



RESEARCH ARTICLE

AN EXPLORATION INTO THE DEVELOPMENT OF FEMALE LEADERSHIP CAPABILITY IN THE SAUDI ARABIAN EDUCATION SECTOR

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ABSTRACT

The twenty-first century has witnessed an ever increasing range of approaches being taken to leadership. Many of these have sought specifically to distinguish this from management by developing innovative theoretical perspectives and models, which have helped to deepen our understanding of this concept. Some of these approaches have explored the possibility of a gendered dimension to leadership styles and have attempted to identify the multiple factors which prevent women from breaking through the glass ceiling and achieving their true potential. Whilst in the Western world, feminism had a major impact on women's role in society and in the workplace since the late 1960s, Saudi women were not admitted to university until the end of that decade but now they occupy a number of key positions within Saudi society. This essay examines what is known about the challenges faced by these women and the aspirations of those who hope to follow in their footsteps. This essay begins by attempting to distinguish between the two interrelated concepts of management and leadership and then will then consider some of the diverse definitions of leadership which have been formulated. The following section briefly outlining some of the key theories and models which have been developed with regard to educational leadership. Following this the focus shifts to examine one of the key debates in the field of leadership studies, namely whether leaders are born or whether they can be made. Another of the areas which has also prompted increasing academic interest is the extent to which gender influences not only styles of leadership but how we as societies choose to understand the meaning of leadership. This is followed by a discussion of a review of literature relating to the varied challenges faced by women aspiring to leadership positions, particularly in the educational field. Having reviewed some of the key debates and concepts in leadership studies, the concluding sections of this essay focus on female leadership in Saudi Arabia, a society which is widely viewed as being one of the most challenging environments for women. After briefly contextualising Saudi society and its education sector, the results of several studies concerning the challenges faced by women in leadership positions in academia in the Kingdom will be used to highlight the similarities and the differences in the challenges faced by Saudi women and their non-Saudi counterparts. After a series of recommendations on future strategies which can be employed to encourage female leadership in academia in the Kingdom, this essay concludes with some personal reflections on my aspirations to a role in academic leadership as Saudi citizens.

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INTRODUCTION

According to Bush (2007) over the course of the last two decades, countries in both the developed and the developing world have begun to realise the crucial importance of

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educational leadership, although this concept may be interpreted somewhat differently from one culture to another. The twenty-first century has witnessed an ever increasing range of approaches being taken to leadership and there is a growing recognition of school principals, assistant principals to hold at least a master degree in educational leadership (Bush and Jackson 2002). Many of these have sought specifically to distinguish this from management by developing innovative theoretical perspectives and models, which have helped to deepen our understanding of this concept. Some of these approaches have explored the possibility of a gendered

dimension to leadership styles and have attempted to identify the multiple factors which prevent women from breaking through the glass ceiling and achieving their true potential. Whilst in the Western world, feminism had a major impact on women's role in society and in the workplace since the late 1960s, Saudi women were not admitted to university until the end of that decade but now they occupy a number of key positions within Saudi society. This essay examines what is known about the challenges faced by these women and the aspirations of those who hope to follow in their footsteps. This essay begins by attempting to distinguish between the two interrelated concepts of management and leadership and then will then consider some of the diverse definitions of leadership which have been formulated. The following section briefly outlining some of the key theories and models which have been developed with regard to educational leadership. Following this the focus shifts to examine one of the key debates in the field of leadership studies, namely whether leaders are born or whether they can be made. Another of the areas which has also prompted increasing academic interest is the extent to which gender influences not only styles of leadership but how we as societies choose to understand the meaning of leadership. This is followed by a discussion of a review of literature relating to the varied challenges faced by women aspiring to leadership positions, particularly in the educational field. Having reviewed some of the key debates and concepts in leadership studies, the concluding sections of this essay focus on female leadership in Saudi Arabia, a society which is widely viewed as being one of the most challenging environments for women. After briefly contextualising Saudi society and its education sector, the results of several studies concerning the challenges faced by women in leadership positions in academia in the Kingdom will be used to highlight the similarities and the differences in the challenges faced by Saudi women and their non-Saudi counterparts. After a series of recommendations on future strategies which can be employed to encourage female leadership in academia in the Kingdom, this essay concludes with some personal reflections on my aspirations to a role in academic leadership as a Saudi woman.

