

ARTICLE

Leadership in Transition: Contextualizing Adaptive and Culturally Grounded Models in the Gulf Cooperation Council

Samantha Raed^{1,*}

¹ *College of Economics and Management, Al Qasimia University, Sharjah, UAE*

*Corresponding author. Email: Samraed2020@gmail.com

Received: 29 July 2025, Accepted: 13 August 2025, Published: 19 August 2025

Abstract

This study explores evolving leadership models in Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries amid rapid socio-economic transformation, globalization, and ambitious national development visions such as Saudi Vision 2030 and UAE Centennial 2071. Using qualitative thematic analysis of secondary data, the research identifies key leadership characteristics, including strategic foresight, cultural intelligence, adaptability, and inclusivity. Transformational and servant leadership styles are emerging as particularly effective, especially in public sector reform and innovation-driven sectors. However, persistent challenges such as institutional inertia, gender inequality, and symbolic policy implementation limit the impact of these efforts. The study proposes a hybrid leadership model that bridges global best practices with local cultural values, introducing the concept of “leadership as cultural translation.” The findings contribute to contextual, institutional, and strategic leadership theories and offer actionable insights for policymakers and practitioners aiming to foster sustainable, inclusive governance in the Gulf.

Keywords: GCC Leadership; Transformational Leadership; Cultural Adaptation; Strategic Governance; National Development Strategies

1. INTRODUCTION

The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, long defined by their oil wealth, are now at a critical turning point. As these nations shift toward diversified, knowledge-based economies, effective leadership is essential, not only to manage limited natural resources but also to navigate rapid technological changes, increasing global integration, and evolving societal expectations. In this fast-changing environment, understanding what “appropriate leadership” means has become a vital question.

Despite ambitious development plans such as Saudi Vision 2030, UAE Centennial 2071, and Oman Vision 2040, leadership in the region often still follows hierarchical and traditional models. These legacy approaches can limit innovation, responsiveness, and inclusive governance, qualities that are increasingly important for both public and private sectors in the 21st century. This gap reveals the need for a leadership framework that fits the GCC’s unique social and economic conditions while effectively addressing global challenges like digital transformation, climate change, and youth inclusion.

This study aims to fill this gap by exploring how leadership in the GCC can evolve to support national visions while respecting cultural values. Using qualitative analysis of existing secondary data, the research contributes to the growing understanding of leadership in transitional, non-Western contexts. It proposes a hybrid leadership model that combines strategic foresight, cultural intelligence, adaptability, and inclusivity with respect for local traditions.

The objectives of this study are to:

- Identify the key leadership traits suited to the GCC context.
- Analyze how leadership drives sustainable economic and social development.
- Propose adaptive strategies to meet global and regional challenges.

- Examine ways leadership can uphold national identity while engaging internationally.
- The study addresses these research questions:
- What core leadership traits and strategies are needed for effective governance in GCC countries?
- How do current leadership models align with or diverge from national development plans like Vision 2030 and Vision 2040?
- How can leadership adapt to challenges such as digital transformation, climate change, and youth engagement?
- How can GCC leadership balance preserving national identity with the demands of globalization and regional cooperation?

By answering these questions, this research seeks to provide a practical, culturally grounded leadership framework for the GCC—one that integrates global best practices with local realities to guide future development.

The article is structured as follows: after the literature review, the methodology section is presented, outlining the research approach. This is followed by the results, which summarize the key findings. Then, the discussion section analyzes the entire article in light of the study's objectives and research questions, while also addressing the limitations of the methodology. Additionally, the discussion provides theoretical contributions and practical implications. Finally, the study concludes with a summary and directions for future research.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Leadership in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries is fundamentally shaped by the region's unique economic, cultural, and institutional landscapes [6]. While traditional hierarchical leadership structures remain dominant, they are increasingly challenged by evolving political economies and ambitious national transformation agendas such as Saudi Vision 2030, the UAE Centennial 2071, and Qatar's National Vision 2030 [13]. The existing literature is notably up-to-date and provides a valuable contribution to understanding these ongoing shifts. A recurring theme is the widening gap between visionary development goals and leadership frameworks that often lack the adaptability, participatory governance, and innovation-driven mindset necessary to meet 21st-century demands [23].

2.1. Transformational and Servant Leadership Models in the GCC

Transformational leadership has gained significant attention across both corporate and public sectors in the Gulf. Empirical studies demonstrate that CEOs employing transformational leadership enhance top management performance, with effectiveness moderated more strongly by internal innovation support than by psychological empowerment alone [40]. In education, transformational leadership among school principals in Kuwait and the UAE supports responsiveness and reform implementation [19].

