

# Developing Leaders in the Public Sector of the Kingdom

Data and Perspectives from the Center for Creative Leadership

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# Executive Summary

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Across the globe, public sector leaders share many of the same leadership challenges. This paper addresses questions about leadership challenges, gaps, career-derailment factors, and opportunities within the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) with a focus towards leaders of public service. The research reported in this paper is from three samples of Saudi leaders who participated in programs at the Center for Creative Leadership (CCL®).<sup>1</sup> The data illustrate KSA leaders share many of the same challenges and opportunities as government leaders with whom CCL has worked around the world. Our data further suggest that even though KSA leaders are facing a rapidly changing world, they are reasonably well prepared to manage these changes with a strategic skillset, knowledge of doing what it takes to achieve key results, and the ability to influence the thinking and actions taken by leaders at higher levels in the hierarchy. Similar to leaders in other countries, Saudi public sector leaders face challenges related to leading themselves, leading their teams, and leading organizations. Further, the study reveals important gaps in leader development. These gaps could have an impact on leadership capability in the future. The gaps include selecting and developing others, self-awareness, and negotiation.

The data suggest that leaders pay attention to the low ranking on importance and effectiveness of various competencies including resiliency, risk-taking, work-life integration, and managing globally dispersed teams. The two most important risks that are related to the possible career derailment of KSA leaders are not meeting business objectives and maintaining too narrow a functional focus. Following a summary of the analyses of these data, this paper offers leadership solutions that may be taken by institutions to help KSA leaders address these challenges, bridge their gaps in leadership development, and prevent career derailment. Solutions could include:

1. Understanding leadership as a collaborative effort versus an activity based solely on exerting positional authority.
2. Creating teams that consistently achieve high performance despite challenging internal and external conditions.
3. Building interdependent organizational cultures to improve innovation and creativity. Focusing on these areas could create results that matter across the Kingdom.

# Overview

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Saudi government leaders, like their public sector colleagues worldwide, operate in a volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA) world.<sup>2</sup> Our data reveal that Saudi leaders face many of the same challenges that other government leaders face at similar levels around the world. To be successful, government leaders must possess the skills to survive in this uncertain world and to perform their jobs while under constant observation from a range of sources—from their own colleagues to the media and the private sector. Understanding the challenges facing these leaders, in addition to the gaps in their leadership development, will help Ministry officials develop initiatives that will help leaders cope with these changing needs and create world-class government leaders in the KSA.

To help leaders identify the best way forward for leader development, this report explores the skills government leaders need to be successful in a VUCA environment. We analyzed data from two different databases. First, we examined data about leadership challenges from over 166 surveys of KSA government leaders who participated in leadership courses offered by CCL.<sup>3</sup> We identified the different challenges faced by these leaders. Second, we analyzed 360-degree feedback reports of over 192 KSA leaders, of which 20% were from leaders working in government.<sup>4</sup> In reviewing these data sets, we focused on three key questions:

- What are the major challenges Saudi public sector leaders are facing?
- What competencies do raters believe are most important to the success of a Saudi leader?
- How well do government-sector leaders perform in the competency areas most critical to success?



# Leadership Challenges

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To better understand the leadership development challenges faced by leaders across Saudi Arabia, CCL analyzed the leadership challenges data from Saudi public sector leaders who had attended CCL's various leadership programs. Prior to attending the program, attendees described four leadership challenges they were currently facing. We then analyzed these data for overarching trends.



## Specific Leadership Challenges:

- 18.5% report challenges with leading self (individual awareness and style, balancing multiple priorities, time management)
- 45.9% report challenges leading others (e.g., leading a team or group, influence, leading across multiple groups, and leading people)
- 31.9% report challenges leading the organization (e.g., talent management, strategic issues, and business operations)
- 3.7% report challenges with the external environment (e.g., regulatory, economic challenges, technology)

These challenges are similar to challenges facing public sector leaders around the world. The nature of being a leader in the public sector illustrates key transition points among leaders who honed their skills as technicians and eventually then moved into management often based on their excellent technical skills. Moving away from the technical and managerial areas and into leadership, particularly executive leadership, can create challenges around self-awareness, teamwork, and organizational understanding.