Management versus leadership

As noted in the introduction, there has been a shift in the world of business generally from a focus on management skills to leadership skills, with copious publications proposing different theories and models, and attempting to define this concept which may assume a diverse range of forms according to the culture being discussed and the circumstances (Yukl, 2006; Northouse 2010; Jago 1982). As part of this shift, the importance of educational leadership has taken on an increasingly important role and there is a growing school of thought that those who occupy key positions in educational institutions should now learn not only how to manage but also how to lead. Moreover, some writers have claimed that there is growing evidence that leadership, like management, is a sets of skills that can be taught (Bush and Jackson 2002; West-Burnham, 2004). According to Bolden (2004), attempts to define leadership and to understand this concept can be traced as far back as Ancient Greek philosophers, such as Plato. In contemporary times, Zaleznik (1977) was one of the first writers who attempted to distinguish the concept of leadership from that of management in his article in *Harvard Business Review* in which he described a manager as essentially a problem solver whereas in his opinion a leader could more

aptly be compared to an artist, the implication being that the latter draws on the skills of creativity. More recently, in a book-length study, Kotter drew a different distinction between the two concepts, arguing that: "management is about coping with complexity" whilst "leadership, by contrast, is about coping with change" (1990, p.104). Inherent in both these descriptions is the idea that they involve quite different abilities and aptitudes. Other writers, however, such as Bush (2003; 2007) and Rue and Byars (2003) have argued that leadership and management can be considered as simply facets of the same concept. It has been claimed that in the field of education the terms leadership and management have approximately the same meaning; however, there is no agreed internationally recognised definition of either term (Bush, 2003). Bush has defined educational management as "a field of study and practice concerned with the operations of educational organisations" (p.1). Boalm distinguishes educational management from leadership by the fact that the latter entails "the responsibility for policy and formulation and, where appropriate, organisational transformation" (1999, p.194).

Defining leadership

When examining a concept, it is always helpful to attempt firstly to define what it is and equally what it is not but Tosti and Jackson (1999) have emphasised the difficulty of finding a precise definition of what makes a good leader on the grounds that, firstly, this is highly dependent on circumstances and, secondly, on the attitudes of those who are expected to be followers. They argue, then, that the basic element of leadership is to be found in "influencing others to act" (p.5). In his discussion of the meaning of leadership, Yukl (2006) notes that most definitions of this term "reflect the assumption that it involves a social influence process whereby intentional influence is exerted by one person (or group) over other people (or groups) to structure the activities and relationships in a group or organisation" (2006, p.3). In his own definition, Yukl (2006) also chose to emphasise this aspect of leadership, but he is more specific about the purpose that this influence should achieve within an organisational context. Thus, Yukl (2006) defines leadership as "the process of influencing others to understand and agree about what needs to be done and how to do it, and the process of facilitating individual and collective efforts to accomplish shared objectives" (p.8).

Most recent attempts at defining the concept of leadership have accepted that it can indeed mean different things to different people in different cultural and historical contexts (Bolden 2004), or as Liethwood, Jantazi, and Steinbach (1999) phrased it "Changing Leadership for Changing Times". However, it is also agreed in the context of a business organisation or an educational institution, effective leadership must involve influencing others for the purpose of achieving corporate or institutional objectives. Thus, Northouse (2004) identified this facet of leadership as being one of its four essential elements, which he summarised in the following terms:

- It should be understood as a process;
- It affects others;
- It occurs inside a group, and
- It requires achievement of targets.