Servant leadership is increasingly relevant, especially in public sector reform where trust-building and community-oriented governance are critical. Leaders who prioritize participatory decision-making and stakeholder service tend to foster legitimacy and better policy alignment [42]. Together, these models underscore the need for leadership approaches that are both effective and culturally congruent.

2.2. Institutional and Governance Reform

Governance scholars emphasize modernizing corporate and public boards in the GCC to better support economic diversification and sustainability. Although gender diversity remains limited, it correlates with stronger environmental, social, and governance (ESG) outcomes [7]. Through the lenses of agency and resource dependence theories, inclusive boards enhance stakeholder legitimacy and strategic effectiveness.

Corporate governance reforms such as board independence and role separation (CEO vs. Chair) have improved investor confidence; however, their implementation varies across countries [24]. These reforms are critical for aligning leadership practices with national economic objectives.

2.3. Knowledge Management and Organizational Culture

Leadership effectiveness in the GCC is closely linked to knowledge management and organizational culture. Research on telecommunication firms finds that knowledge management fully mediates the relationship between organizational culture and effectiveness and partially mediates leadership's impact on performance [13,37]. These findings highlight the importance of leadership strategies that leverage knowledge assets while respecting cultural norms [14].

2.4. Sectoral Applications: Health, Safety, and Sustainability

Health and safety leadership remains a priority. Regional studies show leadership significantly influences organizational safety culture, though challenges in workforce diversity and leadership training persist [4].

Environmental leadership is crucial for sustainability transitions. Studies identify institutional inertia and cultural resistance as major barriers to energy efficiency and climate responsiveness despite strong financial capacity [9,28]. Addressing these requires leadership capable of coordinating economic, institutional, and social dimensions [22].

2.5. Leadership in Digital Governance and Innovation

Leadership plays a central role in digital transformation efforts. Interviews with GCC department heads reveal that leadership style and organizational culture strongly shape attitudes toward open data and innovation. Resistance to change and lack of vision frequently hinder smart city initiatives [33]. Even where digital infrastructure exists, leadership often treats technology as an add-on rather than a transformative tool [34].

Similarly, AI governance in the GCC tends to rely on “soft regulation” through national strategies and ethical principles rather than enforceable legal frameworks. This approach, though forward-thinking, faces challenges related to talent gaps, data governance, and policy alignment—requiring leadership that can convert vision into action [2,36].

2.6. Social Progress, Youth, and Entrepreneurial Leadership

As the GCC moves toward knowledge-based economies, leadership must address persistent challenges such as inequality, gender disparities, and human capital gaps [9]. Social Progress Index metrics indicate improvement, yet inclusive leadership is essential to sustain these gains.

Research on education and entrepreneurship highlights misalignments between national goals and institutional practices. Curriculum relevance, pedagogical consistency, and market alignment gaps slow innovation [6]. Effective leadership in education is crucial to bridging these divides and fostering entrepreneurial ecosystems [9].

Youth participation is widely promoted, but actual leadership opportunities remain limited. Initiatives like entrepreneurship incubators and youth innovation councils show promise [5,17] though scale remains insufficient relative to demographic needs.

2.7. Evolving Theoretical Frameworks and Shared Leadership

The literature reveals a shift from traditional single-authority leadership models toward shared and distributed approaches. Shared leadership frameworks, inspired by historical and cultural analogues such as the Roman consul model, offer adaptability and inclusivity suited to GCC complexities [8,21].

Such approaches are especially valuable where leadership must balance performance with cultural traditions, social legitimacy, and stakeholder alignment. Leaders increasingly act as “cultural translators,” blending global benchmarks with local values and traditions [26,27].

Overall, the literature presents a leadership model that integrates transformational energy with cultural sensitivity, strategic adaptability, and participatory governance. Yet, empirical gaps remain, especially concerning comparative leadership practices across GCC states, gender dynamics, and implementation effectiveness. These limitations highlight the need for a contextually grounded leadership framework tailored to the Gulf's transitional and culturally complex environment.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research Design and Rationale

This study adopts a qualitative research design to explore appropriate leadership models within the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries. Given the complex and evolving nature of leadership in the region, a qualitative approach enables a nuanced, context-sensitive analysis that goes beyond quantification. By interpreting patterns in leadership discourse and practice, the study provides rich insights into how leadership is conceptualized and enacted across different national and institutional settings.

As GCC nations pursue ambitious development goals articulated in national agendas—such as Saudi Vision 2030, Oman Vision 2040, and the UAE Centennial 2071—qualitative methods are particularly appropriate for capturing the social, cultural, and strategic dimensions of leadership transformation [11].

