that I be able to serve my team and be emphatic to their needs and circumstances and help them to overcome their own challenges.” She believed that working together as a team motivated team members to learn from each other. Faye also believed that teamwork improved members’ skills, gave them the opportunity to take on leadership roles, and thereby increased their creativity, productivity, and satisfaction. She further stated:

when team members observe trust, fairness, and feel secure with their leader, it makes them more comfortable in their relations with her. Building trust with others enhances a leader’s ability to manage tasks and successfully mediate disputes during the leadership journey.

Building trust and positive relationships are fundamental elements of leadership. Leaders need to keep these at the forefront of their strategic thoughts and plans. Respondents had strong

beliefs that their relationships with others increased their opportunities in developing their networks. Faye shared a story of a leader she knew, who due to her inappropriate perspective of leadership, was not able to continue her journey in leadership. This leader thought that leadership was all about giving orders to followers. She did not care about her team members and in return, they complained about her leadership style. This individual had to step down from her position as a leader. Faye emphasized that leaders must give directives at times, and she indicated the importance of leaders communicating effectively, especially to ensure that they give clear instructions to followers. When a leader communicates effectively with team members it helps to minimize misunderstandings at work.

Experience

Experience was a new key added by participants to the other keys in navigating the labyrinth of leadership. As mentioned in response to research question 1, experience facilitated respondents leadership pathways and career progressions; it played a major role in reducing women's barriers in PSIs. Participants noted that their experience in administration motivated them to learn and improve their skills and later they were able to translate them into leadership behaviours. One valuable lesson that was given during the interview from a participant in respect to experience was "to be an experienced person, you need to share your knowledge with others, don't be a bottleneck of knowledge, otherwise, the experience will be invalid." It was evident that experience helped participants to be open-minded as well as giving them the ability to be positive in their thoughts, so they were able to tackle challenges in several different ways.

Spirituality

The previous section revealed participants' acknowledgment of the vital role of keys for navigating the labyrinth of leadership. Participants unequivocally declared how these keys acted as triggers that supported them to pursue their leadership journeys despite the barriers that they encountered. In addition, participants' data showed the influences of Islamic and spiritual values on their attitudes. In literature, spirituality comprises "the values, attitudes, and behaviours that are necessary to intrinsically motivate one's self and others" (Fry, 2003, p. 694). Reave (2005) stated that values such as integrity, humility, and honesty have been identified as being influential to the success of leaders and that traditional practices in people's daily lives that have been linked to spirituality are also associated with efficient leadership. Reave (2005) further argued that "showing respect for others, demonstrating fair treatment, expressing care and concern, listening

responsively, recognizing the contributions of others, and engaging in reflective practice” (p. 655) have been highlighted in many spiritual teachings and have been found to be critical elements in leadership.

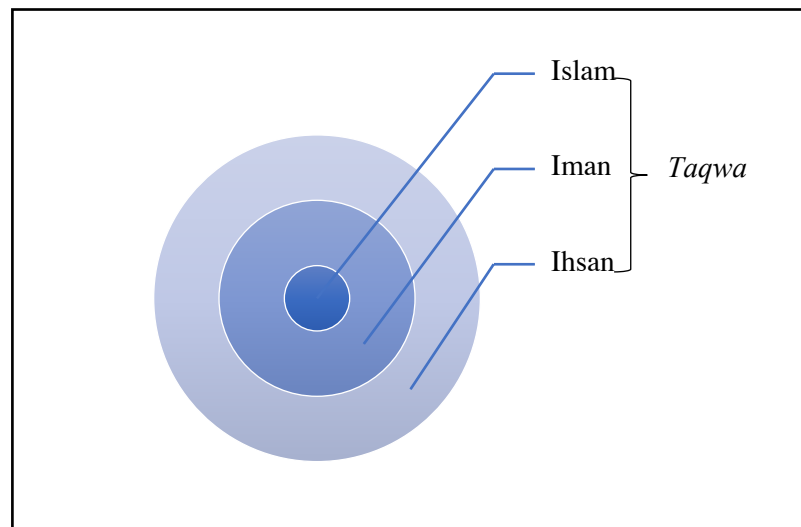
With this in mind, perhaps the support that was considered to be most influential for Saudi female academic leaders and is almost completely absent in a high percentage of Western literature and base except, perhaps, in religious schooling contexts, is the important role that faith and spirituality play in supporting Saudi women leaders. Mohammad et al. (2015) argued that the “Islamic view of leadership is similar to the Western view of leadership, except its religious, moral, and human roots” (p. 4). I was fascinated to understand Saudi female leaders’ performances, by exploring their spirituality and how it influences their attitudes as leaders. Hence, I captured all spiritual values that increased Saudi female leaders’ efficacy such as empathy, patience, faith, persistence, and others.

Islam is the state religion in Saudi Arabia; therefore, it is not surprising that participants manifested Islamic teachings and values in their behaviours. The compatibility of Saudi female academic leaders’ behaviours with religion is a result of their strong faith in God. Some of these female leaders declared that faith and trust in God are what motivated them to exert more effort because of the assurance that their ultimate reward will be from God, and not man. This view was clearly stated when a participant cited a verse from the Quran: “And my success can only come from God. In Him I trust, and unto Him I return” (11:88). Another participant stated, “we as Muslims put Islamic principles and values into practices that are entrenched in our daily lives.” Thereby, everything functions in accordance with God’s will, Angela professed. Participants believed that God would question them on every deed: because God declares in the *Qur’an* “And fear a Day when you will be returned to God. Then every soul will be compensated for what it earned, and they will not be wronged” (2:281). Respondents declared that their belief in God helped them to control their behaviours.

In Islam, spirituality is viewed as a set of values, principles, and ethics. To explore the role of spirituality from the collected data, I used a frame provided by Beekun and Badawi (1999) that composed of: Islam, *Iman*, *Ihsan*, and *Taqwa*. The authors stated that moral values are the basis of Islamic leadership and that the progress of leaders and/or followers happens through these four stages of spiritual development. The operational principles of leadership emanate from these layers of moral responsibility; these stages, also known as *Religion Layers*, depicted in

Figure 5.1., have Islam as the core and *Ihsan* as the outermost layer (Haddara & Enanny, 2009). The combination of these three stages resulted in a person's *taqwa*. The influence of these stages on Saudi leaders' behaviours is discussed in the following section.

Figure 5.1. *The spiritual stages (Religion layers) that supported Saudi female leaders*



The spiritual stages. The spiritual stages which are depicted in Figure 5.1., appeared to be key supports for Saudi female academic leaders throughout their academic leadership journeys. It was evident that consensus existed among all participants that leadership is about behaviours and these behaviours are the representations of values in action. Participants also asserted that several characteristics embedded in the various stages of spirituality encouraged them in navigating the labyrinth of leadership, and inspired subordinates to trust and follow them.

Islam. Islam is the submission to God's will. Leaders at this stage of Islam have peace with God, within themselves, and within others through their willing submission to God (Mohammed et al, 2015); they never see themselves as supreme (Haddara & Enanny, 2009) they are so humble.

Iman. *Iman* is the belief in the Oneness of God. Leaders with strong faith/*iman* surrender their egos, thoughts, and passions to God. *Iman* also implies that leaders have a strong belief in the life hereafter, and this makes them responsible for their words and conducts (Mohammed et al, 2015). *Iman* is what settles in the heart of a person and is reflected in their actions. Thus, leaders with strong *iman* strive to implement Islamic principles into practice by helping and

serving others. Participants' strong faith/*iman* in God facilitated their navigation in the labyrinth of leadership. This faith was clear in Maya's words:

from an Islamic perspective, the leadership role entitled leaders to create a climate of justice, that is free from discrimination, oppression, and exploitation. These factors help to make leaders role models. We [leaders] have to understand that leadership is not only how to lead people; it is how to treat them, serve them, and let them love and respect you, and the most important thing is to do your part and ask for God's gratification.

With these lines, Maya was sure that Islamic values influenced leaders' attitudes which can be reflected in their behaviours. Further to Maya's insight, Faye shared that a person who has strong confidence in herself and abilities "will never give up even if the road is full of obstacles." Faye's belief in herself and her abilities made her a strong person. She stated, "the more barriers I face is the more I trust in God to help me pass through them." She also declared, "God loves those who when they do things, they do it perfectly" citing an excerpt from the prophet's speech. Faye further added:

from an Islamic view, a person who internalizes spirituality with its principles is more self-confident. The spiritual values stem from Islam, assure a person that she is not lonesome or has no guidance in life, but that every step taken by her is unfailingly guided by God, the Almighty.

Taqwa. *Taqwa* is the inner consciousness. Leaders with *taqwa* have reverence for God and their duty, and have accountability towards God (Mohammed et al, 2015). Leaders and followers' level of *taqwa* restrains them from behaving or acting unfairly with others. *Taqwa* is found in people's hearts, but its effect is demonstrated in their behaviors. In addition, *taqwa* restricts leaders in power positions or who have strong authority from being arrogant (Mohammed et al, 2015). Leaders with *taqwa* are humble, respectful, caring and serving others.

Ihsan. *Ihsan* is doing one's best. Leaders with *Ihsan*, have the love of God, and this love stimulates them to monitor their work to gain God's blessings (Mohammed et al, 2015). It compels them to be fair and just with their followers and others believing that "God is with those people who fear Him and adopt the righteous attitude" (*Qu'ran*, 16:128). *Ihsan* also encourages leaders to go beyond their normal duties with the willingness and desire to serve others around them by making sacrifices to please God. These levels of spirituality were the main source for participants' spiritual values, which are discussed in the next section.

Spiritual values. Participants revealed several personal spiritual values during the interviews which are embedded in the spiritual levels of Islam. Some of these values are *fairness, patience, trustworthiness, humility, empathy, and serving others.*

Fairness. Fairness was the first spiritual value that respondents articulated, and it is embedded in leaders' *taqwa*. The notion of fairness is a key ingredient of how leaders feel about their work, organization and how they are treated and how they treat others. Evidence showed that "individuals often work less hard if they perceive that they are being treated unjustly" (Hoy & Smith, 2007, p. 163). Fairness can also be a symbol of empowering others by involving leaders and followers in decisions that affect them. Particularly when leaders put the interest of their organization ahead of their own and use their experience and knowledge to develop the quality of their decision (Hoy & Smith, 2007).

Fairness was repeatedly emphasized by participants; they argued that without fairness, people around them would not trust and imitate them. This was clear in Isabella's response when I asked her what made her successful on the journey despite the barriers. She was quick to associate her answer with religion. She declared "religion enables us to be fair with everyone regardless of their colour, education, or language." Maya also affirmed the importance of being "fair, respectful, and patient" at work to cope with work hurdles. She believed that female leaders should be empowered with knowledge and have similar PD opportunities as their male counterparts. This made her query the idea of fairness in her comment "why is the university president a man and not a woman?" The united perspective of respondents is that fairness should be pervasive in PSIs, and the playfield should be level for both males and females.

Patience. Patience was the second spiritual value that participants stressed. Patience helped them to navigate the labyrinth of leadership and deal with work issues. This was especially evident when I asked respondents about what motivated them to pursue the leadership journey. Participants acknowledged that the pathway of leadership is full of challenges. Nevertheless, they believed that to achieve their goals, they had to be patient and persevere towards their goals. They also believed that, especially when they got stuck or hit the wall of the labyrinth, they needed to exercise patience to go through the challenges.

For example, Alice was known by her colleagues as being a patient individual, especially in dealing with everyday conflicts and attempting to acquire solutions to problems. Faye also believed that working and interacting with people was always challenging, however, she

recognized that she had to be patient, especially when dealing with the male section of the university. Maya pointed out that being a leader in a sex-segregated environment where she had to deal with men and women, required her to be patient to perform her role effectively. She stated that especially when her leadership is challenged by males, as a leader she must be patient. “To achieve success, leaders need to be patient and devise strategies to overcome challenges,” Sophie declared. One of the participants shared a story stating that she made a speech with students who had difficulties passing their studies. She encouraged them to be patient to pursue their studies no matter how complicated they were. She also told them that most famous scientists failed many times before succeeding. She also gave an example of seeds that are planted that need to tolerate the heat of the sun to grow.

Trustworthiness. Trustworthiness was the third spiritual value that participants indicated as a major characteristic in Islam. The *Qur’an* proclaims, “...the best one you can hire is the strong and the trustworthy” (28:26). This verse implies that leaders need to be trustworthy, and their relationships with followers must be built on trust and accountability, which are critical elements of effective leadership. The ability to inspire others, fulfill a shared vision, and communicate effectively are also important elements of Islamic leadership. Another example in the *Qur’an* is, “And acts, so God will see your deeds, as will his Messenger and the believers; and you will be returned to [Him] ... so He will inform you what you were doing” (9:105). This verse implies that Muslim leaders need to watch and control their behaviours with followers, be trustworthy because God views and will judge them. Nicole mentioned the role of trust with herself and others as crucial for leaders’ success. Faye supported Nicole’s view and added:

the best way for leaders to be role models is to monitor their behaviours and words, especially when communicating in tough situations. Because their behaviours reflect their thinking. If they are positive and optimistic in their thinking, these will be reflected in their attitudes and actions with others.

Faye further declared that:

leaders who are honest and have integrity can build trust in their relationships with followers. These leaders then become valued as friends, co-workers, coaches, and managers to their followers. In addition, these leaders are respected and relied on with full confidence to do what is right. These leaders can share their values and principles with

others and at the same time, they are able to balance respect and responsibility in their roles.

Trust is a critical trait of leadership. Hoy and Smith (2007) noted that “leaders who want to gain the confidence of their followers must make themselves vulnerable to them by being open, reliable, kind, and honest” (p. 162). Therefore, leaders should be trustworthy to achieve success in their roles. Being a leader also requires individuals to be accountable for their words, thinking, and behaviours; this accountability helps to make them role models for followers.

Humility. Humility was the fourth spiritual value mentioned by three of the participants. Ariana noted that “the more generous and humble you are with your team, the more successful you will be.” She also refused to be called ‘the head of the department’ instead she preferred “supervisor” to eliminate any insinuation of domination. She liked to be addressed as one of the team and addressed her members in the team as ‘my colleagues’ to build a strong relationship with them and to create a collegial environment. She believed by being humble she could increase her team members’ engagement and satisfaction. The need for female leaders to exercise humility was also articulated by Faye, who noted that she placed herself in others’ shoes to understand their concerns and serve them. For her, leadership was about serving and helping people. Humility was evident in Sophie’s responses especially when she put herself in students’ shoes and tried to help those who were not accepted at the university.