Achievement of targets may be last on his list but it is by no means least. Looking at the psychological profile of successful

leaders, Hogan and Kaiser (2005) also stress their ability to achieve goals whilst more recently Judge and Long's (2012) exploration of individual differences in leadership styles emphasised that successful leaders were those who took actions "which serve to direct, control, or influence the groups' behaviour toward collective goals" (p. 179).

Theories and models of educational leadership

Bolden (2013) argues that traditional and contemporary theories of leadership have impacted on today's practice of leadership and our understanding of this as a concept, and that consequently, these theoretical frameworks have affected how leadership is viewed in various fields, including that of education. Bush (2003) notes that some authors have argued that theories of leadership developed by academics have little to do with the day-to-day practice of leadership in which managers find themselves involved. Gresham (2009), for example, has pointed out that there is "a distance between the theory and the reality of actually being a leader" (p. 9). Bush (2003), however, argues that most theories relating to educational leadership and management have their basis in Social Science and thus are developed in response to particular problems, unlike the approach of the Natural Sciences which attempts to produce generalizable absolute truths. Social Science theories thus have three important features, namely, they tend to be "normative, selective, and supported by observation" (p.28). Frequently they are derived from grounded theory which entails the researcher developing concepts from the study data or testing out a theoretical framework. According to Bush (2003), then, on this basis theory and practice can, in fact, be seen as fundamentally and inextricably interconnected, since many writers have presented theories of educational leadership which can serve as instructional guides to practice to be followed, identifying the key aspects of the leadership role and describing how to achieve practical outcomes.

Theories and models of management and leadership emerged from the practices of industry and commerce, and then were transferred, with appropriate modifications based on observational experience and empirical research, to educational settings to suit the education sector (Bush, 2003). A number of researchers who have investigated educational leadership and management from a theoretical perspective have found it useful to categorize these theories into models. One of the earliest attempts to do this in the field of educational leadership can be found in the work of Liethwood, Jantazi and Steinbach (1999), who identified and investigated six different models in the context of educational management. As Table 1 shows, Bush and Glover (2002) then used these

Table 1. Models of management and leadership (adapted from Bush and Glover, 2002)

| Management model | Leadership model |
|------------------|--|
| | |
| Formal | Managerial |
| Collegial | Participative Transformational Distributed |
| Political | Transactional |
| Subjective | Postmodern Emotional |
| Ambiguity | Contingency |
| Cultural | Moral Instructional |

initial six categories and mapped them onto their own research into leadership, which had identified ten different models in total.

Leadership capability: innate or acquired?

One key debate amongst those interested in leadership is whether this is a trait which some individuals are born with or whether, in fact, anyone can learn to be a leader (Hogan and Kaiser 2005). According to Kirkpatrick and Locke (1991), for example: "Leaders are not like other people [...] they do need to have "the right stuff" and this stuff is not equally present in all people" (p.50). Judge and Long (2012) also argue that some individuals have the capabilities to envision, engage and execute, and they will, in all probability, demonstrate leadership. Conversely, those who do not already have these capabilities will not be able to demonstrate leadership. However, others writers have disagreed, claiming that leadership capability should be seen as an ability or competency that just like other sets of behaviour can be acquired by identifying those traits that make a good leader (Boyatzis 2008; Daft, 2005; Jago, 1982; Northouse, 2010). It has been argued that capabilities are a set of abilities or traits of a successful leader (Bolden, 2004; Nielsen, MacFarlane and Moore 2012).

Although the initial traits were understood from the Great Man theory, according to which a man is born to be a leader, the phenomena has changed gradually (Bolden, 2004). According to Bolden, attempts to define the traits of leaders started at the beginning of the 20th century, and such definitions have been further developed with the constant global economic and education revolution. Moreover, some authors claim that in addition to identifying capabilities, they can be measured and predicted (Nielsen, MacFarlane and Moore, 2012). Nielsen et al. assert that capabilities consist of "skills, motivation and personality traits", and these would differentiate the good leader from others. Some of these capabilities can be improved through training and practice within the context of work, but 'cognitive' skills might be something innate (ibid). Other writers think that excellent leaders share three high valued characteristics to a greater degree than normal people, namely ability, motivation and sociability. In their study of leadership within the field of environmental politics, Karlsson, Parker, Hjerpe and Linner (2011) conclude that some leadership traits may only be effective in particular contexts whilst others, such as credibility, can be said to be more generic.