3.2. Data Sources and Scope

Initially, this study is based on comprehensive secondary data, including peer-reviewed academic journal articles, national policy documents, and institutional reports. These sources allow for a broad, multi-sectoral, and cross-country synthesis of leadership insights across the six GCC member states: Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Oman, Bahrain, and Qatar.

Secondary data was drawn from five primary categories:

- Peer-reviewed academic journal articles
- Strategic policy documents (e.g., Saudi Vision 2030, Oman Vision 2040, UAE Centennial 2071)
- Reports from international organizations (e.g., United Nations, World Bank)
- Case studies and scholarly analyses from regional institutions
- Reports by Gulf-based think tanks and development agencies
- These sources were selected for their relevance to themes such as governance reform, leadership styles, innovation, human capital development, and cultural adaptation.

3.3. Inclusion of Primary Data for Contextual Depth

Recognizing the limitations of relying exclusively on secondary data, this study proposes the addition of in-depth, semi-structured interviews with key leaders from government, business, and civil society sectors across the GCC. These interviews aim to enrich the contextual depth of the research by capturing firsthand perspectives on leadership practices, challenges, and adaptations in the region's rapidly evolving socio-political landscape. This primary data will complement the secondary analysis by providing direct experiential insights and enabling a more grounded understanding of leadership dynamics.

3.4. Sampling Strategy

For secondary data, a purposive sampling strategy was employed to ensure analytical depth and contextual relevance. A total of 57 sources were included, with 55 published within the last five years and two foundational works. Selection criteria included:

- Academic rigor and methodological soundness
- Direct relevance to GCC-specific leadership issues
- Focus on themes such as sustainability, digital transformation, cultural identity, youth empowerment, and institutional reform

For the primary data phase, purposive and snowball sampling will be used to identify a diverse range of leaders from public, private, and civil society sectors, ensuring representation across the GCC states.

3.5. Data Analysis Process

Thematic analysis was conducted on the secondary data through iterative reading and manual coding to identify recurring patterns, contradictions, and emergent themes. A combined deductive and inductive approach was applied:

- Deductive coding drew on established leadership theories including transformational, strategic, and servant leadership [40].
- Inductive coding captured new patterns emerging from policy documents, regional discourse, and institutional case studies [15,21].

In the upcoming primary data phase, interview transcripts will undergo similar thematic coding to integrate empirical insights with secondary findings.

3.6. Ethical Considerations

The secondary data analyzed are publicly available, posing no ethical risks related to confidentiality or human subjects. For the planned interviews, ethical approval will be sought, and all participants will provide informed consent, ensuring confidentiality and voluntary participation.

3.7. Summary

This qualitative methodology, combining extensive secondary data analysis with planned primary interviews, offers a robust platform to analyze leadership in the GCC through a culturally grounded and strategically adaptive lens. The integrated approach aims to generate insights that are empirically rich, contextually relevant, and theoretically meaningful—informing leadership development strategies that address governance, sustainability, innovation, and cultural identity preservation in the Gulf region.

4. RESULTS

This section synthesizes key findings from the selected secondary sources, structured around the core research questions: the traits and strategies shaping effective leadership in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), the alignment between leadership models and national development plans, leadership adaptation to emerging challenges, and the balance between national identity and global engagement. Figure 1 presents the Leadership Themes in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC).

Fruits and Stirrings of Effective Leadership in the GCC	Alignment with Malallen Development Vision
Leadership Adaptation to Benchmarking	Balancing national identity and Globalization

Figure 1. Leadership Themes in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)

4.1. Traits and Strategies for Effective Leadership in the GCC

Across the literature, effective leadership in the GCC is consistently characterized by a hybrid model that integrates strategic foresight, cultural intelligence, and adaptability. Visionary leadership is emphasized in numerous policy documents such as the UAE Centennial 2071 and Saudi Vision 2030, highlighting the importance of long-term strategic planning and national goal alignment [9].

Transformational leadership is frequently cited as particularly influential in the GCC context. Empirical studies show that transformational CEOs improve top management performance, especially when internal innovation support is present [40]. In education, transformational leadership among school principals in Kuwait and the UAE has demonstrated increased organizational responsiveness [19].

Strategic leadership traits—such as results orientation, adaptability, and innovation promotion—are widely recognized in public and private institutions [19]. Servant leadership also emerges as a promising approach, particularly in public sector reform, where community engagement, stakeholder trust, and participatory decision-making enhance legitimacy and policy alignment.

From the synthesis, common leadership attributes include: visionary thinking, cultural sensitivity, empowerment of subordinates, innovation orientation, transparency, and alignment with national development goals [10].