# Leadership Strengths and Gaps

We found that Saudi leaders have key skillsets that can be applied to addressing their challenges. The data demonstrate that Saudi leaders are perceived as being effective at influencing higher management, having a broad organizational perspective, possessing learning agility, communicating effectively, and acting **systemically** within their organization. Our experience working with leaders at this level helps us to understand that many of these strengths are internalized during initial training and ongoing organizational reviews. These strengths reflect a community of leaders that is effective at running itself and making sure the boss is informed and pleased with results being accomplished.

Next we examined what competencies raters believe are key to success and how effective Saudi leaders are in these competencies. For this analysis, we turned to a set of CCL data from 192 public and private sector managers. These managers completed the 15-competency Leading Managers 360 assessment used in the CCL Leadership Development Program (LDP®)(data are from 2010–2014).

The following tables present the raw data for the rank order priority of 15 competencies for success and ratings of the effectiveness of leaders for these competencies. Competency effectiveness ratings are on a one-to-five scale with five being the highest level of effectiveness.

## Saudi Leader Data: Leading Managers 360 (N=192) What Competencies Are Important for Success in the Rater’s Organization?

	Rank <sup>5</sup>
Communication	1
Influencing Higher Management	2
Influencing Across the Organization	3
Implementing Change	4
Selecting and Developing Others	5
Learning Agility	6
Self-Awareness	7
Negotiation	8
Broad Organizational Perspective	9
Responding to Complexity	10
Acting Systemically	11
Resiliency	12
Taking Risks	13
Balance between Personal Life and Work	14
Managing Globally Dispersed Teams	15

The following chart reflects leader effectiveness in the same competencies:

**Saudi Leader Data: Leading Managers 360 (N=192)**  
**Average Effectiveness by Competency Compared to the CCL Global Norm**

	Mean Rank Order for SA Leaders	SA Average Competency Rating <sup>6</sup>	LM360 Global Norm Competency Rating <sup>7</sup>
Communication	4	3.99	3.91
Influencing Higher Management	1	4.17	4.18
Influencing Across the Organization	7	3.95	3.90
Implementing Change	6	3.98	3.89
Selecting and Developing Others	11	3.91	3.82
Learning Agility	3	4.07	3.99
Self-Awareness	10	3.91	3.83
Negotiation	13	3.87	3.74
Broad Organizational Perspective	2	4.16	4.21
Responding to Complexity	8	3.94	3.99
Acting Systemically	5	3.99	3.89
Resiliency	14	3.81	3.80
Taking Risks	12	3.88	3.96
Balance between Personal Life and Work	15	3.79	4.01
Managing Globally Dispersed Teams	9	3.92	3.89

The reader can readily see the difference in importance and effectiveness across the competencies. To further illustrate the gaps, the tables below illustrate the relationship between perceived importance of the competency and the leader effectiveness average for each competency. We used a green light, yellow light, red light, and gray light categorization scheme to examine the relationship between competency importance and competency effectiveness. If ratings fell within the top seven, we considered them higher ratings. If they fell within the bottom seven, we considered them lower ratings. The four categories in the table can help leaders identify where they are spending appropriate time and energy, and where they might need to invest more in building the capability of their leaders. The red area (high importance, low effectiveness) should be a focus of considerable attention.

Importance Rank Order		Mean Effectiveness Rank Order
<b>Green (Higher Importance, Higher Effectiveness)<sup>8</sup></b>		
1	Communication	4
2	Influencing Higher Management	1
6	Learning Agility	3
3	Influence Across Organizations	7
4	Implementing Change	6
<b>Yellow (Lower Importance, Higher Effectiveness)</b>		
11	Acting Systemically	5
9	Broad Organizational Perspective	2
10	Respond to Complexity	8
<b>Red (Higher Importance, Lower Effectiveness)</b>		
5	Selecting/Developing Others	11
7	Self-Awareness	10
8	Negotiation	13
<b>Gray (Lower Importance, Lower Effectiveness)</b>		
12	Resiliency	14
13	Taking Risks	12
14	Balance between Life and Work	15
15	Managing Globally Dispersed Teams	9





A quick review of this coding reveals:

- The green category reflects a consistency between what leaders deem to be important competencies for success and commensurate ratings of competency effectiveness by raters of the leaders. These are competencies that deserve continued attention by KSA leaders.
- The yellow category includes competencies in which leaders are rated as being effective even though the competencies are not the most important for success. Leaders should evaluate whether they are spending too much time focusing on these competencies. This disconnect could represent a need for more of an “outside-in” orientation among leaders (i.e., paying attention to the needs of external stakeholders).
- The red category includes competencies in which leaders are rated as being less effective even though the competencies are rated as important for success. This disconnect could represent a need for more of an “inside-out” orientation among leaders (i.e., focusing on the development of individual skills that increase self-awareness and ability to work effectively with others within an organization).
- The gray category includes competencies in which leaders are rated as being less effective for competencies that are rated as less important for success. Even so, we know that leaders who are able to sustain themselves over time are resilient, have good work and life integration, and are comfortable taking risks.



