

Navigate the Labyrinth of Leadership: Leaders' Experiences in Saudi Higher Education

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Abstract : The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore Saudi females' leadership journeys as they navigate the labyrinth of leadership in higher education. To gain a better understanding of how these leaders overcame challenges and accessed support as they progressed through the labyrinth to top positions in Saudi higher education. The significance of this research derived from the premise that leaders need to acquire essential leadership competencies such as knowledge, skills, and practices to effectively lead through economic transformation, growing globalism, and rapidly developing technology in an increasingly diverse world. In addition, understanding Saudi women's challenges in the labyrinth will encourage policymakers to improve the situation under which these women work. The metaphor 'labyrinth' for Eagly and Carli (2007) encapsulates the winding paths, dead ends, and maze-like pathways that are full of challenges and supports that women traverse to access and maintain leadership positions was used. In this study, 'labyrinth' was used as the conceptual framework to explore women leaders' challenges and opportunities in leadership in Saudi higher education. A proposed model for efficient navigation of the labyrinth of leadership was used. This model focused on knowledge, skills, and behaviours (KSB) as the analytical framework for examining responses to the research questions. This research was conducted using an interpretivist qualitative approach. A case study was the methodology used. Semi-structured interviews were the main data collection method. Purposive sampling was used to select ten Saudi leaders in three public universities. In coding, the 6-step framework of thematic analysis for Braun and Clarke was used to identify, analyze, and report themes within the data. NVivo software was also used as a tool to assist with managing and organizing the data. The resultant findings showed that the challenges identified by participants in navigating the labyrinth of leadership in Saudi higher education replicated some of those identified in the literature. The onset findings also revealed that the organizational barriers in Saudi higher education came as the top hindrance to women's advancement in the labyrinth of leadership, followed by societal barriers. The findings also showed that women's paths in the labyrinth of leadership in higher education were still convoluted and tedious compared to their male counterparts. In addition, the findings revealed that Saudi women leaders use significant strategies to access leadership posts and effectively navigate the labyrinth; this was not indicated in the literature. In addition, the resultant findings revealed that there are keys that assisted Saudi female leaders in effectively navigating the labyrinth of leadership. For example, the findings indicated that spirituality (religion) was a powerful key that enabled Saudi women leaders to pursue and persist in their leadership paths. Based on participants' experiences, a compass for effective navigation of the labyrinth of leadership in higher education was created for current and aspirant Saudi women leaders to follow. Finally, the findings had several significant implications for practice, policy, theory, and future research.

Keywords : women, leadership, labyrinth, higher education

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