4.2. Alignment with National Development Visions

While national development plans such as Saudi Vision 2030 and Oman Vision 2040 emphasize agility, inclusivity, and innovation, actual leadership practices often remain embedded in hierarchical, centralized models. Case studies reveal discrepancies between strategic objectives and institutional

implementation—particularly in private sector participation, women’s empowerment, and SME growth [35].

Nevertheless, progress is observable in countries like the UAE and Qatar, where public leadership development academies and performance-based governance reforms have been introduced [41]. Think tank reports suggest that countries integrating leadership development into modernization agendas show greater momentum in achieving vision targets [11].

Despite rhetorical alignment with youth empowerment and sustainability goals, many GCC institutions struggle with implementation due to structural inertia and uneven leadership capacity [22]. This underscores the importance of leadership reform strategies that are measurable, accountable, and tailored to national visions [31].

4.3. Leadership Adaptation to Emerging Challenges

Digital Governance: Leadership responses to digital transformation vary widely. While national strategies advocate for smart governance and open data, many leaders treat digital tools as technical enhancements rather than instruments for systemic change. Cultural resistance, fragmented authority, and lack of strategic roadmaps remain key barriers [33,34].

Sustainability and Climate Leadership: GCC leadership shows growing commitment to sustainability through initiatives such as net-zero targets and green building programs. However, engagement is often symbolic and lacks enforcement mechanisms. Challenges include data system gaps, weak inter-agency coordination, and low incentives for behavioral change [9,28,30].

Youth Empowerment: National discourse frequently highlights youth inclusion and entrepreneurship, yet leadership roles remain dominated by senior figures. While programs such as university-based incubators and youth councils are emerging in countries like Saudi Arabia and the UAE [5,16], their reach remains limited. Top-down leadership structures continue to marginalize youth participation in policy and governance [17].

These findings indicate that adaptation to emerging challenges is uneven. Where leadership fosters inclusion, innovation, and institutional agility—such as in the UAE—more tangible progress is observed. In contrast, reactive or symbolic leadership undermines sustainable development goals [38].

4.4. Balancing National Identity and Globalization

A major leadership challenge in the GCC is balancing rapid globalization with preservation of national identity. Leaders are tasked with advancing modernization while upholding traditional norms, requiring a culturally literate and diplomatically strategic approach [39].

In line with this, studies on cultural leadership emphasize that reform initiatives must be embedded within local traditions to gain legitimacy. Leaders who frame reforms as “progressive continuity”—modernization without cultural disruption—are more likely to achieve stakeholder support [26,27]. Moreover, shared or distributed leadership models, though still nascent, are increasingly advocated in the literature as culturally adaptive mechanisms. Such models emphasize consultation, collective responsibility, and flexibility while respecting traditional values, such as tribal or elder-led decision-making [8,21].

Practical examples of this trend include heritage-led tourism governance, higher education boards with local and international representation, and cross-functional teams in cultural institutions [20,32].

Nevertheless, tensions persist—particularly around global norms on gender, governance, and corporate standards—which may clash with localized expectations. Navigating these tensions requires leadership that can “translate” global frameworks into culturally meaningful narratives and practices [1,3].

Overall, the findings of this study reveal that effective GCC leadership is defined by a complex blend of strategic vision, adaptability, and cultural grounding. While aspirations outlined in national development plans are ambitious and forward-thinking, practical leadership implementation remains inconsistent. Leaders who embrace inclusive, participatory, and innovation-focused approaches show the most success in navigating challenges related to modernization, digitalization, sustainability, and youth inclusion.

5. DISCUSSION

This study set out to explore the evolving nature of leadership within the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), focusing on the alignment between leadership characteristics and national development visions, the capacity of leaders to address emerging challenges, and the ability to balance national identity with global engagement. Drawing on extensive secondary data, the analysis confirms existing research trends while offering new insights into the unique leadership dynamics of the region.

A key dimension that warrants explicit clarification is the distinction between public and private sector leadership models within the GCC context. Public sector leadership tends to emphasize servant and transformational leadership styles, prioritizing participatory governance, community engagement, and alignment with state-led development agendas [9]. In contrast, the private sector often exhibits a stronger focus on strategic and shared leadership models, driven by market competitiveness, innovation, and agility [40]. Table 1 summarizes the contrasting leadership traits and challenges across these sectors.