Empathy. Empathy was the fifth spiritual value that was highlighted by participants. Faye reflected on her own struggles when she was a student, she said these struggles made her empathetic to others. Her care for others caused her to devote her time in service to them so that they did not have to face the difficulties that she faced. She declared “...I put myself in others’ shoes, to serve people and prioritize their needs over mine” these actions motivated staff to not only do their work but also to give the best they have.

Serving others. Serving others was the last spiritual value that some participants commented on. Alice devoted most of her time to helping and serving colleagues and students by providing the assistance they needed. She believed this was critical for building good relationships and it was part of a leader’s responsibility. Faye indicated that “the leadership position is not a conceited position, it is a position for serving, accommodating, and working with people as a team in order to give them a sense of belonging and loyalty.” Furthermore, the participant stated that great leaders are those who can be close to their followers, understand their

circumstances, and assist them in overcoming them. Angela also declared that helping and serving others improved her self-esteem, as followers were grateful for her, which gave her a sense of satisfaction in what they could accomplish as a team. Leaders in serving others are like the shepherd or mentor who guards, protects, cares for, develops and guides followers to grow and reach their potential.

To crown it all, the spiritual stages and values, increased participants' intrinsic motivation to make every attempt to lead well and do their best despite the barriers. It also encouraged them to be aware of their own roles, responsibilities, and behaviours with others.

In sum, data revealed that Saudi female academic leaders faced numerous barriers that restricted their advancement in the labyrinth of leadership in PSIs. However, their effective use of KSBES supported their success in navigating the labyrinth of leadership.

Research Question 3

The third research question was, “what are the supports accessed by Saudi female academic leaders as they navigated the labyrinth of leadership in universities in the Makkah region and how did these supports facilitate their navigation?” The overarching theme was ‘supports that facilitate navigation of the labyrinth.’ The data showed that supports played a critical role in motivating Saudi female academic administrators to proceed and navigate the labyrinth of leadership in Saudi PSIs. Participants articulated two kinds of supports that were momentarily beneficial in their leadership progression in PSIs: (a) personal support and (b) organizational support as the sub-themes.

Personal Supports

Most respondents expressed how family members influenced and guided them into pathways of leadership that they would likely not have taken on their own accord. They mentioned that their husbands were their major supporters and encouragers in their professional lives. The emotional support that was provided to participants from their family members and husbands helped them with household duties, rearing children, and enabled them to fulfil their leadership responsibilities at work. Ariana noted:

I have two adult sons and my husband works late, so I spent longer hours at work. The structure of my family helped me a lot as I wouldn't have been able to work for long hours if my sons were young. My husband is so understanding and encourages me.

Maya stated “my husband is so supportive and understanding of my role. We [Maya and her family] are like a team; everyone supports the other. Throughout my academic journey, he has stood with me.” Nicole mentioned that her husband helped by taking on additional responsibilities at home to care for their two children who demand a lot of attention and time. Sophie made special mention of her father, whom she indicated was not an academic, but he instilled leadership in her from an early age. Alice also referenced how family support eased some of the weight off her during her career progression as she received support from her father, an academic at the same university. She stated that she would consult her father about issues relating to her role as a leader. On the contrary, Angela lamented the lack of family support during her leadership journey. Angela stated that she was not fortunate to have the support of her husband, so she had to take care of her children while she navigated the labyrinth of leadership.

Participants also acknowledged that spending time with their families was significant in reducing their stress levels. However, managing the time spent with family members was often a challenge for some respondents due to the heavy demands on their time. Isabella remarked, “I always assign special times to spend with my family.” Sophie professed that most of her time was devoted to work responsibilities due to the overwhelming tasks that she had to deal with. She hardly found time for family or social life.

Interviewees also spoke of the support they received from close friends, although some of them stated that it was often difficult to maintain these friendships because of the heavy time commitment to their work. Angela stated that she was blessed to have received a lot of support from her close friends as she had not received it from her family.

One of the interviewees placed specific emphasis on the importance of having an individual who would listen and not judge and in whom she could confide, as a support. Faye stated:

the female leaders often need someone with whom to talk a (sister, husband, friend) after a long day at work. For me, all I need is someone to listen, and this helps me to release my stress from work. I am grateful to my husband who has been extremely supportive.

All interviewees spoke of their own personal efforts to support themselves professionally. They stated that the lack of PD at the universities propelled them to personally improve their leadership abilities. Faye, Alice, and Angela stated that they relied on their “personal efforts” to develop as a leader. Ariana also shared a similar perspective, she said, “based on my personal

effort, I strive to learn and gain new skills.” According to Maya “I depend on myself in searching for PD.” Sophie shared her experiences in participating in more than fifty workshops based on her efforts in searching and selecting appropriate workshops to enhance her knowledge and skills. “Whenever there is a workshop or a course, I register.” Her ambitious nature and eagerness to learn have shaped her development and widened her professional experiences.

In sum, respondents acknowledged that family members (father, spouse), close friends, and personal supports played critical roles in assisting them to survive and be efficient in their roles as leaders.

Organizational Supports

Respondents shared data about the level of support that they received from their universities; they agreed that without organizational support their efforts as academic leaders to effect changes would not be sustainable. All interviewees declared gratitude for the support from the government in providing free education throughout their lives. However, they professed that organizational supports were not adequate to meet their needs. Although some participants emphasized that they were able to attain some training through organizational opportunities, they indicated that the PD opportunities were inadequate and mostly targeted men. “There is no parity between the PD offered to men and women, in addition men are given the chance to attend international conferences, we (women) don’t have that chance, so we try to improve ourselves” Maya stated. On the other hand, two participants indicated that they were fortunate to be enrolled in some PD courses at their universities and spoke about the important role of networking and how it increased their opportunities.

Some of the respondents of this study recalled that they had scholarship opportunities from the universities to pursue their studies abroad. These scholarships helped them to gain international experience and advanced their academic career. Most of the respondents did not elaborate on this opportunity; they stated that there were not feasible for them because, for some, it created major disruptions in their families to move to another country to study. They suggested that this opportunity was more beneficial to younger single women who did not have family commitments. One of the participants stated that scholarship and travelling abroad were triggers that shaped her personality and improved her self-confidence, accountability, ambition, and made her an open-minded person.

One participant pointed out that organization support was not necessarily PD, but that it should include a focus on the well-being of academic leaders especially those who suffered from excessive stress at work. She stated, “I wish if there were meditation, well-being workshops or short programs inside the university to assist staff to manage and release stress and pressure.” Unfortunately, this kind of support is not available, but she is hopeful that it would be available in the future.

Interviewees also explained that supportive strategies such as female mentors and role models were not at the disposal of female leaders in Saudi PSIs. Female universities were less likely to have them due to the fewer number of senior females. They also argued that clear rules and regulations of the organization would be of great help to their progression.

Although some participants argued about the negative effects of technology as previously mentioned in the section on barriers, some emphasized the positive role of technology. Being in separate campuses under the supervision of men was challenging, however, technology provided them with some support for communicating. Participants emphasized the role of technology, especially with the announcement of *Vision 2030*; they stated that communication between female administrators and managers in top administration positions of Saudi PSIs became much easier and more accessible than in previous times.

Participants were extremely optimistic about the Saudi *Vision 2030 Policy* and highlighted how it supported their status as women and leaders. To reiterate, this vision aims to increase women’s contribution and empower them by increasing their knowledge and skills to meet workforce requirements. *Vision 2030* as Isabella indicated, provides increased numbers of opportunities as well as support for women’s advancements. In the same vein, Angela stated:

the vision aims to clarify the tasks of each person in the organization, and places focus on how to measure each performance. The vision sets forth employees as assets who must be invested in to improve the performance of their organizations.

The participant continued by stating that *Vision 2030* supported women by increasing the national awareness of their abilities and competencies “people have started to become more aware of the role of women than before. Younger generations especially those who studied abroad, have become more open-minded about the role of women.” Maya had a different perception of *Vision 2030*. She professed that the vision itself is powerful and dynamic in providing support for women leaders, however she stated that, “some men still don’t fully

support women as leaders; for these men the vision is only ink on paper, and I hope their mind-sets will be transformed soon.” Maya stated that there must be rules to protect women leaders at work otherwise, they will not succeed, and their challenges will remain. The participant further added:

within the implementation of *Vision 2030*, female opportunities are increased in most public spheres, but not yet in academia. We are still not fully empowered as men. Men’s dominance still exists, and some men still believe that leadership is theirs.

Sophie also emphasized the positive role of *Vision 2030* to Saudi women in general but stated that the traditional norms and practices in favouring men in leadership positions specifically in PSIs are still there and have not yet changed. She continued “we need to increase community awareness about the empowerment of women.” She concluded with the hope that these norms will progressively be eradicated.

Table 5.3. demonstrates the overarching theme, sub-themes, and the findings on research question 3.

Table 5.3. *Summary of findings for research question 3*

Overarching Theme	Sub-themes	Findings
Supports that facilitated females’ navigation in the labyrinth of leadership	-Personal supports	-Self-development, family members (father, spouse), and close friends.
	-Organizational supports	-Free education, scholarship, and Saudi <i>Vision 2030</i> Policy.

To sum, participants emphasized the key role of supports in facilitating their journeys to and through the labyrinth of leadership, however, they bemoaned the insufficiency of organizational supports for females in PSIs.

Summary

In the summation, Saudi female academic leaders described their paths to and through the labyrinth of leadership as being complicated and full of twists and turns. These leaders faced numerous barriers that hindered their advancement in leadership in Saudi PSIs. The organizational barriers came as the top hindrance for these leaders followed by societal barriers.

From participants' insights, one can conclude that there were some organizational supports provided to respondents, however, these were inadequate to satisfy their needs as leaders. Participants were able to find other beneficial tools to support their progressions through and toward their progression in the labyrinth.

The subsequent chapter offers a discussion of the primary findings in relation to the literature, as well as implications for theory, practice, policy, and future research.

CHAPTER 6: SUMMARY, DISCUSSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND CONCLUSION

Summary of the Study

As outlined in Chapter 1, the purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the journeys of female academic leaders as they navigate the labyrinth of leadership in Saudi PSIs. I sought to gain better understandings of how these leaders overcame barriers and accessed supports as they progress towards and through academic leadership positions in Saudi PSIs in the Makkah region. The findings of this study are intended to answer the following research questions:

1. How do Saudi female academic leaders in the Makkah region describe the ways in which they navigate the labyrinth of leadership?
2. What are the societal, organizational, professional, and personal barriers faced by Saudi female academic leaders in the labyrinth of leadership in PSIs in the Makkah region and how did they navigate despite these barriers?
3. What are the supports accessed by Saudi female academic leaders as they navigated the labyrinth of leadership in PSIs in the Makkah region and how did these supports facilitate their navigation?

Findings from this study revealed that to effectively navigate the labyrinth of leadership, Saudi female academic leaders should develop leadership keys KSB. Participants of this study unequivocally declared how these keys acted as triggers that supported them to pursue and persist in their leadership journeys despite the barriers. According to Smith and Hughey (2006) each person's leadership journey is affected by her individual experiences, education, and training because these factors have the main roles in defining her knowledge and skills in leadership. In addition, revealing women's barriers in leadership roles contributes to the development of effective practices they use to cope with current and future challenges (Bryman, 2007). Eagly and Carli (2007) argued that understanding women's barriers and how some women navigate their paths within the labyrinth will encourage practitioners to "work more effectively to improve the situation" (p. 2) for women.

The findings also showed the role and influences of Islamic and spiritual values on participants; I was fascinated by these findings on female leaders' behaviours in Saudi PSIs. Beekun and Badawi (1999) stated that moral/ethical values are the basis of Islamic leadership and that the progress of leaders and/or followers happens through four stages of spiritual development: *Islam*, *Iman*, *Ihsan*, and *Taqwa*. I examined how these stages were embedded in the leadership of participants in navigating the labyrinth of leadership in PSIs.

Discussion of Research Question 1

This section provides an answer to the first research question “how do Saudi female academic leaders in the Makkah region describe the ways in which they navigate the labyrinth of leadership,” in relation to literature. In other words, this section links a summary of findings from the interviewees to the research questions with available empirical evidence from literature.

Leadership Pathways

The findings of the study showed that respondents had relatively similar paths to and through leadership in Saudi PSIs; none of them had straightforward paths to educational leadership positions. These findings align with Eagly and Carli (2007) findings which are mentioned in Chapter 2. All participants started their careers as teachers in universities; over time they gained tenure, pursued graduate studies, and were promoted to positions of leadership. Many of the respondents emphasized the value of gaining experience from serving in various administrative roles, these experiences enriched their administrative knowledge, skills, and thereby, made them efficacious in their roles as leaders. Participants' career paths to and through the labyrinth of leadership was congruent with the previous literature that examined Saudi women's pathways and described them as a continual set of hurdles, including (Abalkhail, 2017; Almaki et al. 2016; Alomair, 2015; Alsubaie & Jones, 2017; Gonaim, 2016; Hamdan, 2005). However, a few of these studies noted the extent of these hurdles, and how Saudi women's leadership pathways were diverse. This element is discussed further in the response to the second research question.

Influential Individuals and Career Progressions

The influence of family members on women's decision to pursue leadership and navigate the labyrinth was noticeable, in the way they supported their daughters' education and professions. This was a new finding specifically in the male-dominated culture in Saudi Arabia, and it highlights the role of fathers and husbands' impact on women's leadership progression. In

addition, the influence of close associates was also referenced by some participants as being instrumental in shaping their career progression to and through leadership positions. These influences align with the literature, several studies suggested that family members and individuals' social experiences have a significant influence on females' successful attempts in navigating the labyrinth, such as (Bryman, 2007; Nakamanya et al., 2017; Ruhi et al., 2018). As Nakamanya et al. (2017) stated "...women family members like the spouses, children, parents, and siblings... are crucial to their success in leadership" (p. 993). Similarly, Ruhi et al. (2018) noted that "the influence of family members [was] an enabler for women taking on leadership roles," (p. 2) because "some parents were influential as role models or mentors, being employed in the field that their daughters aspired to enter others provided space for their daughter's potential leadership aspirations through non-adherence to traditional gender roles and expectations" (p. 2). In this study, several participants discussed the influence of their upbringing on their leadership capabilities and stated that they were inspired by their families. Others declared that the expectation that they would be leaders was established from early in their lives and was reinforced often by family members. According to Astin and Astin (2000) expectations for success and achievement serve as a lifelong influencer to effect change through leadership and help leaders to become change agents. Therefore, the findings of this study confirmed that influential individuals were helpful, provided participants with meaningful feedback, and constructively encouraged them to pursue their administrative careers in the labyrinth.

