SUMMARY

In recent years, the countries of the Gulf Cooperative Council (GCC) have been the site of a booming industry for leadership development programs. The growing demand for competent "leaders" has been met with a plethora of programs from local and international actors, including academic institutions, governments, private sector companies, international development agencies, non-governmental organizations, and for-profit consultancies. Many of these costly programs are funded by governments with the aim of producing a cohort of qualified citizens that play a leading role in public and private sectors alike. However, in a post-financial crisis context, the cottage industry of leadership programs has been under scrutiny and questions have been raised about its efficacy and impact. Moreover, the nascent interest in developing "women's leadership" risks waning with little reflection on lessons learned from recent experiments and ways of improving them in the future. This policy brief provides a broad overview of contemporary leadership development programs for men and women in the Gulf region, a description of the main challenges facing these programs, and a number of recommendations for advancing effective leadership development in the GCC.[1]

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DUBAI SCHOOL OF GOVERNMENT

Beyond "Leader" Development: Advancing New Leadership Development Models in the GCC

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"Leadership Development" Defined

"Leadership development" is one of the fastest growing industries worldwide. There is no one consistently agreed upon definition for leadership development, as the definitions can be as diverse as the myriad conceptualizations of leadership itself (Avolio, Walumbwa, and Weber 2009). However, recent advances in leadership research have emphasized that leadership development is a relational process that is primarily concerned with interpersonal competence and effectiveness (Avolio 2007, Chemers 1997, Gardner 1993). Key components of interpersonal competence include social awareness (e.g., empathy, service orientation and developing others) and social skills (e.g., collaboration, cooperation, building bonds, and conflict management). A relational approach to leadership development entails developing networked relationships, teamwork, commitments, trust, and respect. Thus, leadership development focuses on the interaction between the individual and the social environment. Leadership in this case is seen as a cause, rather than an effect, which would influence change within the system (Day 2000, 583).

One important characteristic of "leadership development" is that it is distinct from "leader development." Leader development focuses on developing intrapersonal competences and effectiveness (e.g., self-awareness, self-regulation and self-motivation), whereas leadership development focuses on developing interpersonal competence and effectiveness (Gardner 2003). The distinction between leadership development and leader development corresponds to the difference between social capital development and human capital development (Day 2000). This distinction is very important because leader development tends to focus on changing individuals and assumes that contextual changes will follow, whereas leadership development is a relational concept that prioritizes the context in which individuals function, both those in formal positions of leadership and others. The majority of programs in the GCC are, in fact, leader development

[1] This policy brief draws on the research findings of a recent working paper published by Harvard Kennedy School's Dubai Initiative entitled "Taking Stock and Looking Forward: Leadership Development in the Arab World," by May Al-Dabbagh and Christine Assaad.

programs, primarily focusing on human capital development (and intrapersonal skills, abilities, and knowledge) rather than leadership development programs per se. However, the majority of practitioners and providers continue to use the term "leadership development" to describe their programs and activities.[2]

Leadership Development Programs in the GCC: Characteristics and Typologies

The market for leadership development programs in the GCC has flourished over the last decade. First, the demand for qualified nationals to fill senior leadership positions in the public sector has driven governments to invest heavily into training and leadership development programs. Some of these one-year programs cost as much as 10 million UAE dirhams (US$ 2.7 million) per program, or 300,000 dirhams ($81,000) per participant.[3] Second, leadership development for national citizens of GCC states has grown in importance, especially in the context of neoliberal economic policies emphasizing privatization, competition, and global orientation. Many leadership programs provided by universities and educational institutions are meant to produce "the next generation of national leaders," able to navigate new global realities and compete in an increasingly complex environment. Third, due to pressures to employ as many national citizens as possible, as opposed to expatriates, the private sector has also engaged with this process by creating in-house programs or cooperating with government led initiatives to train nationals. Private sector companies provide management and leadership development modules as part of their employees' career development plans to help build capacity among their managerial ranks. Fourth, both local and international organizations have engaged with the GCC as a site for their activities to develop leaders, focusing on a variety of groups including women, public officials, community leaders, and university students. These international organizations have been active in the Arab region outside of the GCC, and in recent years have had an increasing presence in the Gulf. Fifth, because of the unregulated market for leadership development, commercial training centers and HR consultancies have mushroomed in response to the demand for a quick fix for "capacity building" issues.

Leadership development programs in the GCC can be divided into six broad typologies: National programs and centers; educational programs; private sector programs; local and regional NGO programs; international organizations' programs, and commercial training center programs. These programs differ widely in terms of their methodologies, pedagogies, target groups, stated goals, funding sources and assessment tools. (For a summary, see Table 1.)

National programs: One example of a "national program" is the Women's Leadership Program provided by the Dubai Women's Establishment. This two-year program aims to enhance and encourage working Emirati women to become future leaders through providing them with personal leadership development fulfilling the UAE's strategic needs and priorities. Course modules include strategic planning and change management, negotiation, coaching and mentoring. Accompanying these courses is also the opportunity to provide these women with "safe" spaces to grow and network. Such programs are highly sought after by participants, as they are useful for tapping local networks for future employment opportunities.