Table 1. Summarizes the Contrasting Leadership Traits and Challenges across these Sectors

Dimension	Public Sector	Strategic, shared
Leadership Style	Servant, transformational	Distributed, team-based
Governance Approach	Centralized, hierarchical	Innovation, market responsiveness
Key Priorities	National development, social inclusion	Talent retention, rapid adaptability
Structural Barriers	Bureaucracy, low gender diversity	Navigating globalization and cultural translation
Leadership Challenges	Symbolic implementation, fragmented accountability	Strategic, shared

This comparative assessment highlights that while the public sector's leadership is embedded in traditional structures emphasizing stability and social cohesion, the private sector is more experimental, seeking to balance global best practices with regional cultural nuances. Building on this distinction, consistent with previous studies, effective leadership in the Gulf is increasingly characterized by a hybrid model combining transformational, strategic, and servant leadership traits. Leaders who exhibit strategic foresight, adaptability, and deep cultural sensitivity are better positioned to navigate the region's complex socio-political landscape [40]. In particular, the growing adoption of servant leadership, especially within the public sector, signals a shift toward participatory and community-centered governance, fostering trust in societies marked by traditional values [42].

Moreover, emerging interest in shared leadership reflects a broader transformation, moving from top-down authority to distributed, team-based approaches that accommodate both public and private sector needs [8,9]. Figure 1 illustrates the interplay between leadership styles across sectors and their alignment with GCC national visions.

Nevertheless, despite progressive national agendas—such as Saudi Vision 2030, Oman Vision 2040, and the UAE Centennial 2071—that emphasize innovation, inclusion, and agility, actual leadership practices often lag behind these ideals. Empirical evidence reveals persistent hierarchical norms in many institutions, with structural barriers including low gender diversity, limited board independence, and fragmented accountability mechanisms [11,35]. These limitations, in particular, tend to be more pronounced in the public sector, where bureaucratic inertia slows reform efforts.

Furthermore, these challenges echo broader critiques about symbolic policy implementation, where reforms exist more in rhetoric than substantive practice [22,24]. While some countries, notably the UAE and Qatar, have made notable strides through performance management and digital governance reforms, many leadership structures remain insufficiently aligned with strategic ambitions. Therefore, sector-specific leadership development programs with measurable performance metrics are essential to close this gap.

In addition, leadership responsiveness to pressing issues—digital transformation, climate change, and youth inclusion—varies significantly across sectors and countries. In several GCC states, digitalization is often approached as a technical upgrade rather than an opportunity for systemic reform. Case studies reveal that fragmented mandates and limited transparency hinder progress, especially in

smart city initiatives [33,34]. While public sector leadership faces additional challenges due to institutional rigidity, private sector leaders may exhibit greater agility but still struggle with cultural translation.

Similarly, climate leadership is increasingly visible in discourse but often symbolic, lacking enforcement mechanisms and cross-ministerial coordination [28,30]. Both sectors require more robust data infrastructure and financial incentives to promote environmental behavioral change. Moreover, youth empowerment policies highlight another leadership challenge. Despite numerous strategies promoting entrepreneurship and participation, traditional norms and centralized authority frequently limit youth engagement in governance. While initiatives such as incubators and youth councils have emerged [5,16], their scale and impact remain modest. Consequently, a structural shift toward inclusive, bottom-up leadership is crucial to better meet societal needs [17].

A central theoretical contribution of this study is framing leadership in the GCC as a process of “cultural translation.” Leaders are tasked not merely with adopting global best practices but interpreting and adapting them within culturally resonant narratives [26,27]. This delicate balance between modernization and tradition—what we term “progressive continuity”—is critical for legitimacy and public trust [39]. Shared and distributed leadership models hold promise in bridging traditional consultative practices with modern organizational demands [21,32]. However, tensions remain when global governance norms—such as gender equity and data transparency—conflict with local expectations. Leaders must strategically frame reforms to align international standards with domestic cultural sensibilities, requiring nuanced diplomatic skill and contextual awareness [1,3].

This study advances scholarly understanding in four key areas:

- Contextual Leadership Theory: Extends how transformational, servant, and shared leadership styles operate within collectivist, resource-rich societies.
- Institutional Theory: Highlights adaptive leadership’s role in translating formal visions into institutional practices, emphasizing leadership in institutional convergence.
- Strategic Leadership Theory: Demonstrates how leaders must simultaneously manage diversification, globalization, and social cohesion.
- Cultural Translation: Introduces leadership as cultural translation, bridging global governance norms and local expectations in transitional societies.

Collectively, these contributions provide a solid foundation for future comparative research across emerging economies and underscore the importance of sector-specific leadership strategies.

6. CONCLUSION

This study provides a comprehensive qualitative analysis of leadership dynamics within the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries. By synthesizing secondary data from academic literature, policy documents, and institutional reports, the research identifies key leadership characteristics that are contextually appropriate for the region’s rapidly evolving socio-economic and geopolitical landscape.