According to Fulmer, Gibbs, and Goldsmith (2000) having a leader who can handle complexity, be a team player and simultaneously support the other members of the team, all the while inspiring others with a vision of future development has become a strategic necessity for today's universities. Drew's (2010) study of the Australian university sector noted that staff there identified leadership as a key issue and one which required above all "inter-relational capabilities to engage and mobilise staff" (p.17) in addition to an ability to adapt to new environments in contemporary higher education, a characteristic also emphasised by Hanna (2003) and Coleman (2002) who frames this in terms of innovation. It has been argued that leaders generally need to be able to adapt to, support and lead change, but this skill has become all the more vital for university leaders who must have the courage to take action to plan for the future and to inspire others to share their vision (Barnett, 2004). Perhaps the simplest but clearest

summary of the role which successful leaders in higher education should aspire can be summarised in Kotter's (2007) phrase of being a "force for change", the title he chose for his own book on leadership.

Gendered perspectives on leadership

A number of studies have explored the gendered dimension in leadership style, some focusing specifically on the education sector (Pounder and Coleman, 2002). Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt, and Van Engen (2003) conducted a meta-analysis of 45 studies which had compared leadership styles of male and female leaders and managers mainly in education and business. They concluded that previous research suggested that female leaders were more transformational in the sense that they adopted a more communal, supportive style than their male counterparts. Eagly and Sczesny (2009) examined further evidence on this issue. Their findings revealed that stereotypes of masculinity and femininity have impacted on the ideas of both men and women, causing two forms of cultural expectations which they refer to as "descriptive beliefs" and "perspective beliefs". Both of these forms of belief can lead women to think of themselves as weak and incapable as a result of social stereotyping which hinders them from accessing positions of leadership, meaning that male domination is perpetuated in this field.

Other researchers have argued that women adopt particular leadership styles for example, what Pines, Dahan-Kalev and Ronen (2001) refer to as democratic leadership is considered to be particularly adopted by women. The researchers posit that women are more interactive and open-minded with staff, and are more likely to be "consensus builders who encourage wider participation in decision making" (p. 608). Feminism brought many changes to developed western countries, both in society and the workplace. For example, figures produced by the US Department of Labour (2010) revealed that 47.3% of the US labour force are now women with almost half of these in leadership positions. However, despite the major efforts made to encourage educated women to enter leadership in different sectors, they still lack the same opportunities as men and encounter difficulties in acquiring leadership positions within certain fields, education being one of the areas where they remain underrepresented (Carli and Eagly, 2012).

Researchers have advanced various explanations for this state of affairs. One is related to the overwhelming predominance of male leaders creating a lack of female role models. For decades, the top leadership positions in most countries have been held by men not women (Al-Kayed, 2015). As Isaac et al. (2009) note, this lack of females in high profile leadership roles then tends to reinforce the idea that such positions are a uniquely male preserve. Denmark (1993) explains how the Great Man Theory, with its emphasis on the idea that leaders are born with their abilities and capabilities rather than developing them, has also tended to focus only on men as successful leaders. Yoder posits that "leadership itself is gendered" (2001, p.815) being constructed around traits typically associated with masculinity such as competitiveness and discipline whereas femininity is traditionally associated with being emotional and caring (Gary, 1989). This means that females are typically viewed as unreliable and lacking the toughness associated with men and thus seen as unsuitable for the demands of the role as leaders, particularly in senior management.

