

Chapter 11

Leadership Perspectives on Talent Management in Saudi Universities: Challenges and Success Factors

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ABSTRACT

This chapter proposes an in-depth study of higher education leaders (HELs) in Saudi Arabia, with a particular focus on the challenges, obstacles and success factors of talent management (TM) in Saudi universities. A mixed methods study design was adopted in which a general literature review was conducted to uncover the skills gap in the higher education sector and its impact on university leadership, taking into account both the external and internal environments. In addition, a survey would be conducted among a wide range of university leaders, including rectors, vice-rectors, deans, vice-deans and department heads, on the existing TM

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practices in their respective universities. Through this approach, the authors have uncovered how HELs perceive and deal with the skills gap phenomenon, including the barriers and success factors in TM in their universities, with due consideration of the influence of both external market forces and internal institutional dynamics.

INTRODUCTION

Saudi Arabia is focused on transforming into a knowledge economy, with higher education playing a critical role in this transition. The government has increased education spending, built numerous universities, and sent thousands of students abroad for higher studies and training, demonstrating its commitment to developing human resources for economic prosperity. All higher education institutions (HEIs) in Saudi Arabia are supervised by the Ministry of Higher Education, established in 1975 (Alsunaydi., 2020; Smith & Abouammoh, 2013). Since then, significant reforms have been implemented to improve the quality of education, expand accessibility, and align academic programs with national goals and the labor market. These reforms are part of the Kingdom's national transformation programs and the realization of the Vision 2030 initiatives aimed at reducing dependence on oil revenues by investing in human capital and producing a skilled workforce to contribute to a diverse economy and evolving industries (Hamdan., 2013).

Presently, Ministry of Education (MOE) supervises 29 public and 16 private universities, and 21 private colleges as of 2024. Additionally, it supervises 143 colleges and 98 institutes through the Technical and Vocational Training Corporation, which are spread throughout the Kingdom (Technical and Vocational Training Annual Report., 2023). Public universities are funded by the government and offer various undergraduate and postgraduate programs. On the other hand, private institutions offer more specialized learning opportunities for students who may not have had access to their desired programs at public universities, thereby enriching the variety of educational options available. Moreover, the MOE classifies universities based on their academic programs and industries, which serve to develop niche expertise and address industry needs. For example, public universities like KFUPM focus on engineering, petroleum, minerals, and science, while Imam Abdulrahman bin Faisal University specializes in medicine, nursing, dentistry, architecture, engineering, and humanities. Al Faisal University offers medical, engineering, business, and science specializations, aiming to cultivate leadership and innovation. Princess Nourah bint Abdulrahman University (PNU) specializes in women's education, focusing on art, humanities, and social sciences to empower women. In addition, many Saudi universities have partnered with international institutions to promote exchange programs, collaborative research, and dual-degree offerings. For example, King Abdullah

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