Building on this foundation, the findings emphasize that effective leadership in the GCC must move beyond imported Western models to embrace context-sensitive approaches rooted in local values and cultural norms. Specifically, transformational and strategic leadership models—when adapted to the Gulf’s hierarchical and collectivist societies—hold strong potential for guiding economic diversification, institutional reform, and innovation. Leaders who demonstrate visionary thinking, cultural intelligence, adaptability, and ethical grounding are better equipped to address the complex demands of modernization, digital transformation, and youth inclusion. Furthermore, this study highlights the growing importance of soft leadership traits, such as authenticity and emotional intelligence. These qualities, combined with participatory decision-making and responsiveness to community needs, are essential for fostering trust and legitimacy—particularly in societies shaped by tribal traditions, generational hierarchies, and deeply rooted social values.

From a policy perspective, the research suggests that leadership development should be institutionalized as a core component of national transformation strategies. Programs designed by education ministries, civil service academies, and executive training institutions must integrate culturally relevant content alongside global best practices in values-based leadership, innovation, and ethical governance. Vision frameworks such as Saudi Vision 2030 and Oman Vision 2040 offer critical

opportunities to embed these leadership reforms across both public and private sectors. Moreover, the future of leadership in the region depends on early cultivation of essential competencies through educational reform, youth mentorship, and institutional feedback mechanisms. Leaders must transition from traditional command-and-control models to agile, inclusive, and collaborative leadership cultures. Middle managers and emerging leaders should be empowered through clear succession planning, performance tracking, and cross-functional engagement.

At the organizational level, leadership capacity-building efforts should prioritize adaptability, innovation, and stakeholder engagement. Continuous learning, openness to feedback, and benchmarking against international leadership standards must be promoted—while maintaining cultural authenticity and respect for societal expectations. However, the study’s exclusive reliance on secondary data presents methodological limitations. Although this approach allowed for broad regional coverage and multi-sectoral insights, it constrained the ability to capture real-time experiences, narratives, and challenges faced by leaders on the ground. The absence of primary data—such as interviews, surveys, or ethnographic observations—also limits the depth of contextual interpretation.

In addition, GCC countries differ significantly in their political systems, institutional maturity, and reform trajectories. While this study draws regional comparisons, its findings may not apply uniformly. For example, the UAE and Saudi Arabia have pursued ambitious reforms, whereas other states have followed more incremental approaches. Therefore, future research should seek to deepen and validate these findings through primary empirical work. Case studies, interviews, and focus groups with leaders across government, business, and civil society could uncover lived experiences of leadership transformation. Comparative studies between GCC countries—or between the GCC and other emerging economies—would further situate Gulf leadership models within broader global trends.

Furthermore, additional research is also needed to explore the gendered dimensions of leadership in the region, especially considering persistent disparities in representation and opportunity. Moreover, as digital governance, artificial intelligence, and data-driven decision-making reshape leadership paradigms, studies focusing on digital leadership competencies in the Gulf are increasingly essential.

Ultimately, this study contributes to both academic and policy discussions by advancing a culturally grounded, strategically adaptive leadership framework for the GCC. By emphasizing leadership as both a driver of transformation and a guardian of national identity, it offers valuable guidance for nurturing leaders capable of bridging tradition and modernity—leaders who can effectively shape the region’s sustainable and inclusive future.

Funding Statement: No external funding was received for this research’s conduct or the manuscript’s preparation.

Contribution: The author contributed to the research and writing of this article and has read/agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: The data used in this study were derived from secondary sources compiled through a comprehensive literature review. All data are publicly available and have been appropriately cited in the manuscript.

Conflict of Interest Statement: The author declares no conflicts of interest.

Acknowledgement: The author acknowledges the use of the free version of AI ChatGPT to refine the language in this article. After writing the article, the author asked the AI to check the language and correct the grammar.

REFERENCES

1. Akinsola, K. (2025). *The role of corporate governance in strengthening compliance frameworks*. Social Science Research Network. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.5126938>