Challenges faced by women aspiring to leadership positions

Research has identified various obstacles or so-called "barriers" for women unique to women which prevent them from getting achieving leadership positions. Some appear to be general to all women; others can be thought of as being more culture specific (Pounder and Coleman 2002). AlDoubi (2015) identifies nine different barriers which women attempting to enter leadership positions typically face, namely: the glass ceiling,¹ the glass cliff,² gender stereotyping, lack of professional networks, lack of effective mentors, family responsibilities, institutional policies and culture, male-dominated academic arenas, and Queen Bee Syndrome.³ Conditions are usually thought of as being difficult in the Arab world in general and particularly so in Saudi Arabia (AlMunajjed, 2010). Whilst there is now a growing body of research on leadership challenges facing women in the Western world (Oakley, 2000; Ridgeway, 2002; Stelter, 2002), to date, still very little has been written about women and leadership roles in Saudi culture (Al Munajjed, 1997; Al Munajjed, 2010). Despite the fact that women in Saudi Arabia faces some of the worst challenges to assuming leadership positions, they are still viewed as being subservient to men (Sadi and Al-Ghazali, 2010; Al-Tamimi, 2004).

Saudi Arabia: The Context

The modern Kingdom was established as an Islamic state by King Abdulaziz in 1932, with Arabic as the official language (AlDoubi, 2014). Since two of the most sacred places for Muslims are to be found in Saudi Arabia, the Holy Mosques in Makkah and Madinah respectively, it is considered to be of central importance within the Islamic world (Fallatah, 2012). Saudi Arabia has a unique collective culture, which consists of various tribes and clans which make connections and relationships of central importance for anyone interact with different sectors of the society (AlDoubi, 2014). In recent decades, Saudis have gradually begun to embrace change in education, culture, and even in some Islamic concepts of jurisprudence (AlMunajjed, 1997). Of its three largest cities in economic terms, namely, Jeddah, Dammam, and Riyadh, the capital (formerly known as Najid) is still considered the most conservative one, as the seat of Saudi government and senior Islamic scholars.

The Kingdom is well-known for its conservative religious views and social traditions and for the impact which this has had on the status of women in Saudi society (AlMunajjed, 1997, Long, 2005, Hamdan 2005). Education for women was not acceptable in Saudi culture, until public primary education for girls was introduced by King Faisal in 1960 (Rugh, 2002). However, by 1969, Saudi women were able to enrol in universities just one year after the Kingdom's first university was established in 1968 (AlMunajjed, 1997). In cultural and governmental terms, Saudi Arabia remains male dominated (AlMunajjed, 2010) and adheres strictly to what are seen as traditional Islamic beliefs. Changes occur but these are often hotly debated and slow paced in most areas affecting society. however, reflecting on my own experience as a Saudi woman

¹ An unacknowledged barrier to advancement in a profession which affects women (OED)

² The phenomenon whereby women are likelier to be put into leadership roles during periods of crisis or downturn, when the risk of failure is highest (OED).

³ This refers to a woman in a position of authority who views or treats subordinates more critically if they are females (OED).

living in the United Kingdom since 2012, when I return home there is change in Saudi culture among women. Most visibly, some Saudi women in Riyadh no longer wear *niqabs* (veils), although this used to be obligatory in public places. But beyond this I find that females are stronger and give more thought to their future, modelling themselves on women who have already been successful leaders in both private and public sectors in the Kingdom. In higher education, Saudi women still suffer from traditional views regarding their suitability to pursue particular degrees including law, medicine, pharmacy and journalism; however, with government backing, Saudi universities have been trying to create new departments to allow female students to pursue their interests (Profanter, Cate, MaestriI, Piacentini, and AlFassi, 2010). Other specific obstacles include the need for a male guardian and the lack of freedom to travel within the city or commute between home and job without being accompanied by a male relative or a personal driver (Al Alhareth and Al Dighrir 2015) together with more general conservative views that a woman's role lies within the family and the domestic sphere (Sechzer, 2004). Hatton Alfassi, a well-known advocate for women's rights in Saudi Arabia who serves as a role model for many young Saudi women, has highlighted some of the main difficulties facing women:

Leadership positions remain in the hands of men. Financial decisions remain in the hand of men. Opportunities in education and career advancement are wide open to men and limited to women. Discrimination against women as a student, staff, and faculty is still widely practised through the regulations and institutional interpretations (Profanter et al., 2010, p.19).