Labyrinth and Opportunities

Although Saudi women work separately on female campuses, they have limited opportunities for high-level positions in leadership (Gonaim, 2020) because "men are selected for top administration since it is believed it is the man's right" (Abalkhail, 2017, p. 10). In this study, findings revealed that the years of administrative experience for participants range from 2 to 25 years. Despite the long work experience in academia as leaders, participants' escalation to top leadership positions was very slow. For instance, only one of the participants reached the position of vice-dean, and the rest occupied positions as vice-chair of departments. These findings are congruent with what the literature stated, that women are perceived to be inferior and incapable of leadership; the effect is that they become significantly underrepresented in such positions (Al-Ahmadi, 2011; Al-Asfour et al., 2017; Alomair, 2015; Almengash, 2017; Metaclyfe, 2008). In addition, Al-dakheel (2012) stated that restrictions in the Saudi society "has put women under

men's absolute control" (p. 152), therefore, their opportunities for leadership positions are limited.

The findings showed that almost all the interviewees admitted that they would not be where they were if they had not taken the opportunities for leadership as soon as they were presented to them. Such leadership opportunities do not have to be directly associated with officially assigned administrative roles; rather, potential administrators need to source opportunities even if they may not be able to display their leadership potential. These findings align with the literature, Abalkhail (2017) professed that women "do have some opportunities which help them in their careers" (p. 2) and their "knowledge, skills, and expertise are crucial for social and economic development" (p. 2). Kouzes and Posner (2007) noted that because leaders have the "desire to make something happen" (p. 165), they "seize the initiatives, encourage others to do the same, and actively look everywhere for great ideas" (p. 182) to benefit themselves and others.

There was consensus among participants that their willingness to take leadership opportunities allowed them to increase their self-confidence and make the decision to aim for senior leadership positions. This finding aligns with Abalkhail (2017) who noted that self-confidence facilitated women's process by "challenging stereotypes through consciousness of their own potential and specific strengths and development needs in order to fit into leadership positions" (p. 14). Self-confidence also enabled these women to know how to lead, how to overcome challenges, and how to be willing to take on new challenges. For these leaders, it does not matter whether they found the challenges, or the challenges found them. What was critical for them was identifying the challenges and being willing to confront them and change the way things were. Therefore, the question that leaders had to answer was: "When opportunity knocks [are] you prepared to open the door?" (Kouzes & Posner, 2007, p. 183). Leaders' self-confidence enabled them to be more responsive to the opportunities that were presented to them.

In addition, this finding of self-confidence aligns with Rook (2015) who stated that women who have confidence in their leadership capabilities, make it to the top. Respondents made great efforts to demonstrate that they were competent and capable to assume leadership roles; they also engaged in much personal effort to navigate the labyrinth and prove that they were worthy to be leaders. Rook (2015) stated that women "need to shatter the glass labyrinth, take a gradational approach" (p. 2) and find ways in promoting others into leadership positions.

Hence, Saudi female academic leaders' self-confidence played a key role in encouraging them to carry the torch and illuminate the paths of leadership. Leaders often asked, "what's new? What's next? What's better?" and when they seek opportunities to develop in their roles, they chose innovative ideas which at times did not originate at their university. As Kouzes and Posner (2007) stated, leadership requires leaders' to have "outsight not just insight, that's where the future is" (p. 184). Thus, these innovative opportunities assisted Saudi female academic leaders along the path to and through the labyrinth of leadership.

Self-professional development was one opportunity that participants took to accelerate their progress in the labyrinth. Findings revealed that participants knew that their opportunities for leadership in PSIs were limited due to stereotypical imaging of Saudi females, thereby, they made plans to develop themselves professionally. This finding supported Rook (2015)'s view, who stated that "learning to engage in leadership ... enables leaders to become more effective individually and helps to create a work environment that acknowledges individuals for who they are, in all their complexity rather than in stereotypical roles" (p. 2). Self-development was usually undertaken as personal efforts for professional growth as Eagly and Carli (2007) argued how women develop themselves and how they seek occupations that provide growth opportunities to advance to any level of leadership.

Based on the findings, it seems that some choices that participants made were bound by time and opportunity. For instance, to acquire a leadership position in Saudi PSIs, women have to complete their graduate studies and expand their knowledge of leadership and administration. Some participants did not see themselves as leaders during the earlier stages of their progression; however, by engaging in the limited leadership opportunities that they got, they were able to become leaders. The women indicated that they developed interests in leadership slowly; they attended to the needs of others around them and helped others to continue the legacy of leadership. They also developed awareness of life choices and were open to opportunities that served as a source of autonomous motivation.

The findings revealed that the barriers that participants faced encouraged them and fortified their resolve to persevere and face even greater challenges. For respondents, the labyrinth of leadership was viewed as an opportunity to develop their strength as leaders, and it did not deter them from persisting in their roles. This finding aligns with Carli and Eagly (2016) study which indicated that some women "may advance by persisting after experiencing setbacks

and wrong turns and others by following the crumbs of those who came before them” (p. 518). The authors further noted that “the labyrinth is both optimistic in its acknowledgement that women do succeed as leaders and realistic in its reflection of the uncertainty of success” (p. 518). Additionally, these findings seem to suggest that regardless of the risk, respondents are willing to take on challenges to prove that they can lead successfully, and they view each triumph as an endorsement of their capacity to work under demanding circumstances. These new findings on Saudi women leaders can enrich the literature.

A discovery that I found from this study is that some participants did not intentionally seek leadership roles; in most instances, their talents were noticed by key individuals at the institutions that they served; these individuals recommended the participants for leadership positions. In my years as an administrator, I found that being visible contributes to achieving one’s goal. For example, getting noticed at work either by speaking up, contributing to departmental meetings or volunteering for projects, increased a person’s opportunity for leadership. I also found that the identification of talent was an integral aspect of women being appointed to leadership roles. In this study, some participants were examples of this view; they had no intention of becoming leaders; their goal was to publish research for the sake of promotion. However, being selected by senior administrators assisted them to expand their knowledge of leadership, increased their self-confidence, and motivated them to pursue the role of leadership. The example of established leaders recognizing potential women leaders and giving them opportunities to serve, offers additional reinforcement to the importance of not only developing one’s leadership skills but also the opportunity to practice these leadership skills. In my experience as a leader, I concur with the findings from participants that building followers’ capacity to make an impact in local spaces increased women’s credibility and visibility to others. Being credible and visible help women to establish themselves as leaders in the field.

In sum, the experiences of navigating the labyrinth of leadership for these Saudi women differed, yet commonalities were found amongst their experiences. These experiences provided new insights into the journeys of the women to the leadership roles and present a guided pathway for aspiring Saudi female academic leaders to follow.

Discussion of Research Question 2

This section provides responses to the second research question, “what are the societal, organizational, professional, and personal barriers faced by Saudi female academic leaders in the

labyrinth of leadership in PSIs in the Makkah region and how did they navigate the labyrinth despite these barriers?” in relation to literature.

Societal Barriers

The findings revealed a significant number of prominent societal barriers that Saudi women faced in educational settings. There was consensus among participants that the male-dominated culture that existed in Saudi universities was the main reason for women’s limited opportunities in senior leadership positions. This finding also demonstrates that gender equity is still a problem in Saudi Arabia in general and in academia in particular. The Saudi society still has a far way to go before females achieve parity with males in leadership positions as stated in several studies in the literature by (Al-Ahmadi, 2011; Almunajjed, 2009; Alsubaie & Jones, 2017; Gonaim, 2016). In addition, Alsubaie and Jones stated, “still, women are a long way from achieving parity with men, both in the workplace and in social spheres of life” (p. 6). A large number of Saudis view men as the leaders of society and their homes; this perception has been transferred to the work environments where men are given authority and power as well. Saudi men are influenced by ‘*qa’wama*’ (guardianship) according to Abalkhail (2017) and “think that they have a right to be the ‘guardians’ or controllers of women” (Abalkhail, 2017, p. 10) at home and in the workplace. To achieve gender parity, gender should not be a criterion for positions of leadership in academia; leadership criteria should be based on an individual’s ability, training, and strength.

The impact of the male-dominated culture and negative perceptions about women have made some women doubt their leadership capabilities to the extent that they have thought about giving up some leadership roles or quitting the leadership position altogether. These findings are consistent to findings from studies conducted by (Al-Ahmadi-2011; Almengash, 2017; Gonaim, 2020). Three out of eight participants were former educational leaders who had no intention of occupying leadership positions again after having long experiences in leadership. In addition, three of the participants who were in current leadership positions declared their intentions to not renew their contracts as leaders because of barriers that affected their levels of persistence, motivation, and optimism. Eagly and Carli (2007) stated that male leaders’ negative perceptions of women in a male-dominated context, specifically those who do not believe that women should be in positions of leadership, continue to deter women’s ascension to top leadership positions, and in fact impact their decision to persist or desist.

The findings revealed that the male-dominated culture was a key factor in the underrepresentation of women in the chancellor/deanship positions. Because in the Saudi society, it is not customary for women to preside over men, or for women to make decisions for men to implement. Thereby, many women face strong resistance in their attempts to get top leadership positions, which threatens their roles and often limits their desire to persist. Although there are more than 28 public universities in Saudi Arabia, the limited number of women in leadership positions stands in contrast to the hundreds of leadership positions for men. All but one Saudi university are headed by men. The exception is Princess Noura University (PNU), a female-only university, headed by a female. Participants indicated that the success of these women at the (PNU) can be replicated in other Saudi universities; they argued that if given the same opportunity to occupy leadership in Saudi universities, without the interference of men, they would be just as successful.

The male-dominated culture in Saudi Arabia was also highlighted by several scholars in literature. Carli and Eagly (2016) stated that in a male-dominated culture, women do not have equal opportunities to leadership positions or decision-making as do their male counterparts. Almaki et al. (2016) likewise reflected this idea, and stated that in a male-dominated society, “men are not [*sic*] accepted the idea of women holding senior posts” (p. 75) because “leadership itself is gendered” (Yoder, 2001. p. 815) with male characteristics. Therefore, when women access leadership positions, they struggle with their gender stereotypes to fulfill that role. Alomair (2015), who studied the impact of male-dominated culture as a barrier that hinders Saudi women noted that:

women lack presumption of competencies compared to men in which they assume the need to work twice as hard to be perceived as equal to their male colleagues. They accentuated the problem of in-group favouritism occurring in a traditionally male-dominant environment. (p. 83)

Alomair further added that in academia, the overrepresentation of men in leadership positions increased their loyalty because of the male-dominated setting; but this setting negatively impacted women leaders' progression. Likewise, Alghofaily (2019) who studied Saudi women's leadership in PSIs elucidated that “due to years of playing subservient roles to males, Saudi women have over the time lost the confidence to lead” (p. 25). Overall, the findings from this study regarding male-dominated culture align with findings in literature.

Stereotypes and discrimination against women leaders were widely discussed by (Alhareth et al., 2015; Alimo-Metcalf, 2010; Carli & Eagly, 2007; Carli & Eagly, 2016; Hart, 2015; Le Renard, 2008; Syed et al. 2018). Carli and Eagly (2016) argued that women in general “are subject not only to gender stereotypes that are perceived as incompatible with leadership but also to gender discrimination in employment” (p. 521). Women can be discriminated against through the hiring, selection, payment, and training processes. Participants in the study did not mention discrimination in payment (though this was not a direct question). However, findings showed that these women received less favourable ratings than men in hiring, promotion, and PD. This finding aligns with the work of Mathipa and Tsoka (2001) who stated that women leaders are subject to stereotypes, prejudices, and biases due to prevailing cultures in a society that restrict their ascending to senior positions. Findings also revealed that participants’ perspectives are consistent with the evidence in the literature as they shared stories of how discrimination restricted their ascension to upper-level leadership positions. This finding was in line with Carli and Eagly (2007) who stated that when women display their abilities as directive leaders, men often dislike them because their behaviours do not match the stereotypical image that they have of them. Thereby, men frequently consider those women as “unqualified” because they possess the assertive qualities of good leaders (p. 128). Such beliefs play a major role in limiting women’s access and ambition to leadership in Saudi PSIs.

Participants reflected on the sex-segregation policy in Saudi Arabia as a key hurdle that slowed their ascension to senior leadership positions. Participants also reported that PD offered by the organization was inadequate and was mainly offered to men. Baki (2004) who studied the impact of gender segregation on Saudi women, stated that the dominance of top leadership positions by men, added further barriers “restricting women’s entry” (p. 5) into leadership and limiting their career development opportunities. Women’s leadership distinction remains surrounded by the opinion of men and even their appearance is still limited or almost non-existent at the top leadership positions in universities not because women lack leadership skills, but rather because of their invisibility in the system and the obstacles they face.

This finding about sex-segregation aligns with data from several studies in the literature, for example, Abalkhail (2017), Al-Ahmadi (2011), Almegash, 2017, Almunajjed (2009), Baki, (2004), Jamjoom and Kelly (2013), and Le Renard (2008). As discussed in Chapter 2, these

researchers argued that sex-segregation added more hurdles to Saudi women's leadership paths and hindered them from getting the same opportunities as men.

Overall, findings of this research on Saudi women leaders' societal barriers accord with findings in the literature. It appears that resistance to changing the prevailing pattern in the academic administrative field, due to the patriarchal culture, is immense, and hinders some women's progress and desire to become leaders in Saudi PSIs.

Organizational Barriers

There was consensus among participants that organizational barriers were at the top of the list of obstacles that impeded their advances as leaders. This finding aligns with a number of empirical studies in the literature that identified organizational barriers as having more negative effects on women than societal barriers such as Abo-Khudair (2012), Alghofaily (2019), Almaki et al. (2016), Almengash, (2017), Gonaim (2020), and Hodges (2017).

The findings showed that the centralization of decision-making that occurs in the male campus, and limited authority were highlighted by most participants as the main factors for their slow progress to senior leadership positions. The absence of job descriptions added more structural complexities to women leaders' roles and performance. Participants declared that they were excluded from attending university meetings or participating in decision-making due to structural and traditional barriers, however, some reported that they attended departmental meetings with men due to the implementation of the Saudi *Vision 2030*. This was a novel experience of empowerment for women and a sign of a new era for women's advancement in leadership. This is a new finding that enriches the literature on Saudi women leaders.

The lack of authority was a major concern for participants; it was described by one respondent as a bird that aspires to fly but has clipped wings. This finding from participants of this study is consistent with findings in the literature. Hodges (2017) and Halawani (2002) argued that Saudi women leaders operated under the umbrella of men in academia, and this reduced their levels of accountability. Therefore, women leaders deferred to men, and this negatively affected their performance. Furthermore, the organizational hierarchy is bifurcated starting with men at the top of the pyramid; this division delayed the arrival of decisions and circulars to the female section of the university, and thus delayed the performance of work, which made women appear inefficient at work (Gonaim, 2020).