Educational institutions: A wide variety of leadership development programs exists throughout both private and public

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[2] For the purposes of this paper we will refer to any self-proclaimed "leadership" development program in the GCC as a leadership development program. The conceptual distinction between "leader" and "leadership" development is highlighted here to emphasize the shortcomings of using the term "leadership development" inappropriately.

[3] Personal interview with director of a leadership development program in the GCC

Table 1: Typology of Leadership Development Programs in the GCC

Type	Scope	Example
National Leadership Development Programs	Nationals in public, private and semi-public organizations in Arab countries who exhibit potential to become leaders within the government	Mohammed Bin Rashid Center for Leadership Development Dubai Women's Establishment UAE Governmental Leaders Program
Educational Institutions	University students and executive education participants from the public, private and non-profit sectors	Dubai School of Government Sheikha Fatma Program at Zayed University in the UAE Al Yamama University in Saudi Arabia Qatar Science Leadership Program Effat College in Saudi Arabia
Private Sector / Work Organizations	Company employees who are selected or self-nominate for training to fulfill management positions	Shell BP Etisalat
Local and Regional NGOs	Non-governmental organizations and members of civil society who are training for community leadership and action or empowerment	CAWTAR (Regional) Dubai Foundation for Women and Children (DFWAC) with British Council (UAE)
International Organizations	Training on leadership for countries and their administrations provided by donor agencies as part of development aid	MEPI World Bank Gulf Research Center (Global Leadership)
Commercial Training Centers	Provide training on commercial basis to any institution which requires that service	UAE Leadership Training Center

educational organizations. One type is exemplified by the "executive education" courses provided by the Dubai School of Government. These courses aim to develop the institutional leadership capacity of the Arab world by training its policy makers and senior executives. The courses are prepared in collaboration with Harvard's Kennedy School of Government and/or regional freelance consultants and trainers, and vary anywhere from a few days to two years in length. Courses include a wide variety of applied topics including management, leadership, negotiation and policy making, to name but a few.

A second, and quite different, example of leadership development within an educational context is that of Zayed University (ZU); rather than offering discrete courses on leadership, the ZU approach to leadership development permeates all university activities. "Conversations on Leadership" is a year-long project mandated to set the stage for the development of a new leadership model at the university. This is done through interactive discussions and presentations on best practices in global leadership education, with the aim of creating a unique, culturally-specific, student-centered leadership education approach. Data collected from the discussions

on leadership will be compiled, along with an extensive literature review on leadership theory, to formulate a strategic plan, to frame the leadership development model of the university and produce "locally relevant" curriculum on leadership.

Private sector: Shell's leadership development program is an example of a private sector program designed and delivered by a corporation in the GCC. Like most other companies with similar programs, Shell identifies individuals from the "high potential" talent pool within the organization, and channels them through "fast track" training courses in management and leadership. The company develops the core competencies it requires for future managers within the organization. Most private sector leadership development programs in the GCC last for two years or longer, and are often conducted in close collaboration with international educational organizations. Like most private sector leadership programs, Shell funds the program and allows candidates free time for training, but the execution of the training is outsourced to educational institutions, who design "tailor-made" executive courses to fit the employees' particular needs.

Local and regional NGOs: The Dubai Foundation for Women and Children (DFWAC) typifies many of the common characteristics of leadership programs developed by **local NGOs**. It provides some capacity building programs to the victims of domestic violence, to improve their opportunities for re-integration into society and to gain new perspectives on how to best protect themselves. In cooperation with the British Council, the program provides participants with functional training, including English language courses which are designed to enhance their communication skills and empower them in their court cases. At the level of **regional NGOs**, The Center of Arab Women For Training and Research (CAWTAR) is an example of an NGO with a variety of offerings in leadership development programs

for women. For example, it has developed training kits and manuals to provide capacity building for NGOs on issues of women's political participation, as well as entrepreneurship and decision making for Arab women. One of their hallmark training kits is "Arab Women Speak Out (AWSO)," which trains NGOs on the empowerment of young adolescents on family, puberty, labor issues and values. CAWTAR has provided some of this capacity-building training (especially AWSO and combating domestic violence) in some GCC countries to NGOs and UN organizations.

International organizations: One example of a US-funded program active in a number of GCC countries is the Middle East Peace Initiative (MEPI). This program targets a grassroots level, including the underprivileged and community leaders, and varies in duration from several weeks to a few months. MEPI offers a variety of leadership development programs across the Arab world, such as the UAE Teacher Leadership Academy, the Student Leaders Program, and the Kuwait Women Leadership Training Program. MEPI programs aim at giving people a voice in their future, supporting quality education developing economic opportunity and empowering women and youth. The program is designed to foster leadership development as a tool to democratization.

Commercial programs: One example of a commercial program is the UAE Leadership Training Center, which is a for-profit organization which offers consulting services and "tailor-made" courses adapted to the particular needs of the requesting organization. Courses span leadership, HR, administration, accounting and finance. These courses are designed to build the capacity of staff working in private and public organizations. These commercial programs can be seen as a natural extension of the management consultant industry, which is widespread in the GCC and targets government and private sector companies alike.