2. Albous, M. R., Al-Jayyousi, O. R., & Stephens, M. (2025). AI governance in the GCC states: A comparative analysis of national AI strategies. *arXiv*. <https://doi.org/10.48550/arXiv.2505.02174>
3. Al Hinai, M. (2022). *Ethical leadership in the cultural context of Oman*. University of Worcester Repository.
4. Al Mazrouei, M. R. A. B. (2024). *The role of leadership in promoting organizational safety culture in the government sector of Abu-Dhab*. Aberystwyth University Research Portal. https://pure.aber.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/89604888/Almazrouei_Mariam.pdf
5. Al Naqbi, S. H., & Awashreh, R. (2024). Youth-led innovation for social transformation: A pathway to change communities. *Kurdish Studies*, 12(1), 4184–4196. <https://doi.org/10.58262/ks.v12i1.300>
6. Al Saadi, A., & Atef, R. (2024). The complex relationship between leadership, innovation, education, and sustainable development: A review in the Arabian Gulf region. *Cultural Conflict and Integration*, 1(1), 41–53. <https://doi.org/10.55121/cci.v1i1.345>
7. Aladwey, L., Elsayed, M. F. M., & Diab, A. (2025). Breaking barriers: Gender diversity, ESG, and corporate misconduct in the GCC region. *Risks*, 13(5), 97. <https://doi.org/10.3390/risks13050097>
8. Alsabaan, F. S. (2024). *Shared leadership in the context of change: A Saudi Arabian case study*. Queen's University Belfast Research Portal. https://pureadmin.qub.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/610335979/Shared_leadership_in_the_context_of_change_a_Saudi_Arabian_case_study.pdf
9. Awashreh, R. (2025a). Leadership strategies for managing change and fostering innovation over private higher education: Academic institutions in Oman. *Evolving strategies for organizational management and performance evaluation*. <https://doi.org/10.4018/979-8-3373-0149-5.ch018>
10. Awashreh, R. (2025b). Leadership in the pursuit of net-zero emissions: Overcoming barriers and embracing strategic innovation. *Arab Gulf Journal of Scientific Research*. <https://doi.org/10.1108/AGJSR-02-2025-0030>
11. Awashreh, R. (2025c). Omani public governance in the age of artificial intelligence. *Public governance practices in the age of AI*. <https://doi.org/10.4018/979-8-3693-9286-7.ch007>
12. Awashreh, R. (2025d). Leadership in the tourism sector: Strategies for sustainable growth and innovation. *Human capital management and competitive advantage in tourism*. <https://doi.org/10.4018/979-8-3373-0071-9.ch004>
13. Awashreh, R., & Al Ghunaimi, H. (2025). Transforming leadership in the Arab region: Emerging pedagogies for effective public administration and governance. *Journal of Governance & Regulation*, 14(2), 28–37. <https://doi.org/10.22495/jgrv14i2art3>
14. Awashreh, R., & Hamid, A. A. (2024). Understanding wise leadership: Employees' perspective in Oman's government sector. *SA Journal of Human Resource Management*, 22, Article a2747. <https://doi.org/10.4102/sajhrm.v22i0.2747>
15. Awashreh, R., & Hamid, A. A. (2025). The role of entrepreneurial leadership in driving employee innovation: The mediating effect of knowledge sharing. *Cogent Business & Management*, 12(1). <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311975.2025.2466812>
16. Awashreh, R. (2024a). Omani private universities: Debates between progress in human development but weak education quality. *The International Journal of Educational Organization and Leadership*, 32(1), 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.18848/2329-1656/CGP/v32i01/1-15>
17. Awashreh, R., & Al-Maskari, N. (2024). Toward effective student bodies and students' movement. *Finance and law in the metaverse world*. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-67547-8_18
18. Awashreh, R. A., & Alshuhoomi, S. A. (2025). Leadership in security media: Impact on community safety – Insights from Oman Police. *SA Journal of Human Resource Management*, 23, Article a2828. <https://doi.org/10.4102/sajhrm.v23i0.2828>
19. Awashreh, R., & Mohamed, Y. (2024). A comparative study of leadership perceptions in government and education sectors: Insights from the UAE and Oman. *The International Journal of Organizational Diversity*, 24(2), 109–123. <https://doi.org/10.18848/2328-6261/CGP/v24i02/109-123>