However, political, educational and particularly technological changes have begun to transform many aspects of women's lives. In the political domain, the late King Abdullah took the initiative to place women in different area of government and started by adding 30 female members to the Saudi Shura Council. His initiatives also increased opportunities for women in higher education in the Kingdom's 300+ higher education colleges and universities (Ministry of Higher Education, 2013), including the Princess Noura University which is the largest all-female university in the world. Females now represent "more than 56.6% of the total number of Saudi university students and more than 20% of those benefiting from the overseas scholarship program" (ibid). According to the most recent statistics available, some 17% of PhD holders in Saudi Arabia are women, as are some 22.6% of those holding masters degrees and 42% of those with bachelor degrees, while only 8.63% of women are non-educated (Saudi Education Bulletin, 2013). In December 2015, for the first time, Saudi women were permitted to vote and run for candidacy in Saudi local council elections. The elections received wide coverage in the electronic and print media. Seventeen women were elected from various parts of the country, according to Reuters (McDowall, 2015). Although Qassim city is considered to be the most conservative city in Saudi Arabia, two women were elected (McDowall, 2015). The women were thrilled with their victories and, in their positions as leaders in the Saudi government, promised to initiate much-needed changes on women leadership positions in the country. Nevertheless, some conservative religious people, whom I call extremists, and media organisations believe that women should not get involved in positions of leadership as they should stay at home

and be housewives. The use of ICT and e-learning has provided Saudi women with new methods of learning which help them to fulfill their educational goals and to access the web more easily (Hamdan, 2005). Virtual communication has also begun to challenge some of the previously strictly enforced social taboos concerning gender segregation.

Leadership and the education sector in Saudi Arabia

For cultural and religious reasons, education in Saudi Arabia remains largely gender segregated. Whilst on the one hand, this can be thought of as a negative situation, on the other it means that women who have traditionally taken on roles only within the private domestic sphere now have unprecedented opportunities to take on positions of educational leadership, reflected in the growth of research papers and public and private sector initiatives in this field. With the dawn of the so-called Information Society, education has become the key priority in both developed and developing countries since highly trained and qualified human resources, are increasingly considered to be the key to political, economic and social progress.

The Saudi government is focusing on education, especially for Saudi women, because they represent the main gateway to the education of future generations and have an important role to play in the economic and cultural development of society. As a result, there has been a significant increase in leadership roles for women in Saudi society (Alexander, 2013), particularly within Saudi Higher education (Al-Kayed, 2015). In a recent study conducted by Neva Alexander, 50 female Saudi students were asked to write essays expressing their opinions about what constituted effective leadership and their female role models. The results indicated that female students have a different understanding of the leadership style as charismatic and democratic, and they view the style and attributes of leaders are being "interconnected". Analysis of the essays identified five common capabilities of a good leader, namely, "the ability to persevere, to be a pioneer in a particular field, to excel in a male-dominated field, to achieve a dream or lifelong goal and to be a role model or someone who inspires" (p.150, 2013). Students were also asked to name their top five role models leader and their qualities. The students saw confidence and integrity as the most important qualities in a leader. Ameerah Al-Tweel and Hayat Sindi were viewed as the greatest inspirational models, due their confidence and the fact they encouraged Saudi women to achieve their dreams.