The transition from academic to a leader without prior preparation was a noteworthy point raised by several participants. Most respondents emphasized the need for prior leadership training. This finding is congruent to empirical studies in the literature conducted on the preparedness of academic administrators. Morris and Laipple (2018) declared that “few academic administrators have received any formal leadership training prior to commencing the leadership and ongoing systematic development efforts are scarce” (p. 1). Likewise, Wolverton et al. (2005) argued that most leaders in academia have “neither prior leadership preparation nor a clear understanding of what the job entails” (p. 227). Gmelch (2004) reported that “academic leaders typically come to their positions without leadership training, without prior executive experience, without a clear understanding of the ambiguity and complexity of their roles, ...” (p. 74). These studies supported the findings of the academic female leaders in my study. However, a new finding based on some interviewees’ perspectives suggested that working on departmental committees or being close to administrators were effective ways of acquiring experience and facilitating access to leadership.

The role of PD for academicians-turned-administrators in facilitating their transition was emphasized by Raines and Alberg (2003). Organizational momentum is not maintained without such effective leadership efforts. Therefore, it is necessary to prepare women leaders with skills that help them to support the organization (Morris & Laipple, 2018); the absence of this factor might create difficulty with managerial duties such as work procedures as well as leadership for the organizational mission.

The organizational and professional barriers that Saudi women faced in academic field were not much different from previous studies mentioned in Chapter 2 by (Abalkhail, 2017; Al-Ahmadi, 2011; Al-Asfour et al., 2017; Al-kayed, 2015; Almengash, 2017; Alomair, 2015; Abu-Khudair, 2012; Hodges, 2017). These studies discussed the role of segregation in the Saudi society as salient organizational barriers for academic women. They also noted structural barriers that occurred in many aspects of an organization’s function (e.g., recruitment, selection, promotion, rewards, and training) which align with participants’ perspectives in this study.

Professional Barriers

Professional barriers were closely related to organizational barriers, and both hindered Saudi women’s progress to leadership positions. PD initiatives including formal and informal leadership development, enhance and improve leaders’ capacity within organizations (Redmond

et al., 2017); these would eliminate some of the barriers that women leaders face in Saudi universities. There was consensus among respondents that PD activities for female leaders were limited and participants declared the need to have female mentors during their navigation of the labyrinth. Evidence in literature supports these findings. According to Abalkhail (2017), a lack of mentoring opportunities contributes to the underrepresentation of women in top leadership positions. Furthermore, mentorship for leaders provides greater job satisfaction, increases self-confidence, and creates opportunities for building social capital (Redmond et al., 2017). Similarly, Eagly and Carli (2007) stated that mentorship encourages women leaders to develop their full potential and thus, helps them to contribute more effectively to their organizations. In this case, data showed that the lack of female mentors in some ways motivated participants to navigate their personal paths in the labyrinth of leadership, though women noted the lack of sufficient female role models.

The findings revealed that participants had limited networking opportunities in Saudi PSIs. Participants declared that most positions of deanship in Saudi universities are primarily occupied by men. They stated that a reason behind men's success is because of the greater opportunities they have for building their own professional networks, and hence, access pathways to be promoted to such positions. In support of these findings, Hodges (2017) argued that Saudi women leaders "are excluded from professional networks through not being considered as having the legitimacy to join formal networks because these are seen as traditionally masculine" (p. 42). The benefits gained from networks according to Redmond et al. (2016) are "the ability to build social capital, promote new contact, professional socialization, and emotional support" (p. 5). Schipani et al. (2008) emphasized the role of networks in increasing leaders' opportunities and socialization experiences could equip leaders with a better understanding of the informal side of the organizational life where information exchange and networking take place. Consequently, most female leaders on their journeys to leadership positions had limited PD opportunities and this excluded them from building professional networks which thereby complicated their navigation of the labyrinth of leadership. Women without effective networks are perceived as less: influential, legitimate, and cooperative. Because of the lack of professional networks, some academics used *wasta* as a quick means of gaining opportunities. However, findings showed that *wasta* was a source of injustice and unfairness to others in Saudi PSIs. *Wasta* was also a source of discrimination in senior leadership positions in PSIs. These findings were supported by Tlaiss

and Kauser (2011) who reported that *wasta* was a negative influence because it supports some women's career progression and inhibits the careers of others. In the same vein, Karam and Afiouni (2014) argued that using *wasta* to get recruited, promoted and to fulfill career advancement goals was perceived to be a critical factor that affects women's opportunities to leadership positions.

Overall, respondents of this study tended to find alternative channels to support themselves and relied on informal social networks. The personal efforts in obtaining PD and developing networking relationships were declared by most interviewees as critical tools to hone their craft as leaders; they also declared that these were promising elements for aspirant female leaders, especially regarding *Vision 2030*.

Personal Barriers

The last barrier that participants identified were personal barriers. In Chapter 2, personal barriers were described as sliding doors in some of the labyrinth's walls, which represented women's persistence and ability to cope with barriers. In the labyrinth, there were also mirrored areas that reflected women's personal barriers such as work pressure, fear of mistakes, low self-confidence, leading groups of individuals who had diverse personalities, isolation, and work/family balance.

The findings showed that the overwhelming load of work was a major personal barrier for participants. Huge amounts of pressure and stress made some participants want to resign; their resignations would demotivate aspirants who are in pursuit of leadership roles. Four participants declared that the fear of making mistakes was at the top of their list of anxieties, particularly when they were pursuing nominations for positions. One participant did not recall any fear or anxiety during her leadership, as she considered fear of failure to be inevitable. She felt that making mistakes increased one's wisdom and ability to think and learn from these mistakes. In her view, fear and shyness were the enemies of success. In addition, she stated that low self-confidence and anxiety should not be a part of the psyche of effective leaders because good leaders should be courageous, confidential, and risk-takers to be able to lead others. In this study, the level of fear as suggested by respondents depended on a leader's level of experience. Findings suggested that leaders' level of experience in leadership equated to the amount of fear and anxiety that they exhibited regarding making mistakes.

Four participants spoke about difficulties in dealing with diverse personalities, while two respondents did not recall any difficulty in leading diverse personalities as they had long experience in dealing with people. Nonetheless, they pointed out that diversity in personalities was a major contributor to conflicts among faculty members. To resolve such conflicts, Aldhaferi (2017) suggested that leaders acknowledge SQ because it can increase individuals' ability to interact appropriately with the diverse personalities that people possess.

Findings revealed that respondents' attempt to achieve the balance between professional and personal responsibilities was a major part of their lives. This finding aligns with what Eagly and Carli (2007) pointed out when they stated about female leaders, "for many women, the most fateful turns in the labyrinth are the ones taken under pressure of family responsibilities. Women continue to be the ones who interrupt their careers" (p. 6). Work and family conflict was discussed by four of the participants as a source of stress and a barrier to their progression. These women reported that they struggled with the imbalance between family obligations and work responsibilities which consumed almost all their time. Women leaders are expected to respond to male administrators promptly, declared respondents even while they are at home. Although some respondents declared that they had supportive husbands who shared housework, the bulk of domestic work still fell on women's shoulders as some interviewees declared.

The findings also revealed that work demands took up most of the participants' time and it was difficult for them to balance their role as mothers and leaders. These findings are quite consistent with the literature in that large numbers of studies discussed women's conflict in balancing work and life. Redmond et al. (2016) stated that "the increased time commitment and work pressure that a leadership promotion entails often affect a woman's career choices in a way that is not usually experienced by men" (p. 3). Kern (2015) noted that balancing family and work remained a challenge for women leaders. In addition, Eagly and Carli (2007) stated that "though husbands have taken on more domestic work, the work/family conflict has not eased for women; the gain has been offset by escalating pressures for intensive parenting and the increasing time demands of most high-level careers" (p. 5). Halawani (2002) argued that women's struggle to balance work and family obligations leads them to feel that they are unable to take on leadership roles. This aligns with findings from participants some of whom wanted to quit the leadership role because of family/work conflicts.

Overall, there were significant numbers of prominent societal, organizational, professional, and personal barriers that Saudi women faced in the labyrinth of leadership in PSIs. These barriers decelerated their advancement and impeded their career progression. Nevertheless, the ability to balance work and family responsibility might not be a strain to some women leaders whose family structure (i.e., not having young children) supported them to pursue their career progression. In my years as an administrator, I found that my family's understanding of my role as a leader and the support they provided me, positively energized my ability, to persist and balance my career and life.

Saudi Women's Strategies for Overcoming Barriers

The second part of research question 2 was, 'how do Saudi female leaders navigate the labyrinth of leadership despite these barriers? I was excited to explore the strategies that participants used in the hope of helping to delineate paths of leadership for female aspirants in Saudi universities. Although each participant had a unique experience in overcoming barriers, they all emphasized the critical role of the keys KSB in supporting their navigation.

There was consensus among respondents that knowledge of the university's policies and their administrative skills facilitated their navigation of the labyrinth of leadership. These findings align with the literature, Kattan et al. (2016) stated that "experience and knowledge play an important role in women leadership success" (p. 5). Leadership is related to knowledge, as Merideth (2007) declared that "leadership provides self-knowledge and the courage to act on that knowledge" (p. 7). Great leaders are those who translate their knowledge into initiatives for the benefits of their universities and people (Alsubaie & Jones, 2017; Kattan et al., 2016; Mahdinezhad et al., 2013). In addition, Feiz et al. (2019) declared that great leaders are those who are able to share their knowledge freely and proactively with others.

Findings also showed that knowledge helped respondents to successfully ameliorate their struggles in dealing with different personality types and thereby generating a collective and cordial foundation of understanding and communication. Knowledge was tied with experience, Kattan et al. (2016) argued that:

the more experiences women leaders have had at work, the more ability they have to accelerate their leadership skills and grant their success. The deepest knowledge women have, the highest ability to achieve the organizational goals effectively, a thing that will

help them clearly think about their role and function in the organization and will support them in their success.” (p. 5)

Hence, knowledge helped participants to share information with their members, in order to not be a bottleneck of knowledge.

The role of women’s individual skills was highlighted by several empirical studies, including, (Black, 2015; Gmelch, 2013; Gonaim, 2017; Kalargyrou et al., 2012; Kattan et al., 2016; Spendlove, 2007). Respondents also emphasized skills as being necessary to be effective in their roles. This finding aligns with (Gmlech, 2013) who argued that skills help leaders achieve the organization’s objectives through effective communication with faculty members, staff, students, administrators, and other members of the educational community. The findings showed that critical thinking skills enabled women leaders to understand and introspectively think about the consequences of their decisions to avoid mistakes. Critical thinking also enhanced respondents’ ability to make long-term plans for their departments by aligning their faculty’s objectives with those of the university. These findings confirm Kalargyrou et al.’s (2012) findings, which explained that it was important for leaders to have critical skills to assure efficiency in leadership.

Participants also noted the ability to think ‘outside the box,’ and encourage staff and faculty members to be creative at work as being an important tool. This finding aligns with literature, Korejan and Shahbazi (2016) stated that creativity enables leaders to “lead others in a way that they try more than their abilities in the organization” (p. 453) and inspired them to be innovated because innovation “appears when individuals share their personal knowledge with others” (Feiz et al., 2019, p. 2) at workplace.

The findings also showed that interpersonal skills such as listening, negotiating, persuading, influencing, and understanding people’s personalities supported participants’ effectiveness in traversing the labyrinth of leadership. This finding confirms Kalargyrou et al. (2012) findings regarding interpersonal skills being “centered on interacting with and influencing people through social awareness and interpersonal understanding” (p. 41). Participants stated that working in a male-dominated setting necessitated that they learn how to negotiate disparate viewpoints amongst subordinates. Kalargyrou et al. (2012) argued that developing the skill of negotiation fostered leaders’ confidence in their capacity to be assertive enough to make decisions

during challenging circumstances, and at the same time work to create harmonious environments within their organizations.

The findings also showed that emotional and social intelligence skills, helped participants acknowledge that people have different points of view, so it was necessary for them to demonstrate these skills in their relationships. Furthermore, these skills allowed participants to see things from people's perspectives, understand and manage their emotions, and thereby display self-control and develop followers' trust. These findings align with Almengash (2017) who noted that seeing things through the eyes of others provide women leaders with valuable lessons and allow them to gain respect and engender the trust of others. In addition, SQ as Gardner and Stough (2002) argued, enhances leaders' ability to solve problems and make use of the opportunities that they encounter. The authors also argued that leaders with SQ are able "to envision major improvements to the functioning of an organization...understand their own and other people's point of view...[and] handle the stress of the job, the frustrations, disappointments and joys" (p. 70). Therefore, SQ has positive influences on leaders' advancement in the labyrinth of leadership in Saudi PSIs.

Additionally, respondents purported the significance of having strategic skills such as delegation. The findings revealed that when leaders shared some administration tasks with team members it assisted them to improve their skills, gave them the opportunities to take on leadership roles, and thereby, increased their creativity, productivity, and satisfaction. These findings align with the literature. Gonaim (2017); Mahapatra and Gupta (2013); Shahmandi et al. (2011) emphasized that when administrators delegate responsibility to followers it increases their productivity and satisfaction. Gonaim further added that delegation "is not a way of escaping responsibilities or avoiding complicated tasks; rather it is a way for building trust and collegiality in the academic department" (p. 3515). Participants also emphasized the need to give their team members clear instructions before delegating tasks; this skill of providing clear instruction while delegating tasks to team members minimized misunderstandings at work and improved their performance. These results were highlighted by Gonaim (2017), who stated that "effective delegation entails assigning tasks with a brief explanation of the expected result, express the sense of confidence and trust that the delegated task will be fulfilled" (p. 3515). Results suggest that the skill of delegation was critical for the growth and productivity of the organization because it improved employees' performances.

Leaders' behaviours were also highlighted by participants as a supporting key in navigating the labyrinth. The findings revealed that leaders' behaviour which reflected values, enabled followers to develop confidence and trust with their leaders. This aligns with Kattan et al. (2016) findings that "good leaders are followed chiefly because people trust and respect them, rather than the skills they possess" (p. 4). The demonstration of appreciation, respect, and motivation of followers to give their best, were indicators that reflected how leaders behaved with others. Respondents noted that appreciation was like fuel for followers because when they were appreciated, they worked to exert extra effort. The ability of leaders to influence others through their behaviour resulted in work environments where teams (staff, colleagues, etc.) felt empowered and courageous enough to act. These findings regarding leaders' behaviours were supported by (Delener, 2013; Gmelch, 2013; Hamzah et al., 2016). For instance, Hamzah et al. emphasized the role of leaders and argued that "...[leaders] are respected and counted on to do what is right. They are able to balance respect and responsibility, and they are able to share their values with others" (p. 198). Kattan et al. (2016) stated that "to be an effective leader, one needs an exclusive set of human relations and interpersonal skills. Leadership in essence is being able to influence. To influence others, one needs a number of component skills" (p. 4), attitudes, and behaviours to succeed as leaders.