## Career-Derailment Factors

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CCL asked another key question: What are the risks that a leader will derail? Using a 360 Benchmarks database (N=124), CCL also identified factors that increase the risk that a leader will derail.<sup>9</sup> In addition to leader effectiveness, this 360 asks respondents to rate leaders on five derailment factors that decades of CCL research demonstrate can stall or break a manager's career. These factors were identified by a series of studies comparing successful managers with those who are fired, demoted, or plateaued early.

The five derailment factors are:

**Problems with Interpersonal Relationships**

Difficulties in developing good working relationships with others.

**Difficulty Building and Leading a Team**

Inability to select, develop, and motivate an effective team.

**Difficulty Changing and Adapting**

Shows resistance to change and resistance to learning and developing in response to mistakes.

**Failure to Meet Business Objectives**

Difficulties in following up on promises and completing a goal.

**Too Narrow a Functional Orientation**

Lacking the depth needed to manage outside one's current function.

Each of the five factors noted above have been shown to limit a leader's effectiveness and long-term success. Our research demonstrates that the most salient derailment factor for Saudi leaders in our database is the failure to meet business objectives (2.10 mean rating). The other derailment risks have ratings that are close together except for difficulty changing and adapting, which is the lowest-rated derailment factor (1.88). The ratings are on a five-point scale with lower ratings reflecting a lower derailment risk. For an individual, ratings above 2.5 pose a significant derailment risk. For a group of leaders (as reflected in the data below), ratings at or near 2.0 deserve reflection and consideration.

### Likelihood-to-Derail Rankings and Ratings (All Observers)

Failure to Meet Business Objectives	2.10
Too Narrow a Functional Orientation	1.96
Difficulty Building and Leading a Team	1.92
Problems with Interpersonal Relationships	1.92
Difficulty Changing and Adapting	1.88

These findings are rather consistent with data from other government leaders who have attended CCL programs. Failure to meet business objectives reflects a government that demands and expects high performance. When there is insufficient evidence of sustained high performance, the risk of a leader being reassigned or removed increases. The second highest-ranked derailment factor has also been seen in CCL's other studies of government leaders. When CCL performed

a similar analysis on leaders working for the US government, we found that this was the number one reason for derailment. Leaders join a government agency that reflects their technical specialty. They are then promoted based upon their technical ability until they become managers. When that occurs, they can be ill-prepared for the wide range of responsibilities they are called on to perform outside of their technical specialty.

# Closing the Gaps

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To close the leadership gaps identified in this short report, it is important to understand the specific skills and behaviors required for future leadership success, how these skills are developed, and how they can be applied in the workplace. Below we offer four starting points for the development of leadership skills most critical for the Saudi leader.

## **1. Understanding Leadership as a Collaborative**

**Activity:** Effective leadership creates three important outcomes: Direction, Alignment, and Commitment. Each of these outcomes demands agreement from the leader and the led. Using the strength of communication clearly demonstrated in the data, a strong team orientation, and a feedback-rich environment will support the culture needed for adapting rapidly to the changing VUCA world.

**2. Creating High-Performance Teams:** Developing people, understanding complexity, and having the resilience to sustain productivity are all important to success in a rapidly changing, increasingly interconnected world that requires group cohesiveness and performance versus individual leader heroism. Creating teams that are dedicated to the success of each person on the team and the team overall is clearly important.

**3. Risk-Taking:** Although at first glance this competency seems counterintuitive to good governance, it is actually a key to effective service. Risk-taking is the first step towards innovation and creating new ideas for service to the country. Although frowned upon by many, rewarding risks through simple efforts can increase productivity and employee engagement.

## **4. Resiliency and Work Life Integration:**

Resilience, not more authority, is the key for greater productivity. Resilient workers are able to work longer, harder, and with greater engagement than those leaders who do not utilize the tools of personal resilience.