In the educational sectors of Saudi Arabia, women have been involved in educational leadership, although they face challenges (Al-Kayed, 2015). Al-Kayed conducted a study which involved in-depth interviews with a random sample of 19 female university managers, from two Saudi universities, 10 of whom were in senior management positions (2015). All participants were asked 10 questions, which covered aspects relating to their level of satisfaction with their work-life balance. Findings indicated that 18 of the participants were married and one was divorced, half of them held a PhD and 11 were satisfied with their managerial work. Only ten said they felt able to balance their workloads with the other obligations in their life. Interestingly, 11 expressed the opinion that men are better at decision-making, a point of view which is likely to have been influenced by the fact that in Saudi culture, men are traditionally perceived as possessing wisdom, being more experienced, and being tougher. After analysing the interviewees' responses, the researcher identified some fifteen

challenges facing managers in the university sector. The challenges most frequently cited by the women were ranked by Al-Kayed (2015: 8) as follows:

- Work pressure with long working hours.
- Dealing with the human element, dealing with different types of employees who lack adequate communication skills.⁴
- Lack of authorization to implement what they considered important for their departments or faculties.
- Higher management do not appreciate workers or recognise the time which they spend or pay heed to their family circumstances.
- Higher management do not clearly or accurately know university regulations and ordinances.

AlDoubi undertook a narrative study focusing on six Saudi female leaders, of various ages and at different universities, and concluded that women gain access to leadership in higher education by holding a doctoral degree and working hard to accomplish their ambition (2015). However, women also reported that men were the greatest obstacle to accessing leadership positions within the university since they all, at some stage, had to interact with males to gain access to policy. All six participants agreed on four key difficulties they faced when having to deal with men: their lack of authority to enact decisions which they made; men's control of resources; gender segregation and the shortage of staff which they had in comparison to their male counterparts. AlDoubi concluded that Saudi women were forced into playing particular social roles by a range of factors which included social and cultural stereotyping; religious beliefs; male resistance; the inadequacies of the educational system and their inability to participate fully in decision making processes at a number of levels.

Recommendations on future strategies to encourage female leadership in academia

AlDoubi (2014, pp.171-172) suggested that in order to ensure that women are able to aspire to and secure leadership positions in Higher Education in Saudi Arabia, three conditions must be met. These have been slightly adapted and amended here to reflect what I believe are the key priorities. The first is that women must continue to educate future generations, both formally in the classroom and lecture theatre and informally in the home environment. The late King Abdullah chose to break with the constraints previously imposed by cultural traditions by gradually involving women in fields of leadership and introducing policies aimed at increasing fairness (Almaqrn, 2015). Secondly, therefore, Saudi women must also ensure that future government legislation also supports women and is rightfully applied. One key step might be to achieve parity in salary with their male counterparts since currently women rates of pay are lower. Thirdly, women must demand real involvement in decision-making processes and the authority to enact those decisions which they make. To a certain extent, it is not surprising that 11 of the 19 Saudi women interviewed in Al-Kayed study should believe that men are better at decision-making. However, this is nothing to do with an innate superiority in

intellect: Saudi men simply get more practice at making decisions, and as with any skill, practice makes perfect.

Some personal reflections

The voices of women in positions of leadership now speak out in Saudi Arabia, where bright individuals shine in the new world of social media and in high positions, including academia. Apparently, Saudi women have the privilege and honour of being supported and encouraged by the government and family to pursue higher studies which might equip some of them for the academic leadership position, even though Saudi Arabia is considered to be 'conservative' in present-day Saudi society. The Saudi government has given Saudi women a chance to participate in decision-making processes, including in local council, law and leading universities, meaning that women are at long last gaining access to leadership positions. Women must now take the initiative and prove that women that they are capable of leadership. We see a bright future for women leaders in Saudi academia, and my hope is to go back to lead a university, as my father does, and to use that position to promote change. However, we hope to be guided by the words of Mary Parker Follett, known as the Mother of Modern Management, who wisely observed: *Leadership is not defined by the exercise of power, but by the capability to increase the sense of power amongst those being led* (MPF Network).

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⁴In the opinion of Almaqrn (2015), a successful leader at a Saudi university must have the ability to deal with people from a range of social background, from princes to illiterate Bedouins.

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