The findings showed that experience was one of the keys to navigating the labyrinth. The experience helped leaders to better identify the dead ends, stop signs, and green lights throughout the journey of the labyrinth especially after experiencing setbacks (Carli & Eagly, 2016). Respondents also suggested that this finding helped them to understand how to turn obstacles into valuable opportunities with their patience and persistence. Respondents stated that they appreciated their experiences in navigating the labyrinth of leadership because these experiences were instrumental in shaping who they are today. This finding is consistent with Carli and Eagly (2016) view that "women's success resides in an interaction between the skills and motivation of women and the challenges of the situation" (p. 518). Findings also revealed that the influence of barriers and how to overcome them in the leadership labyrinth varied among participants based on their experience. Experience tends to make a person wiser as they learn to anticipate and overcome challenges along the leadership journey to success.

Another finding that emerged from this study was the impact of spirituality on women leaders' progression in the labyrinth of leadership. Spirituality appeared to be the key support for

Saudi women leaders throughout their leadership journeys because it inspired leaders to fulfil their role from a faith-based perspective. Alongside spirituality, Saudi women leaders' faith made them feel more responsible in serving and cooperating with others which brought more fidelity to the educational setting. These women agreed that a leader is one who can guide others, think about their needs, cooperate with them to excel, and most importantly reveres and has faith in God.

The findings also showed that spiritual values based on Islam were invaluable resources for Saudi women in their career progression. Participants' strong faith in God facilitated their navigation and increased their intrinsic motivation to excel as leaders. Their belief that their ultimate reward would be from God, and not man inspired them to continue their journeys.

The role of spirituality in the study is a new finding and contributes to the literature on Saudi women's leadership in Saudi PSIs. Previous studies discussed challenges that Saudi women leaders faced in PSIs, but none highlighted the role that spirituality played in assisting them to overcome these barriers. The findings suggested that participants' values were derived from their spiritual stages of *Islam*, *Iman*, *Ihsan*, and *Taqwa*, as mentioned earlier in Chapter 5. The findings suggested that these stages helped participants to have peace with God, with themselves, and with others in the organization through their willing submission to God. In addition, these spiritual stages allowed participants to display the love of God, and this love stimulated them to monitor and fulfill their work to gain God's blessings. The spiritual stages also compelled participants to be fair and just with their followers.

Navigate the labyrinth of leadership with faith and trust in God, this finding resonates with the Quranic verse "Those who believe, and whose hearts find comfort in the remembrance of God. Surely, it is in God's remembrance that hearts find comfort" (13:28). Furthermore, Mohammed et al. (2015) claimed that great leaders are remembered for the spiritual core values they impart to their followers more than their achievements. Because spirituality highlights leaders' values, attitudes, and behaviours in motivating themselves and their followers.

Additionally, the findings revealed several spiritual values that participants displayed in their leadership journeys, the key ones were *fairness*, *patience*, *trustworthiness*, *humility*, *empathy*, and *acting in the service of others*. These values and others according to Ishak and Osman (2015) are described as the 'navigational devices' because they guide an individual's emotion and activity. Empathy, for instance, was discussed by Boda (2017) who stated that

empathetic leaders are good leaders of conflicts and tensions as they can have better interactions with others. Patience was emphasized by Ishak and Osman (2015) who identified “patience as the best tool to ease or solve difficulties...patience is a necessity in handling differences, conflicts and a source to remain calmness in facing hardship and difficulties” (p. 15). Also, Hamzah et al. (2016) argued that “leaders that have integrity build trust in their relations with others; they become valued as friends, colleagues, mentors, and supervisors” (p. 198). Jamil's (2015) identified some spiritual characteristics that help leaders to be effective in their roles:

... [people] who can present themselves as a role model for [his] their subordinates. Their firmness, truthfulness, reliability, selflessness, ethics, loyalty to the organization, passion, moderation, humility, fairness, and mercy are important attributes which one has to have in their personality as a leader of the organization, a state or a country. They must be a role model for their team and able to handle/resolve issues and can make effective decisions after consulting with the relevant stakeholders. (pp. 40-41)

In *Sunnah* and the Holy *Quran*, patience is mentioned in several verses “Truly, God is with the patient ones” (1:153) and “O you who believe! Seek help through patience and prayers. God is with the patient” (2:153).

Participants unequivocally declared how spiritual values acted as triggers that supported them in their leadership journeys. They also argued that without fairness, trustworthiness, and humility, followers would not trust and imitate them. Respondents were adamant that the pathway of leadership was full of challenges and to achieve their goals, they had to be patient and persevere in their efforts.

Spirituality was the driving force behind participants' success. The findings revealed that women's courage, confidence, ambition, hard work, care, etc. helped them to persist in their roles and stimulated their self-efficacy to improve themselves as leaders. These values align with what is stated in the Holy Quran, “God does not change the condition of people until they change what is in themselves” (13:11).

The labyrinth's path which was described previously in Chapter 2 as being intricately linked and full of twists and turns for women does not have the same effect on all women. Female leaders who have and use the keys SKB to navigate the labyrinth will find the journey much less cumbersome. Overall, the Islamic culture, spiritual values and principles have made these Saudi women's experiences distinct from other women in the world.

Discussion of Research Question 3

In this section, I provide responses to the final research question, “what are the supports accessed by Saudi female academic leaders as they navigated the labyrinth of leadership in Saudi PSIs and how did these supports assist their navigation?” Also, I related participants’ responses to findings from past studies in the literature.

According to findings, the foremost support that motivated Saudi female academic leaders to pursue and persist in their leadership journey despite the barriers was their faith in, and reverence of God. Participants acknowledged that “whoever fears God, He will make for him a way out” *Quran* (65:2) and always “with difficulty there is a relief” (94:5) this verse was stated twice in *Quran* to assure that challenges are not permanent. The participants in this study were adamant that the path of leadership was full of struggles, but the trust that they placed in God was what fortified them to continue their careers. Their beliefs were anchored in the sacred writings, “and if anyone puts his trust in God, sufficient is (God) for him. For God will surely accomplish his purpose” (65:3). Saudi female academic leaders’ strong faith in God motivated them to navigate the labyrinth despite its barriers.

Spirituality, trust, and fear of God were embedded in behaviours that were mentioned as findings in minuscule ways by a few scholars in their studies. For instance, Gonaim (2018) who studied female school principals and how they coped with challenges, found that “women’s belief in God fuels their survival in the face of all the difficulties that they encounter” (p. 231). However, there was no mention of faith or the influence of spirituality on female leaders in PSIs. Another study conducted by Tameem (2019) on how Saudi women leaders negotiated challenges, found that religion had great influence on participants’ leadership styles. Although Tameem did not fully explain this, she stated that religion empowered women to be successful and faithful in their roles. I found no further studies that examined the spiritual stages and values as mediating factors for Saudi female academic leaders in PSIs, hence, this study addressed this deficiency in the literature. The findings of this study that emphasized the role of spirituality in supporting Saudi female academic leaders to overcome the labyrinth of leadership added much value to this study.

The influence of family members and familial support was a theme that emerged across the research as enablers for Saudi female academic leaders in PSIs, as mentioned in the influential individuals’ section. The findings revealed that supportive families demonstrated

enhanced respondents' performance, self-confidence, and contributed to their development and success in navigating the labyrinth of leadership. Respondents also underlined the effective role that partners who were supportive and willing to sacrifice with them for their career advancement played in their success as leaders. These findings were consistent with Lent et al. (2000); Nakamanya et al. (2017); and Ruhi et al. (2018) literature on how family support helped women leaders effectively perform their roles. Other studies have revealed that having supportive family and friends were factors that mitigated mental illnesses and assisted in improving one's mental well-being, especially in difficult times (Cheung & Halpern, 2010; Marcinkus et al., 2007; Watson, 2008). To increase the possibility of success, Saudi female academic leaders required families that were supportive throughout their careers, especially when they occupied senior positions that were traditionally held by men (Marcinkus et al., 2007). The authors further noted that family support was positively associated with women leaders' job satisfaction, institutional commitment, and career accomplishment. Al-dawsari (2016) found that family support was instrumental in enabling women leaders to succeed in their positions. A study conducted by Kern (2015), that investigated women in leadership, found that the support that families provided to women leaders positively affected their career paths.

The importance of family support was also reflected in the work of Nakamanya et al. (2017) who stated that family support played a major role in the success of women in leadership positions. Nakamanya et al. further argued that support could be manifested through fathers who provided moral and educational support for their daughters' career progression and choices. Family supports helped Saudi female academic leaders to cope with work-related stress and improved their ability to perform their roles effectively. These findings are in accordance with the data that participants provided in this study.

Family support can also be acquired from a supportive spouse. Most respondents emphasized the role of husbands who supported them in their career progression. Because Saudi Arabia is a patriarchal society, it was surprising for women to receive support from their husbands. Byerly (2014) studied the experiences of female college presidents and reported that these women acknowledged supportive husbands who bore the load of family responsibilities such as child-rearing and assisted them to move up the ladder of leadership. Byerly further added that these women "could not do the jobs they do unless they had the support of their spouses" (p.125). Tlaiss and Kauser (2011) highlighted the importance of having supportive and

understanding husbands for the success of women in managerial careers. The female participants in the study declared that having support from their immediate and extended family, or partner was significant for their progressions and made their navigation more probable. On the contrary, the findings also showed that the absence of family support was a challenge to women's leadership journeys which as well align with literature.

The findings revealed that informal leadership spaces at the university such as involvement in departmental committees, internal meetings with supervisors, academic membership, and professional training were personal supports which respondents received as leaders. I found no further studies on Saudi female academic leaders in literature that examined these techniques in supporting women's access to leadership. Hence, this study addressed this deficiency in the literature and added to the literature.

The findings also showed that most of the women in the study emphasized their efforts to grow professionally. Personal supports increased participants' self-confidence, self-esteem, helped them to acknowledge their strengths and weakness, and achieve their goals. Nakamanya et al. (2017) highlighted the role of personal development that helped female leaders in academia "to cope with the work-related stress hence performing their roles excellently" (p.991). Nakamanya et al. further noted that female leaders were also succeeding in academic and professional careers because of the support they received from their close friends, which also aligns with the findings. A few participants also declared that they got some support from their supervisors who shared their knowledge and experience of navigating the labyrinth of leadership.

Evidence showed that organizational supports consistently influence women leaders' performance. Organizational support is operationally defined as any assistance that is provided by organizations, such as financial, PD, advisory, and regulatory (Gazzaz, 2017; Gorondutse et al., 2019). Although participants pointed to PD opportunities provided by the organization, these opportunities were insufficient, and some were originally designed for men. In addition, organizational supports relating to human resources and financial rewards were not mentioned by participants; they alluded that there was a scarcity of financial support for female academic leaders when compared to their male counterparts. The lack of human and financial resources negatively affected women leaders and might be the reason some quit their leadership positions.

Th findings showed that scholarships were institutional supports that were given to Saudi female academic leaders to pursue graduate studies abroad. This opportunity was deemed a

golden one because it opened doors for Saudi academics to obtain personal and professional development. Another support declared by one of the participants was governmental support in providing free education and establishing a professional platform called ‘*misk*’ to gather information from around the country about women leaders who are interested in leadership positions.

The findings revealed that the Saudi *Vision 2030* was another government support that empower women. Participants discussed the significance of this vision in providing them with various opportunities. Respondents gave examples of several changes that occurred in Saudi Arabia, such as the lifting of the driving ban on women, the appointment of the first Saudi woman as a dean in a faculty, the appointment of the first Saudi woman ambassador to the U.S.A, and others (see Table 2.1.) as signs of improvement for women resulting from *Vision 2030*.

The support that women received in academia was highlighted by Gorondutse et al. (2019); who argued that the type of supports had relation to the effectiveness of women in leadership. This relation, according to the authors:

is clear in universities that employ women in their scientific councils and various departments by providing incentives to receive ongoing government support and to raise the level of self-confidence of female leaders by involving them in dialogues and scientific conferences which can help them become effective leaders. (p. 315)

However, Gorondutse et al. (2019) further noted that governmental supports may not extend over and above the prevailing culture of Saudi society. The Saudi customs and traditions mandate a strict code of sex-based segregation in public (e.g., schools, universities, workplace).

Consequently, the findings of the study revealed that governmental supports did not significantly support all female leaders as previously mentioned.

In summation, supports played fundamental role in the progression of Saudi female academic leaders’ trek towards senior leadership positions in Saudi PSIs. Faith and belief in God were participants’ primary support in navigating the labyrinth of leadership.

Implications

The detailed descriptions that Saudi women leaders shared of their leadership pathways, barriers, opportunities, and supports in the labyrinth of leadership, were numerous. The resultant

findings of this study have several implications for practice, policy, theory, and future research. I present these implications in the ensuing sections.

Implications for Practice

Findings of this study indicated that there are three essential practices for Saudi women leaders. First, given the current transformations regarding the role of women in Saudi PSIs, the findings implied that Saudi female academic leaders should keep pace with changes by developing the keys of leadership KSB to effectively navigate the labyrinth. The findings showed that participants relied on their personal efforts to develop their leadership abilities, therefore, they should focus more on self-improvement. Such improvement will help these leaders to understand their strengths and flaws, make them agents of change, assist them to evolve in their leadership development and give them the strength to face and overcome barriers in the labyrinth. Additionally, Saudi women leaders' involvement in the organization's strategic planning and other activities that enhance their personal skills often make their leadership qualities perceptible as well as develop their credibility.

Second, the findings showed that mentorship is missing in Saudi PSIs and there are limited opportunities for women to establish networks, therefore, women's path to leadership was more challenging. The literature assured that; women leaders succeed in their careers when they are mentored; the lack of mentorship restricts Saudi female academic leaders' ability to excel in the few available positions of top-level leadership in PSIs. Thus, Saudi senior women who are in upper leadership positions could share their experiences and acquaint current and aspiring women leaders with strategies of how they overcame their barriers. Sharing experiences could also inspire female colleagues to participate in reflections and decision-making to improve the efficiency of universities. In addition, these senior leaders could serve as role models and mentors for followers. The use of mentors could be the catalyst to establish professional networks and increase the number of women who aspire to top leadership positions in Saudi PSIs. Networks would create opportunities for potential leaders to better understand the role of women leaders, develop skills that would help in making well-informed decisions, learn new strategies for a better balance between their personal and professional lives, and build a community of support that addresses women's exclusion from major decision making in Saudi PSIs. Based on the findings, it seems reasonable to suggest that Saudi female academics who are interested in

leadership should meet frequently and communicate with other leaders in the university to develop long-term plans for possible career directions.