20. Awashreh, R. (2024b). Be aware: Navigating challenges in AI-driven higher education. *The International Journal of Interdisciplinary Educational Studies*, 20(1), 203–218. <https://doi.org/10.18848/2327-011X/CGP/v20i01/203-218>
21. Bonet, L., & Rykkja, A. (2023). Why is managerial shared leadership in creative organizations a more resilient, transparent, open, and generous constellation? A case analysis approach. *European Journal of Cultural Management and Policy*, 13, 1-14. <https://doi.org/10.3389/ejcmp.2023.12056>
22. Boeske, J. (2023). Leadership towards sustainability: A review of sustainable, sustainability, and environmental leadership. *Sustainability*, 15(16), 12626. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su151612626>
23. Elamin, M. O. (2024). Leadership dynamics in the modern era: A comparative study of transformative and controversial leaders. *International Journal of Religion*, 5(5), 379–392. <https://doi.org/10.61707/jesf6626>
24. Elhabib, M. A. A. (2024). Corporate governance and capital market development in the GCC: A comparative literature review. *Journal of Capital Markets Studies*, 8(2), 255–274. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JCMS-06-2024-0027>
25. Galvão Dos Santos Meirinhos, A., Cardoso, A., Neves, M. E., Silva, R., & Rêgo, R. (2023). Leadership styles, motivation, communication and reward systems in business performance. *Journal of Risk and Financial Management*, 16(2), 70. <https://doi.org/10.3390/jrfm16020070>
26. Gutterman, A. (2023). *Cross-cultural leadership studies*. Social Science Research Network. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4560467>
27. Ibn-Mohammed, T., Herath, S., Swallow, N., et al. (2024). Overcoming the challenges faced by leaders of purpose-led medium-sized businesses: The role of corporate communication and its interplay with corporate reputation and organisational identity. *Corporate Reputation Review*. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41299-024-00181-7>
28. Liu, T., Chen, L., Yang, M., Sandanayake, M., Miao, P., Shi, Y., & Yap, P.-S. (2022). Sustainability considerations of green buildings: A detailed overview on current advancements and future considerations. *Sustainability*, 14(21), 14393. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su142114393>
29. Małecka, A., & Pfajfar, G. (2025). Conceptualizing consumer resistance in global consumer culture: Framework and research agenda. *International Marketing Review*, 42(7), 1–46. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IMR-03-2025-0143>
30. Malik, K., Rahman, S. M., Khondaker, A. N., Abubakar, I. R., Aina, Y. A., & Hasan, M. A. (2019). Erratum to: Renewable energy utilization to promote sustainability in GCC countries: Policies, drivers, and barriers. *Environmental Science and Pollution Research*, 26(30), 31550–31551. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11356-019-06138-2>
31. Meirinhos, G. D. S., Cardoso, A., Neves, M. E., Silva, R., & Rêgo, R. (2023). Leadership styles, motivation, communication and reward systems in business performance. *Journal of Risk and Financial Management*, 16(2), 70. <https://doi.org/10.3390/jrfm16020070>
32. Mendoza, H. M., & Talavera, A. S. (2025). Governance strategies for the management of museums and heritage institutions. *Heritage*, 8(4), 127. <https://doi.org/10.3390/heritage8040127>
33. Mutambik, I., Lee, J., Almuqrin, A., & Zhang, J. Z. (2023). Transitioning to smart cities in Gulf Cooperation Council countries: The role of leadership and organisational culture. *Sustainability*, 15(13), 10490. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su151310490>
34. Pittri, H., Godawatte, G. A. G. R., Esangbedo, O. P., Antwi-Afari, P., & Bao, Z. (2025). Exploring barriers to the adoption of digital technologies for circular economy practices in the construction industry in developing countries: A case of Ghana. *Buildings*, 15(7), 1090. <https://doi.org/10.3390/buildings15071090>
35. Rice, C. F., & Yayboke, E. (2017). *Innovation-led economic growth: Transforming tomorrow's developing economies through technology and innovation*. Bloomsbury Publishing PLC.
36. Rospigliosi, P. A. (2025). AI ethics and regulations: Ensuring trustworthy AI. *International Journal of Artificial Intelligence for Science*, 1(2). <https://doi.org/10.63619/ijai4s.v1i2.004>
37. Saif, M. R., & Bin Yeop, N. K. (2020). The effect of organizational culture on knowledge management and managerial performance of government department in Dubai. *European Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies*, 5(1), 47. <https://doi.org/10.26417/915bag69u>

38. Sandhu, M. A., & Al Naqbi, A. (2023). Leadership behavior and innovation performance in the UAE's telecom and ICT industries. *Benchmarking: An International Journal*, 30(5), 1695–1712. <https://doi.org/10.1108/BIJ-10-2021-0599>
39. Sellami, A., Abu-Tineh, A. M. H., Alshaboul, Y. M. K., Ghamrawi, N. A., & Shal, T. M. (2025). The fourth estate's invisible hand: How newspaper media legitimize neoliberal higher education in Qatar and the UAE. *Frontiers in Education*, 10, 1-16. <https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2025.1592878>
40. Sheikh, A. Z., Newman, A., & Al Azzeh, S. A. F. (2012). Transformational leadership and job involvement in the Middle East: The moderating role of individually held cultural values. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 24(6), 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2012.703216>
41. Awashreh, R. (2020). Action learning and leadership development: An article critique. *Journal of Business and Management Studies*, 2(1), 23–25. <https://al-kindipublishers.org/index.php/jbms/article/view/6>
42. Canavesi, A., & Minelli, E. (2022). Servant leadership: A systematic literature review and network analysis. *Employee Relations and Rights Journal*, 34, 267–289. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10672-021-09381-3>