The data summarized in this report should be used as a promoter of dialogue about the future needs of leaders in Saudi rather than as a definitive prescription for next steps. More research on Saudi leaders and the leadership needs in Saudi society is needed. We hope that the data from CCL will help stimulate deeper and more thoughtful discussions about next steps in the development of the KSA as a world leader.



# Notes on Methodology

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This paper provided information about the current challenges of government leaders and the strengths, gaps, and derailment factors for the general mid- and executive leaders in KSA. The paper utilizes three data sets. One data sample is based on pre-program questionnaires concerning challenges facing Saudi government leaders (N=166). The second sample is from a Leading Managers 360, the primary assessment used in our Leadership Development Program (N=192). The third sample (concerning derailment) comes from our 360 Benchmarks data (N=124).

Pre-program questionnaires are key to the learning integration and program learning transfer. We send these out during the preparatory stage of our program to raise the conscious awareness of the leaders' behaviors with others and to provide an anchor for conversations about their leadership. In addition to questions concerning their challenges, we also ask about leadership strengths, developmental needs, and background issues that may be playing a role in their leadership development and perception by others. We have found this tool to be invaluable to our faculty and coaches in developing and delivering effective leadership programs. Because of how this questionnaire was administered, we were able to isolate 166 government leaders for study.

360 Benchmarks is a tried-and-tested assessment for development tool. Since its introduction by CCL in 1987, Benchmarks has been used by over 16,000

organizations and 200,000 leaders. Benchmarks is a comprehensive 360-degree assessment for middle- to upper-level managers that measures 16 competencies critical for success as well as five possible career-derailment factors. This in-depth analysis of observable behaviors provides managers with a solid assessment of their leadership competencies. Benchmarks also helps managers identify what lessons may still need to be learned, establishes what specific work experiences need to be sought out in order to develop critical competencies for success, and identifies possible problems that may stall their career. Feedback reports are sent to a CCL-certified facilitator who debriefs the results with the manager in a confidential session. For this report, we used Benchmarks to identify derailment factors and the data set included only those leaders who self-identified as government workers. This produced a data set of 124 leaders.

The Leading Managers 360 is a refinement of 360 Benchmarks and uses 15 competencies and is focused towards those who must lead from the middle. The Leading Managers category covers people who are managing other managers or senior professional staff. Examples of some of the competencies covered at this level include: managing organizational complexity, negotiating adeptly, implementing change, managing globally dispersed teams, taking risks, and selecting and developing others. For this report, we used a data set of 192 Saudi leaders, including many government leaders.



The competencies included in the Leading Managers 360 are:

Communication	Encourages and models effective communication. Expresses ideas fluently.
Influencing Higher Management	Understands and persuades people at higher levels of the organization.
Influencing across the Organization	Uses effective influence strategies to gain cooperation and get things done.
Implementing Change	Effectively leads others and maintains authenticity during times of transition. Accepts change as positive.
Selecting and Developing Others	Finds talented employees and develops them.
Learning Agility	Seeks opportunities to learn and can learn quickly. Learns a new skill quickly.
Self-Awareness	Has an accurate picture of strengths and weaknesses and is willing to improve.
Negotiation	Negotiates effectively with individuals and groups in the organization. Is effective at managing conflict.
Broad Organizational Perspective	Has a “big picture” understanding of the organization. Has solid understanding of our products and services.
Responding to Complexity	Recognizes and effectively manages organizational dilemmas and trade-offs. Recognizes the ethical dilemmas when they occur.
Acting Systemically	Takes a system perspective on his/her work. Considers the impact of his/her action on the entire system.
Resiliency	Handles stress, uncertainty, and setbacks well. Has activities outside of work.
Taking Risks	Sees possibilities, seizes opportunities, and perseveres in the face of obstacles.
Balance between Personal Life and Work	Balances work priorities with personal life so neither is neglected.
Managing Globally Dispersed Teams	Effectively motivates, develops, and monitors globally dispersed teams. Can motivate multicultural teams effectively.



# Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Please see the Notes on Methodology on page 12 for more information about the data sets.
- <sup>2</sup> The VUCA perspective was originally developed for the government strategic planner. It has been popularized and applied to business by Bob Johansen, CEO of the Institute of the Future.
- <sup>3</sup> A CCL standard practice is to ask program participants to list three key leadership challenges they are currently facing. The data for the challenges come from a review of 166 Saudi public sector leaders between 2006 and 2014. These data include all sectors and all levels of government. This data set includes the years 2006–2014.
- <sup>4</sup> This N=192 sample is taken from our database of the Leading Managers 360. Forty-five of the raters (22%) self-described as being employed in a government state. These data encompass the years 2010–2014. Further definitions of the competencies are found on page 13.
- <sup>5</sup> On the Leading Managers 360, raters are asked to identify the top five competencies of importance for the raters' organization.
- <sup>6</sup> This is the average rating of effectiveness on a one-to-five Likert scale (five being best) by competency for Saudi leaders (labeled as SA).
- <sup>7</sup> The standard deviation (SD) varies by competency but ranges between .33 and .45.
- <sup>8</sup> Higher Importance reflects a position in the top seven for perceived importance. Higher Effectiveness reflects a rating in the top seven for mean average for effectiveness.
- <sup>9</sup> 360 Benchmarks is a variant of the same methodology used on the Leading Managers 360. For these data we studied 124 leaders who participated in CCL programs between 2006 and 2014. For more on 360 Benchmarks, please see the Notes on Methodology on page 12.



## About the Authors

**David Altman, PhD**, is executive vice president and managing director of the Center for Creative Leadership (CCL®) in Europe, Middle East, and Africa (EMEA). He previously served for over nine years as executive vice president of CCL's Research, Innovation, and Product Development group. He serves as codirector of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation–funded **Executive Nurse Fellows program** ([www.executivenursefellows.org](http://www.executivenursefellows.org)). David has long supplemented his work in the public health field with a keen interest in leadership. He currently is a faculty member for CCL's Leadership at the Peak program. Prior to CCL, David was a tenured professor of Public Health Sciences and Pediatrics at Wake Forest University School of Medicine in Winston Salem, NC, (10 years) and a senior research scientist at the Stanford Center for Research in Disease Prevention at Stanford University School of Medicine in Palo Alto, CA (10 years). David earned his MA and PhD degrees in social ecology from the University of California, Irvine, where he was selected as 2007 alumni of the year. He completed a postdoctoral fellowship at Stanford University.

**Clemson Turregano, PhD**, is leadership portfolio director of CCL's EMEA region, responsible for the full spectrum of leadership solutions across the region, including design, delivery, coaching, and senior-level organizational solutions. Clemson's global clients consist of numerous commercial, public, and nongovernment agencies, including major automotive, defense, and pharmaceutical manufacturers, broadcast networks, school boards, and universities. He also has worked with national and international public agencies in foreign relations, defense, education, intelligence, and humanitarian aid. A practicing scholar, Clemson has won awards for teaching

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**Emily Hoole, PhD**, is group director of Global Research and Evaluation at CCL. In this role, she leads the Center in setting strategy for global research and evaluation to align with and anticipate clients' needs regarding leadership and leadership development to address critical challenges and issues; identifies priorities for CCL's portfolio and aligns resources and projects to accomplish those priorities; and ensures that results of CCL's research and evaluation are disseminated widely to inform leaders and organizations worldwide. Emily combines evaluating thinking with organizational learning with faculty and clients to improve the effectiveness of organizational interventions. Emily also serves as a researcher, consultant, speaker, author, and program designer. Prior to CCL, She was the director of Evaluation at The Rapides Foundation, a healthcare foundation, managing multiple large multi-year evaluation projects focused on healthcare, education, and economic development. She also was the CEO of a nonprofit organization and worked in the media and healthcare fields. Emily earned her MPA and a PhD in assessment and measurement from James Madison University.

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The Center for Creative Leadership (CCL®) is a top-ranked, global provider of leadership development. By leveraging the power of leadership to drive results that matter most to clients, CCL transforms individual leaders, teams, organizations and society. Our array of cutting-edge solutions is steeped in extensive research and experience gained from working with hundreds of thousands of leaders at all levels. Ranked among the world's Top 5 providers of executive education by the *Financial Times* and in the Top 10 by *Bloomberg Businessweek*, CCL has offices in Greensboro, NC; Colorado Springs, CO; San Diego, CA; Brussels, Belgium; Moscow, Russia; Addis Ababa, Ethiopia; Johannesburg, South Africa; Singapore; Gurgaon, India; and Shanghai, China.

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