Third, based on the findings, Saudi female academic leaders should actively engage in and publish research in the field of women and leadership. Such research could inspire the compilation of data regarding gender statistics, for example, data from different regions in Saudi Arabia on leadership roles in PSIs. From that collected data, strategies to monitor and understand elements that challenge or contribute to the development of women leaders in universities and other organizations could be identified, addressed, and implemented. Moreover, recommendations from these studies could assist current, and aspiring female leaders to maintain and attain leadership positions in Saudi PSIs. In addition, these studies could promote an awareness of the urgent need to address women's issues in universities and the public sphere and offer innovative ideas that facilitate human resource development programs for women. Furthermore, publications could positively change the stereotyped images of women by increasing societal awareness of gender equity in universities and other places of work. Findings from these studies on women and leadership could help to improve the perspectives of Saudi men regarding women's roles; without the avid support of men towards women, significant progress towards ending the gender disparities in Saudi universities is unlikely to occur. Both women and men should have the intention to progressively transform the organization's culture towards more equitable opportunities in pursuing leadership.

Implications for Policy

I articulate four primary implications for Saudi university's policies in easing women leaders' barriers in the labyrinth of leadership and increasing their acceleration to top leadership positions. First, policies regarding egalitarianism in PSIs should be updated or revised. Such updates or revisions could reduce discrimination and promote gender equity through the reform of recruitment procedures, promotion, and compensation. These policies could "provide a fairground for women to compete for leadership positions with their male counterparts" (Nakamanya et al., 2017, p. 993). In addition, "implementing policies that are free from bias could help women to balance their personal and professional work" (Nakamanya et al., 2017, p. 993) because some policies act as proximal barriers and hinder women's progress to leadership.

The university's policy could also strengthen and update existing or even create more focused professional leadership forums, courses, and training workshops for women. The variety

of these training initiatives could stimulate female leaders to share their experiences. Consequently, potential women leaders would know more about leadership pathways, barriers, and enabling opportunities so that the number of women in top administrative positions would escalate. For instance, the Academic Leadership Centre established in Riyadh, which was mentioned in Chapter 2, that targeted men leaders only, should serve women leaders as well. Perhaps opening similar centres in every region of Saudi Arabia could make it easier for women to attend leadership courses in their region. Such opportunities could develop not only leadership skills for transformation in organizations, but could also encourage women in building relationships that enable them to learn new strategies to overcome obstacles. Therefore, designing and implementing effective capacity-building programs that are mainly focused on women is one of the ways to mitigate the challenges of women leaders in universities. Literature revealed that leadership practices are contextual. It is vital to contextually design these programs by using a variety of modes (e.g., problem-solving exercises) to identify and focus on the challenges of each context and provide effective solutions to overcome them.

University's policy should support women and increase their opportunities by providing their male counterparts with workshops/training regarding the value of women as leaders. Such trainings should focus and highlight women leaders' role, and their critical contribution in decision-making at the university. The hope is that more men in the Saudi universities and in the society will begin to see women as their equals and value their contributions. Changing the perspectives of men towards women leaders could minimize sexism and discrimination against female academic leaders in Saudi PSIs.

Second, results revealed that the lack of leadership assessments in university policies decrease women's opportunities in leadership. Therefore, university's policymakers should develop leadership assessments that aim to assess and advance leadership competencies for Saudi women. Such tools are crucial for the process of leader selection and to provide pertinent data to choose appropriate candidates who demonstrate essential leadership competencies.

Third, the findings also showed that the universities' culture was at the heart of how the challenges in the labyrinth of leadership for Saudi female academic leaders were created, policies must occur to create equal access to leadership positions for both men and women. However, women are encouraged to aid each other and initiate the changes that they want to see instead of waiting for entire shifts in the cultures of universities. Another possible change in the policy of

universities is for them to put measures in place that mitigate life/work conflicts and enhance female academic leaders' ability to succeed in their personal and professional life. Also, universities should put in place policies to ensure that these leaders receive a job description for their roles; this will reduce their stress levels and minimize the amount of scope creep in their roles.

Implications for Research

This case study studied Saudi female academic leaders' paths, barriers, and supports within the labyrinth of leadership in three Saudi public PSIs in the Makkah region. In the future, it would be interesting for researchers to explore Saudi women's experiences of the labyrinth of leadership in private universities, and from other geographical regions in Saudi Arabia. A qualitative design was used in this study; however, researchers could conduct a quantitative or mixed design study to examine women's experiences, perspectives, and deliberations on the labyrinth of leadership. A quantitative or mixed design study would allow researchers to harvest data from larger numbers of respondents in their efforts to obtain greater understanding of the phenomenon. In addition, researchers could do a comparative study that explores the path of male and female respondents in academia to examine and understand their career progression and advancement towards and through leadership positions. Identifying, acknowledging, and understanding what hinders or enables Saudi female academic leaders, would inform policymakers, and assist them to devote greater efforts in putting policies in place that would improve equity in Saudi PSIs.

Furthermore, researchers could also find it beneficial to examine the new findings of this study, particularly regarding spirituality. Results of the value and influence of spirituality on Saudi women leaders' performance and effectiveness could expand the findings of this study.

In the future, researchers could also focus on studies that assist them to understand the impact of the new policy Saudi *Vision 2030* on women, and how this vision may or may not empower them and/or change the contexts of women leadership in Saudi PSIs.

This study focussed solely on women leaders in Saudi Arabia with its unique culture and does not compare it with other developing or developed countries. Future studies could juxtapose Saudi women academic leaders' barriers with women from other Arab and Muslim countries to get new insights and strategies that could increase women's effectiveness as leaders in these jurisdictions.

Implications for Theory

The findings of this study showed theoretical implications for the use of the metaphor 'labyrinth' as suggested by Eagly and Carli (2007). This study revealed that the 'labyrinth' was a concept, that was applicable and useful in describing participants' journeys in leadership positions. The metaphor provided a clearer understanding of women's obstacles and opportunities and the conditions they faced on their leadership pathways. Not all leaders navigate the labyrinth from the same starting point (entrance), and many do not end at the same point. Significantly, the labyrinth metaphor implies that women face challenges throughout their careers, but they also hold, persevere, and successfully navigate their pathways as they proceed. Based on findings the labyrinth painted a clear picture of Saudi female academic leaders' persistence, resilience, and belief in themselves and their aspirations. Furthermore, the findings revealed that the labyrinth encouraged Saudi female academic leaders in developing their leadership skills and knowledge and increased their patience and awareness of their progress. To navigate the labyrinth, these leaders require support and need to use all their abilities including knowledge and skills to carefully analyze the puzzles of the labyrinth.

The findings also indicated that the suggested leadership keys KSB were effective for increasing Saudi female academic leaders' ability to navigate the labyrinth of leadership; leaders relied on these keys to successfully ameliorate the challenges that they faced. Moreover, Saudi female academic leaders' experiences in leadership motivated them to learn and improve their leadership capacity and display them in their conduct. The pathways may be uphill climbs but with these keys, grit and determination Saudi female academic leaders can successfully navigate the labyrinth of leadership in PSIs.

In addition, the findings assured that spirituality was advantageous not only for leaders' benefit but also for other stakeholders. Leaders who demonstrated spiritual values such as integrity, honesty, and dignity, were successful at building effective relationships with others. In addition, Saudi female academic leaders' faith and trust in God were what motivated them to exert more efforts because of the assurance that their ultimate reward will be from God, and not man. The spiritual stages *Islam*, *Iman*, *Ihsan*, and *Taqwa* for the Saudi female academic leaders increased their intrinsic motivation and inspired them to lead well and to do their best; these spiritual stages also encouraged them to be more aware of their own roles, responsibilities, and behaviours to others.

In sum, the labyrinth metaphor was a useful one, as it got respondents to reflect on the varying degrees of obstacles at different levels and the potential routes that led to their success in leadership. Women leaders who were prepared and had a clear understanding of the routes were more prosperous in navigating the labyrinth of leadership. These women indicated that struggles were inevitable for leaders and that sometimes strong actions were required to get to the center of the labyrinth and achieve transformation.

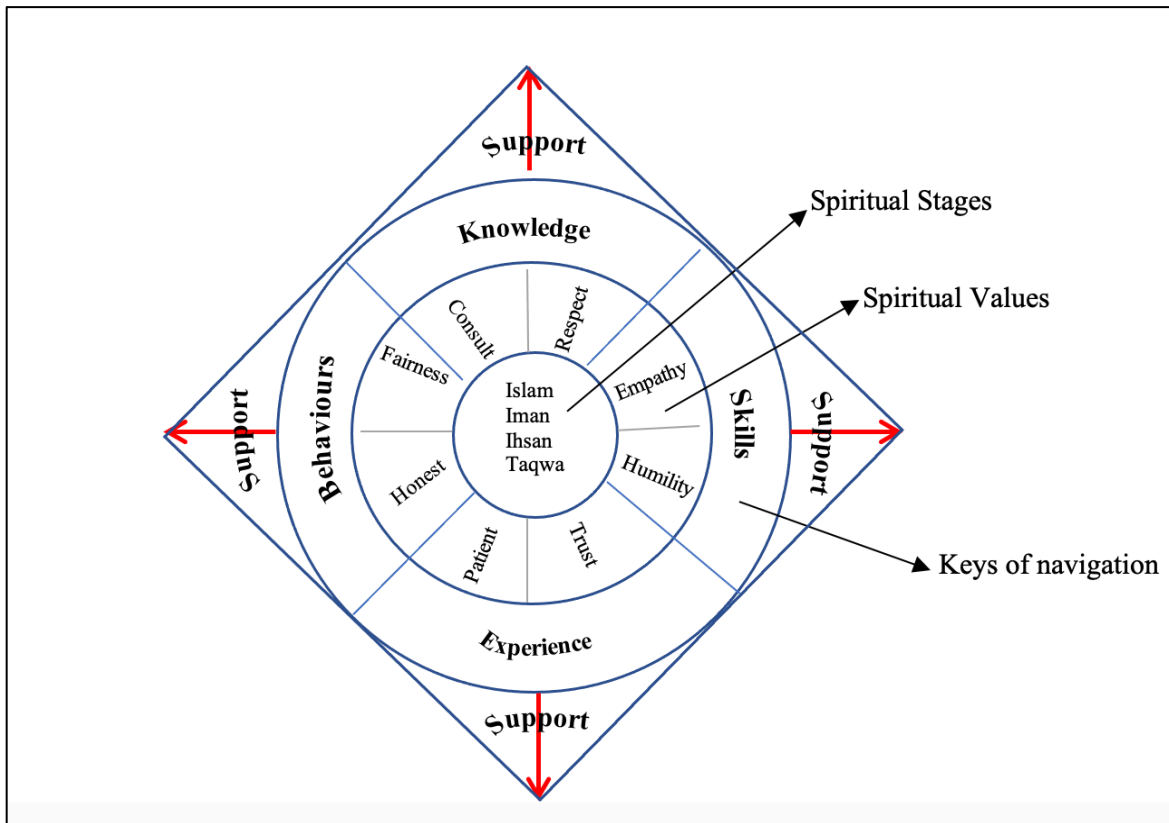
The findings of this study have required that I amend the previous interpretation of the centre of the labyrinth, which was referred to, in Chapter 2, as top leadership positions in PSIs. Based on the results, the centre of the labyrinth was viewed by Saudi female academic leaders as the level where they were satisfied with their success in their role and their abilities to overcome barriers. For others, the centre symbolized the level of personal fears that needed to be subjugated, for others it was acquiring equality in opportunities for females and males as well as the need to cooperate and complement each other as leaders.

Furthermore, results revealed that the labyrinth did not only consist of barriers and opportunities to which women leaders were exposed, it also involved their career experiences of their thoughts, emotions, attitudes, losses, gains, successes, failures, states of happiness, and sorrows; all these factors impacted Saudi female academic leaders' effective navigation in the labyrinth.

Two keys were also added to the conceptualization of the study; *experience* and *spirituality* emerged as keys for Saudi female academic leaders' success in navigating the labyrinth of leadership. In Chapter 2, I proposed an analytic framework which I labelled the keys of navigation, and consisted of *knowledge, skills, and behaviours* (KSB); findings suggested that *Experience* and *Spirituality* are additional keys to that framework.

After synthesis, I proposed a modified model of the analytic framework for this study. I named this framework "The Compass of Navigation" in the labyrinth of leadership as depicted in Figure 6.1. Saudi female academic aspirants in PSIs could benefit from the guidance of this compass that consisted of spiritual stages, values, keys of navigation KSB and support in and through their leadership path.

Figure 6.1. *The compass of navigation*



Studies of metaphors, in literature, tend to focus on contexts derived from Western cultures (Randell & Yerbury, 2020). My study attempted to break that mold, by extending Eagly and Carli’s understanding of the metaphor in the unique context of Saudi PSIs. Using the ‘labyrinth’ as a conceptual framework in this study was useful because it confirmed that Saudi women’s paths to upper levels of leadership were also full of twists and turns. Another fact that emerged from the literature review was the scarcity of Arab studies that focused on women’s leaders’ barriers in PSIs with the labyrinth as a framework. This study contributes to the existing body of knowledge aimed at understanding Saudi female academic leaders’ barriers in PSIs and how they effectively proceeded through the labyrinth of leadership despite these barriers. The resulting ripple effect could add to the overall prosperity of PSIs, in the country, and the world.

Reflections on Methodological Approach

No journey is without challenges and learning, we should ensure that they add meaning to what we do. Without challenges, success would be less meaningful. The difficulties that emerged

during the process of this research were challenging for me as the researcher. First, was the bureaucracy associated with getting approval from the Saudi universities. The long-distance calls to the Graduate Studies Faculty of the targeted Saudi universities were costly but were fruitful in the end. In addition, I had to endure long waiting times for replies from participants as invitations were sent during the early phases of COVID-19 when there was a shift from in-person to virtual delivery of curricula. My second challenge was the time difference (9 hours) between Canada and Saudi Arabia which necessitated awkward times to conduct the interviews. Third, translating the jargon of Arabic language into English was another difficulty I faced, as I had to make sure the meaning was maintained throughout the translation. These challenges were time-consuming, but I overcame them and proceeded with my journey.

In this study, I sought to explore the journeys of Saudi female academic leaders as they navigated the labyrinth of leadership in Saudi PSIs. Given the premise that leadership is a socially constructed phenomenon and to access the lived experiences of these women, an interpretive qualitative approach was chosen with a case study as the methodology and semi-structured interview as the data collection method.

As an interpretivist, my main goal was to interpret the social phenomenon (Collis & Hussey, 2014) and understand women leaders' perceptions as they constructed meaning through interactions with their world (Merriam, 2002; Patton, 2002; Randell & Yerbury, 2020; Schwandt, 2001). The qualitative approach used in the study, allowed me to better understand the experiences of participants in their leadership contexts within the Saudi culture and to understand how these leaders interacted with their social world and navigated the labyrinth of leadership. I opted to use semi-structured interviews to obtain depth and richness data in this case study. The semi-structured interviews were beneficial to this study as they allowed me to listen to and understand the experience of Saudi female academic leaders. I was a bit anxious about conducting online interviews, a requirement because of the COVID-19 pandemic, however, I found out that I could be effective from the first interview. All interviews were conducted in Arabic, which made participants more comfortable, open, and clear in sharing their perceptions. Although interviews were conducted online, there were numerous times for building rapport with respondents especially when I asked for further clarification. Participants showed interest in participating in the study despite their hectic schedules. During the interviews, it was evident that respondents were engaged, focused, and well-prepared with stories to share. Participants were

forthright in sharing their experiences and perspectives which was a bit surprising to me. They eagerly participated in the study and committed their time to share their experiences with me. I was impressed by participants' understanding of my situation as an international student researcher; most of them had studied abroad and had been in similar situations before. I felt close to the respondents; I felt their feelings, frustrations, passions, and the hope they had for improvement for Saudi women leaders in academia. The semi-structured interviews were more than formal research interviews, they were a source of valuable lessons for me. I learnt from these Saudi leaders who persisted despite the barriers they faced. I also learnt that when a leader overcame a challenge, she gained strength and experience which enabled her to overcome others. All these experiences made the gathering of data enjoyable and fruitful.

In hindsight, using a case study methodology was a good choice in providing an in-depth understanding of female leaders' experiences, path, barriers, and supports to and through the labyrinth of leadership in PSIs in the Makkah region. The case study helped me to focus on women academic leaders' issues, understand their various perceptions, and probe for further data, which resulted in me collecting rich data. Purposive sampling allows researchers to select participants who contribute to the study by supplying rich information (Patton, 2000). The purposive sampling of Saudi female academic leaders who had dual roles of administrative and instructional duties provided fulsome data in this study. The spread of the level of experience was good, there was a nice blend of leaders with little experience and others who had a lot of years of experience in leadership. The perceptions of these respondents were filled with valuable lessons from their experiences in the labyrinth of leadership.

I think that the method and methodology used in this research were useful in examining the phenomenon and unearthing data to answer the research questions, however, several other approaches could also have been beneficial for this research. The world café method could have been one such method, it would have been interesting to hear the aggregate data from respondents' dialogue. Along with the world cafe I would also conduct semi-structured interviews with female educational leaders who had 10 or more years of experience in leadership in PSIs. These expert educators would scrutinize and analyze the collected data from the world cafe and then contribute data of their own experiences. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, these methods were not considered for use in this study. However, the methodological approach that

was used in this study provided a clearer understanding of Saudi female academic leaders' journeys, their barriers, and opportunities to and through the labyrinth of leadership in PSIs.

Advice to Aspiring Female Leaders

Participants provided advice for potential and aspirant female leaders to navigate the labyrinth of leadership. I hope that these pieces of advice will encourage women to succeed in leadership in Saudi PSIs. Participants who offered advice worked within constraints and dealt with myriad barriers in contexts that were not always facilitative or inviting. Nevertheless, Saudi female academic leaders stated that they were motivated to tackle the barriers and look for opportunities to improve their leadership capacity. These women encouraged others to pursue the journey so that they may overcome traditional practices that impeded their ascent up the ladder of leadership.

Personal Development Planning

Most participants spoke of the benefits of having a personal development plan during their journey of leadership. These women advised aspirant women leaders to consider putting a personal development plan in place that outlines both their personal and career objectives and the steps they will take to achieve them. Participants advocated for aspirant female leaders to prepare a development plan based on their experiences and how it facilitated their navigation of the labyrinth of leadership in Saudi PSIs.

Professional Development (PD)

Women in the study strongly advised other potential leaders in PSIs to improve their academic credentials by acquiring a Ph.D. degree. Participants also encouraged others to attend leadership PD courses, workshops, webinars, or find mentors who will help them build networks, share knowledge, and gain new information for their personal growth. PD activities will increase female leaders' opportunities to succeed in the labyrinth of leadership.

Accept Leadership Opportunities

Participants also advised women who are interested in leadership to pursue opportunities that allow them to showcase their talents; these opportunities do not necessarily have to be associated with administration. The potential administrator must take on the responsibility to find the niche in which her leadership can be shown. There was consensus among participants that the path to success is always surrounded by obstacles, however, the wise leader is able to solve and turn them into opportunities for change.

Be Prepared

Participants advised aspirant female academic leaders to prepare themselves to face the next barrier/challenge that they might encounter on their leadership path as barriers add meaning to their roles. Female leaders should think about what inspires them to go to work, what motivates them to do their best, etc. Answers to these questions and to what gives meaning and purpose to life and work could make them “generous hosts” to those whom they lead.

Build Social Capital

A very commonly mentioned advice was the need for aspirant female academic leaders to build trusting and supportive relationships. Building positive relationships enables female leaders to appreciate others’ abilities, input, and knowledge which according to the findings of this study is essential for establishing collegiality and good working relationships. Listening, being empathetic to others’ needs, involving them in decisions, among other things help female academic leaders build good relationships.

Self-belief

Respondents advised aspirant female academic leaders to believe in themselves and realize that they CAN succeed. Faith in yourself increases your self-esteem and capacity for resisting and surviving difficulties. Participants advised that attributes such as being capable, assertive, confident, fair, patient, honest, observant, and hard-working were necessary for leaders to be effective in the labyrinth of leadership. Leaders with a strong belief in themselves can face and overcome barriers and can be change agents who make difference in others.

Visibility

The need to be visible and market one’s administrative capabilities and ambition were also included in the advice given by participants. According to respondents, visibility can be achieved by displaying initiative and developing credibility which are also associated with the need to be confident enough about one’s abilities. Respondents strongly advised that aspirant leaders be visible and display their abilities.

Confront Fears

The need to be courageous and not fear uncertainty or mistakes was also advice that respondents suggested for aspirant female leaders. Everyone makes mistakes but it is important to acknowledge, correct them and use self-improvement practices to increase efficiency. Participants stressed that fears keep female leaders in the same position and prevent them from

taking opportunities to progress and improve their careers. Fear sometimes acts as a compass that points to areas where female leaders need to improve. Participants advised that learning new skills could increase leaders' self-confidence and thereby enable them to face and beat fear.

Balance

The most common advice given by participants was the need to balance one's personal and professional life to have peace of mind. The university indeed must be involved in providing family-friendly policies and good support for female academic leaders. However, respondents advised that it is the female leaders' task to make sure there is a balance between their professional and personal lives.

Trust in God

The last most strongly underlined piece of advice given by the participants to aspirant leaders was to have faith and trust in God because He surely will help, no matter what difficulties they faced, He will be with them.

In summation, the findings showed that the labyrinth of leadership is not a maze nor a puzzle to be resolved, it is a path of meanings to be experienced for advancement throughout female leadership journeys. Because what looks like an endpoint may also be a beginning point. Good leaders are those who uncover the labyrinth's secrets and share them with others.

Conclusion and Final Thoughts

In exploring Saudi female academic leaders' experiences, I wanted to discover how they had ascended to leadership positions, their barriers and enabler opportunities. At times, I became frustrated because the tedious task of working through the raw data overpowered my eagerness to know their stories and experiences; in times like those I reminded myself of the purpose of conducting the study. Through the data collection and analysis process, I felt as if I was a part of each interviewee's journey especially when I was engrossed with the collected data. I was able to identify common themes in respondents' data after repeatedly reading their transcripts. The findings revealed a united voice of respondents in several areas, as they shared similar details. This was an exciting part of my study, as I started to make connections with the data from participants. By embarking on this journey of exploring Saudi women's leadership journeys in PSIs, I learned a lot about myself and my own career journey. The passion I had for the study and the metaphor I used, invigorated me after each interview. I realized the significance of this research for social change within Saudi Arabia, especially with regards to the country's *Vision*

2030 Policy which aims to increase women's contribution and provide them with opportunities to accelerate to the echelon of senior leadership positions.

During the interviews, I reflected on my respondents' messages of courage, optimism, enthusiasm, and success; I hope readers of this study will be inspired by understanding Saudi women's multiple and nuanced perspectives and take the opportunities that are there for future research and open up more possibilities for Saudi women to be leaders in senior positions in PSIs.

Based on the findings of the study, I realized that all the turns and twists in the roles of female leadership required essential competencies. This made me reflect on my previous experience in leadership and how I was trying to improve my skills and gain leadership knowledge to ease my path. The findings of this study also made me reflect on times when I hit the wall in the labyrinth and reached cul-de-sacs with the overload of work and unclear procedures. At that time, I never ever thought of spiritual values, per se, as strategies to overcome barriers; I found myself searching for other ways to alleviate my journey such as reading. Readings on leadership and how leaders lead during difficult times, helped me to cope with barriers. In addition, reading made me realize that leadership is a complex but rewarding venture.

The values that participants shared such as caring and serving others, being humble, kind, and generous to all stakeholders resonated with my previous experience, specifically when I cared about my team's needs, respected their opinions, encouraged them to grow and excel. Despite of the work challenges, I managed to build good relationships with my colleagues based on understanding and trust.

I found that participants' strengths appeared in every word they shared. Their strong faith in God, self-confidence in their abilities, determination, and persistence made them leaders and also pioneers in their roles. Their acknowledgement that the path to leadership had some short or long curves did not stop them from achieving their goals. They were willing to make positive differences in PSIs and pave the path of leadership for others.

From the participants' strengths, I learned many valuable lessons, for example, having confidence in my capabilities, being patient, and going forward to achieve my goals. The curves and twists of leadership provided moments of contemplation and action by the respondents in this study. These moments became catalysts for Saudi women leaders' advancement in leadership.

Female leaders go through labyrinths and the level of difficulty of their journeys depends on their attributes and willingness to persist.

At the end of the study, I found the following quote from Pattakos (2018) most personally impactful:

A labyrinth has one entrance, one way in and one way out. When we walk the path, we go around short curves and long curves; sometimes we are out on the edge, sometimes we circle around the center. We are never really lost, but we can never quite see where we are going. Along the path we sometimes move forward with ease and confidence: sometimes we creep ahead cautiously, sometimes we find the need to stop and reflect, and sometimes we even feel the urge to retreat. The center is there but our path takes us through countless twists and turns. Sometimes we are at the heart of our life experiences, sometimes we are at a playful turn; sometimes we share our path with others, and other times we don't. No matter what, we are still on the labyrinth path. It holds all our experiences, in life and work. And to draw upon the wisdom of the ancient Greek philosopher Heraclitus, we need to be aware that what looks like an endpoint can also be a beginning point. Indeed, in so many ways, the labyrinth is like life. (Para. 1, 2)

In reflection, the labyrinth of leadership is not like life, it is in reality the professional life of female leaders regardless of where they live and work. There are and will always be challenges however it is for each leader to decide to transform what appears to be endpoints into beginnings. I hope that this study will open the eyes and change the mindsets of those who view women as having inferior leadership capacities, to have a new vision of equity in leadership. I also hope that current female leaders will be encouraged to persevere in their leadership journeys and aspirant female leaders will increase their resolve to pursue leadership opportunities in PSIs. Finally, I hope this study encourages women to carry the torch and illuminate the paths of those who have an interest to become leaders in Saudi and other PSIs across the world.

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Appendices

Appendix A. Interview Invitation Letter

Dear participant,

I am a doctoral candidate in the Department of Educational Administration, in the College of Education, at the University of Saskatchewan, in Saskatoon, SK., Canada.

I am recruiting Saudi female academic leaders in the university to participate in my qualitative research study: “**Women Leaders’ Experiences in Navigating the Labyrinth of Leadership in Saudi Post-Secondary Institutions.**” I will submit to you via email, an interview guide, and questions. The interview will approximate take from 45 to 60 minutes, in Arabic language to collect data about my topic, all interviews will be transcribed in Arabic and most relevant data from your recording interview will be directly used in my research. Your identities will remain confidential with a pseudonym.

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore the journeys of female academic leaders as they navigate the labyrinth of leadership in Saudi PSIs. I sought to gain better understandings of how these leaders overcame barriers and accessed supports as they progress towards and through academic leadership positions in Saudi PSIs in the Makkah region.

This letter is to request your voluntary participation in my dissertation research your participation or non-participation will not affect your employment or how you will be treated in the Consent Form. As stated in the attached consent form, within interview, you may limit your participation to answering questions that you are comfortable with, and you will be free to turn off the tape at any time during the process. You may withdraw from the research project for any reason, at any time without explanation or penalty of any sort. However, if you withdraw after the beginning of the data analysis (after THREE weeks of receipt of transcript), data reporting and dissemination of findings, it is not possible to remove your data from the analysis.

This study has been approved by the University of Saskatchewan Research Ethics Board (Behavioural) on 14-02-2020. My research supervisor is Dr. Dawn Wallin, a professor in the College of Education, University of Saskatchewan. She can be contacted by email (dawn.wallin@usask.ca).

I understand that your time is extremely valuable, if you have any questions, please contact me, Laila Albughayl, by email (laa672@usask.ca). Please let me know if you are interested in participating in the interview by 15-04-2020 to arrange time and date for the interview.

Thank you for considering this invitation.

Respectfully,

Laila Albughayl

Appendix B. Participant Consent Form



Participant Consent Form

Education Administration

You are invited to participate in a research study entitled: **Women Leaders' Experiences in Navigating the Labyrinth of Leadership in Saudi Post-Secondary Institutions.**

Researcher(s): Laila Albughayl

Ph.D. student

Education Administration Department, College of Education, University of Saskatchewan
laa672@usask.ca

Supervisor: Dr. Dawn Wallin

Professor

Education Administration Department, College of Education, University of Saskatchewan
dawn.wallin@usask.ca.

Purpose(s) and Objective(s) of the Research:

The **purpose** of this qualitative study is to explore the journeys of female academic leaders as they navigate the labyrinth of leadership in Saudi post-secondary institutions (PSIs). I sought to gain better understandings of how these leaders overcame barriers and accessed supports as they progress towards and through academic leadership positions in Saudi PSIs in the Makkah region.

The **objectives** of the research: To obtain academic development and capacity building strategies for academic women in leadership. To enhance academic women's leadership knowledge, skills, and behaviours by providing better understandings of the barriers that they face in their journeys to leadership and how they overcome them.

Questions which guide the research include the following:

1. How do Saudi female academic leaders in the Makkah region describe the ways in which they have navigated the labyrinth of leadership?
2. What are the societal, organizational, professional, and personal barriers faced by Saudi female academic leaders in the labyrinth of leadership in PSIs in the Makkah region and how did they navigate despite these barriers?
3. What are the supports accessed by Saudi female academic leaders as they navigated the labyrinth of leadership in PSIs in the Makkah region and how did these supports facilitate their navigation?

Procedures:

1. The research will be conducted in one or several Saudi public universities in the Makkah region in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Letters will be sent to one or several universities to obtain permission in conducting the research.

2. The method for this research is semi-structured interview on the-campus of the targeted Saudi public university(ies) in the Makkah region.
3. The interview will be recorded after obtaining the participant's approval and signature in the Participant's Consent Form before interview.
4. Interviews will be conducted in Arabic.
5. Purposive samplings will be used to elicit reflections on the experiences of 8 Saudi female academic leaders.
6. The interview time is approximate (45 to 60 minutes).

Funded by: The researcher is thankful for the funding provided by the Saudi Ministry of Education through the Saudi Culture Bureau, Ottawa, Canada.

Potential Risks: This research is considered to be minimal risk. There are no known risks or anticipated risks to those who take part in this study.

Potential Benefits:

1. To enhance academic women's leadership knowledge, skills, and behaviours for the benefit for Saudi universities especially in obtaining world-class standards.
2. To provide better understandings of the barriers that academic women face in their journeys to leadership in Saudi PSIs and how they manage to overcome these barriers by having the keys: knowledge, skills, and behaviours.
3. To enrich the body of literature on the Saudi culture, the role of women, and concept on academic leadership.
4. To prepare Saudi women citizens for modern global life and the foreseeable future, which aligns with the Saudi *Vision 2030 Policy*.

Compensation: There is no monetary compensation will be provided to participants in this study.

Confidentiality:

1. I will assign pseudonym for each participant in any data reporting.
2. I will not identify the participants' universities in any publications
3. Each participant will have the opportunity to edit, review, or remove information for transcripts that they do not wish to see reported as results of the study.
4. I will personally transcribe the recordings made during interviews in Arabic. Some portions of transcript will be translated into English by me, reviewed by a certified translator, and used for interpretation.
5. A deadline of three weeks (from the receipt of transcripts) will be required of participants to return of any transcript revisions. If I do not hear back from participants after this deadline, all transcripts will be analysed as provided.

Storage of data:

1. Initially, my personal laptop (secured with protected password) will be used to store the electronic data. All data will be digitally sent to PI for back up while still in Saudi Arabia.
2. Collected data (papers and audio tapes) will be digitally uploaded to Usask OneDrive for backup while still in Saudi Arabia once be sent to PI.

3. I and PI will make sure to wipe and erase any data once uploaded to Usask OneDrive with a program that will not permit its recovery.
4. After the completion of study, data (papers and audio tapes) will be transferred from the PI to a third party (Department of Educational Administration) in a password protected and encrypted portable device (USB or hard disk) to be stored in a locked cabinet and backed up on a Usask server, and that he will be responsible to delete them beyond recovery after the five-year retention period has passed.

Right to Withdraw:

1. As a participant, you are informed that your participation in the study is voluntary, and that you can answer only those questions that you are comfortable with. Further, your participation or non-participation will not affect your employment or how you will be treated.
2. You may withdraw from this research project for any reason, at any time, without explanation or penalty of any sort.
3. During the interview, you can have the recording device turned off at any time without giving a reason.
4. You can ask to pause the recording or end the interview at any time.
5. If you wish to withdraw, you may do so up until the time of data analysis. In advance of this, your data will be removed from analysis, destroyed, and will not be included in the study. However, if you withdraw after the beginning of the data analysis, data reporting and dissemination of findings (after the three weeks following the receipt of transcript), it is not possible to remove your data from the analysis.

Follow up:

You may be asked if it is possible to meet again or contact by email if further clarification is needed. Study findings will be shared with all participants via email.

Deception:

No deception will be needed in the conduct of this research study.

Questions or Concerns:

- By using the contact information at the top of the first page, please feel free to contact me with any questions.
- This research project has been approved on ethical grounds by the University of Saskatchewan Research Ethics Board on 14-02-2020. Any questions regarding your rights as a participant may be addressed to that committee through the Research Ethics Office ethics.office@usask.ca +1 (306) 966-2975. Participant can call the REB collect toll free +1 (888) 966-2975.

Appendix C. Behavioural Research Ethics Board Approval



Behavioural Research Ethics Board (Beh-REB) 14/Feb/2020

Certificate of Approval

Application ID: 1696

Principal Investigator: David Burgess

Department: Department of Educational
Administration

Locations Where Research

Activities are Conducted: Saudi Arabia - [REDACTED] University, [REDACTED] University, [REDACTED] University,
University of [REDACTED]

Student(s): Laila AlBughayl

Funder(s):

Sponsor: University of Saskatchewan

Title: Navigating the labyrinth of leadership: The experiences of female academic leaders on their
journeys to academic leadership in Saudi higher education

Approved On: 14/Feb/2020

Expiry Date: 13/Feb/2021

Approval Of: Behavioural Research Ethics Application

Participant Consent Form

Invitation Letter

Interview Guide

Transcript Release Form

Permission Letter

Acknowledgment Of:

Review Type: Delegated Review

CERTIFICATION

The University of Saskatchewan Behavioural Research Ethics Board (Beh-REB) is constituted and operates in accordance with the current version of the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS 2, 2014). The University of Saskatchewan Behavioural Research Ethics Board has reviewed the above-named project. The proposal was found to be acceptable on ethical grounds. The principal investigator has the responsibility for any other administrative or regulatory approvals that may pertain to this project, and for ensuring that the authorized project is carried out according to the conditions outlined in the original protocol submitted for ethics review. This Certificate of Approval is valid for the above time period provided there is no change in experimental protocol or consent process or documents.

Any significant changes to your proposed method, or your consent and recruitment procedures should be reported to the Chair for Research Ethics Board consideration in advance of its implementation.

ONGOING REVIEW REQUIREMENTS

In order to receive annual renewal, a status report must be submitted to the REB Chair for Board consideration within one month prior to the current expiry date each year the project remains open, and upon project completion. Please refer to the following website for further instructions: <https://vpresearch.usask.ca/researchers/forms.php>.

***Digitally Approved by Patricia Simonson
Vice-Chair, Behavioural Research Ethics Board
University of Saskatchewan***

Appendix D. Interview Guide

I will remind my participants that:

- It is a voluntary participation
- You have the right to withdraw at any point with no penalty, however, if you withdraw after the beginning of the data analysis, data reporting and dissemination of findings which is THREE weeks after the interview, it is not possible to remove your data from the analysis
- The interview duration 45 to 60 minutes
- You may decline to answer any questions
- I will record the interview with your permissions
- I can stop recording at their request if you don't feel comfortable
- Your identities and universities will be confidential with pseudonyms

Do you have any question before we begin?

As my research is about the labyrinth of leadership, I would like to clarify what this term means. The term 'labyrinth' comes from the Greek 'labyrinthos' and describes a maze-like structure with a single path through it. This single path differentiates it from an actual maze, which may have multiple paths that are intricately linked. Globally, women who do rise to leadership positions have described their paths as being full of twists and turns. Eagly and Carli (2007) used the term 'labyrinth' in leadership which refers to the indirect paths that women take to reach leadership positions.

Appendix E. Interview Questions

<p><u>Question 1#</u> How do Saudi female academic leaders in the Makkah region describe the ways in which they navigate the labyrinth of leadership?</p>
<p>1. Tell me about your career progression as an academic leader to date (e.g., length of experience, current & previous positions, background, prior preparation, etc.)</p> <p>a. Who/what motivated you to become an academic leader? (a family member, a friend, etc.)</p>
<p>2. Describe some of your personal skills/characteristics that make you suited your role as a leader?</p> <p>a. Share some highlights of your achievements in your career as a female leader?</p> <p>b. How do you deal with difficult situations during your progression and how they help you to improve yourself as a leader?</p>
<p>3. ‘Labyrinth’ is used as a metaphor for women’s journey to leadership that is full of twists and turns. Do you believe this is a suitable metaphor in describing your journey?</p> <p>a. If yes, how has your journey reflected the metaphor?</p> <p>b. If no, are there other metaphors that you might use to characterize your career journey?</p>
<p><u>Question #2</u> What are the societal, organizational, professional, and personal barriers faced by Saudi female academic leaders in post-secondary institutions and how did they navigate despite these barriers?</p>
<p>1. Describe a time when you hit a wall, got stuck in the mud or reached a dead end along your journey?</p> <p>a. Describe how (societal, organizational, professional, & personal) barriers have affected your progression in the labyrinth, how you overcome them? Share examples.</p> <p>b. Which of these barriers had the greatest effect on you as a leader?</p>
<p>2. In the middle of the labyrinth with all its barriers, have you ever had the feeling to give up?</p> <p>a. If yes, what happened?</p> <p>b. If no, what motivated you to proceed as a leader?</p> <p><small>*You might consider using the metaphor ‘labyrinth’ in your answer (e.g., someone gave you a hand, you found a key to open doors etc.)?</small></p>
<p>3. As a leader, do you think (skills, knowledge, behaviors) are essential keys in overcoming barriers? Use examples to explain their importance and how to develop them.</p>
<p><u>Question #3</u> What supports are accessed by Saudi female academic leaders as they navigate the labyrinth of leadership in PSIs in the Makkah region, and how do these supports facilitate their navigation?</p>
<p>1. Tell me about the formal leadership activities, that you have participated in to support your leadership growth? (e.g., education, trainings, experiences) how you access them?</p> <p>a. What aspects of these have most helped you in navigating the labyrinth?</p> <p>b. Family, organizational, other supports, how far are they beneficial?</p>
<p>2. Describe some of the most beneficial learning experiences in which you have engaged (e.g., prior learning). What changes did you experience in yourself as a result of your involvement in the training?</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Conclusion</p>
<p>1. In what way do you believe <i>Vision 2030 Policy</i> had or will have impact on your ability or other women to lead? Please offer examples to support your ideas.</p>

- a. Do you believe that your experience might have been different if this vision had been in place where you were in this position? How?
- b. If you could make changes to your leadership progression over time, what changes would you make? Why? In what areas do you believe you need to improve to become a better leader in the current position?

2. What advice would you give to the current, potential women leaders, or your daughter who wants to navigate the labyrinth of leadership?

Would you mind if I contact you via email for more information or clarification?

Thank you again for taking part in my study.

Appendix F. Transcript Release Form



**Research Ethics Boards (Behavioral and Biomedical)
TRANSCRIPT RELEASE FORM**

Title: Women Leaders' Experiences in Navigating the Labyrinth of Leadership in Saudi Post-Secondary Institutions

I, _____, have reviewed the complete transcript of my personal interview in this study, and have been provided with the opportunity to add, alter, and delete information from the transcript as appropriate. I acknowledge that the transcript accurately reflects what I said in my personal interview with **Laila Albughayl**. I hereby authorize the release of this transcript to **Laila Albughayl** to be used in the manner described in the Consent Form. I have received a copy of this Data/Transcript Release Form for my own records.

Name of Participant

Date

Signature of Participant

Signature of researcher

Appendix G. Initial Letter to University

To Vice-Dean for Graduate Studies and Scientific Research,

I am Laila Albughayl, a Ph.D. student, in Education and Administration Faculty at the University of Saskatchewan, Canada. As part of the completion of a Ph.D. degree, I have research with a title “**Women Leaders’ Experiences in Navigating the Labyrinth of Leadership in Saudi Post-Secondary Institutions**” which aims to interview former and current Saudi female academic leaders on leadership positions in the university(ies), such as (vice-dean, vice-dean deputy, department head, deputy department head, supervisor).

Thank you for your cooperation.

Sincerely,
Laila Albughayl
Email: laa672@usask.ca

Appendix H. Verification Translation Form

ALSAATY
Certified translation

License 174
J.C.C. No. 250713
C.R. 4030290925



مكتب
الدكتور محمد أمين ساعاتي
للترجمة المعتمدة
ترخيص رقم ١٧٤
رقم العضوية ٢٥٠٧١٣
س.ت ٤٠٣٠٢٩٠٩٢٥

CERTIFICATION

ALSAATY for Translation, Jeddah Saudi Arabia, licensed as an authorized translation office by virtue of Permit No. (174) hereby certifies that, translation of the document (s) annexed hereto, which are sealed for identification purposes only, is a complete and true translation without any liability upon its contents thereof.

إشهاد

يشهد مكتب الساعاتي للترجمة المعتمدة بجدة - المملكة العربية السعودية، المرخص له بمزاولة مهنة الترجمة المعتمدة بموجب الترخيص رقم (١٧٤) أن ترجمة الوثيقة/ الوثائق المرفقة والمختومة لأغراض تعريفها فقط هي ترجمة صحيحة وكاملة دون أدنى مسؤولية عن محتوياتها.

General Manager

Dr. Amin Saaty

د. محمد أمين ساعاتي



جدة، المملكة العربية السعودية - حي الجامعة - أمام كلية الهندسة - بجوار قصر الساحل الغربي - جوال ٠٥٠٦٢٥٢٨٢٧ - تليفون ٦٢٢٥٧٥٢
Jeddah, Saudi Arabia - Aljamea Dist., Tel 6335753 - Mobile 0506353827 Email: omaranadani@hotmail.com omaranadani@yahoo.com

Confidentiality Agreement for Translation services

I, TAMER MAHMOUD translator agree to maintain full confidentiality in regards to the documentations received from (Laila Albughayl) related to her research study on the researcher study titled (**The Experience of Female Leaders in Navigating the Labyrinth of Leadership in Saudi Higher Education**). Furthermore, I agree

1. To not make copies of any transcribed interviews (encrypts), unless specifically requested to do so by the researcher (Laila Albughayl)
2. To secure all study related materials in a safe, secure location as long as they are in my possession.
3. To return all study related materials to (Laila Albughayl) in a complete and timely manner.
4. To delete all electronic files containing study related documents from my computer and my email.

I am aware that I can be held legally responsible for any breach of this confidentially agreement, and for any harm incurred by individuals if I disclose identifiable information contained in the files to which I will have access.

Translator's name (printed):TAMER MAHMOUD

Translator's signature:..

Date: 08/12/2020