The typology presented above is useful in so far that it demonstrates the wide array of programs in the Arab world and the diversity in providers of "leadership." However, it does not reflect the complex context in which providers of "leadership" do their work. While the programs are diverse, they exist within the same "ecosystem" and are interlinked in different ways. One example of this type of link is that governmental and semi-governmental organizations subcontract their leadership development programs to executive education programs in educational institutions. These "tailor-made" programs must accommodate the client's preferences in terms of content and candidate selection criteria, thereby strongly shaping the design and outcome of the program. Such interlinkages lead to reinforcing the prevailing leader development paradigm and monopolize resources needed for alternate approaches to leadership development. Moreover, many of these programs share a common feature of "importing" leadership paradigms from Western scholarship and practice. Indeed, most programs that are purportedly "tailor made" to the needs of the region are actually modeled after existing programs and paradigms, mainly from the US and Europe, and can be characterized as skill-based programs. Usually, these programs neither take into account regional specificities nor genuinely engage with local realities.

Challenges Facing Leadership Development Practice in the Region

Impact

One of the biggest challenges facing leadership development practitioners and funders in the GCC is how to gauge their impact. One important lesson from the experience of the economic crisis in the region is that organizations with institutionalized and strong systems were able to weather the storm better than others. Surprisingly, many of the heads of organizations implicated in ineffective governance, corruption, and problematic decision-making practices were graduates of existing "leadership" development programs. This begs the question: what kind of impact do these programs have in reality? Even if their impact is measured at the level of the individual, what kind of "skills" are not being taught to those in positions of leadership, whose actions should be in line with the public good? More importantly, what have these individual-focused approaches done for changing the context for the better? The biggest challenge, then, for leadership development practice is to transcend the individual approach for a relational approach that is systems–based, where the focus is on building trust, respect, and interpersonal competence.

A special case to examine when addressing the issue of impact is women's leadership development programs. Compared to "mixed" programs, which include men and women, these women-only programs are primarily designed to increase the number of qualified women in decision-making positions. These programs must be commended for attempting to fulfill an ambitious and important goal. However, doing so through skill-based programs which attempt to "fix the women" is certainly not enough. To create "women leaders," there must be a context which is conducive to women's leadership, not only to women's appointments. Gender equality is a contextual and relational issue that should be included in leadership development programs more generally, not only as a "women only" subject. While the latter approach is longer term and may not yield immediate outcomes, like higher rankings on gender equality indices, it is an important one nevertheless, and should receive support alongside more traditional "women-only" programs.

Sustainability

To date, the overwhelming common practice in the GCC is to import leadership development programs models from the US and Europe (Al-

Dabbagh and Assaad, 2010). This system ensures that programs are "branded" internationally and, therefore, purportedly taught by qualified practitioners and instructors. However, it also promotes one-sided partnerships between local consumers and international providers, with an emphasis on the superiority of Western knowledge and know-how. The GCC countries aspire to being knowledge economies, but are simultaneously making investments that preclude such a possibility in the long term. During the financial crisis, many leadership programs were cancelled or reduced in scope, primarily because the programs could not afford to import foreign expertise at previous rates. In order to build a sustainable leadership development practice, investments must be made to develop a local and regional pool of knowledge providers and practitioners of high caliber.

Relevance

Another drawback to the dependency on external leadership programs is that they may not be addressing the issues most relevant to the MENA region. The common practice for making programs "culturally relevant" is to provide (mainly) Western experts from universities, training centers, and consultancies with booklets of pre-prepared information about the region. Even "tailor made" programs for the GCC are often a mere compilation of modules delivered by different Western providers . While arguing for cultural relativism is neither desirable nor effective, reinforcing hegemonic Western universalism should not be an option either. Indeed, articulating an indigenous perspective should not necessitate a reductionist dichotomy such as local/authentic vs. global/Western. "Reifying" cultural difference and positing a binary approach to understanding the self and the context may not be empowering for individuals who have to deal with globalizing realities (Al-Dabbagh 2010). New approaches must be developed to create meaningful collaborations between leadership experts

locally and internationally that can go beyond simply importing knowledge to producing it collaboratively. Indeed, the environment in the GCC is particularly well suited to such an ideal, given the proliferation of Western educational institutions, satellite campuses, and international consultancies. These institutions can choose to engage with the region in ways that produce relevant knowledge that can contribute to a more meaningful leadership development practice.

Policy Recommendations

Move from "Leader Development" to "Leadership Development"

Individual skill-based programs are important, but they should not be the only paradigm for leadership development in the GCC. The individual approaches disregard the complex relations and interactions between individuals and their environment, and overlook the fundamental mechanisms for transforming systems. The impact of a program lies not in the glossy brand name of its provider, but more in the program's ability to address relational and systemic issues in a meaningful way. Therefore, investments should be directed to developing relational approaches to leadership research and practice. A specific example of this would be leadership development programs targeted at promoting women's leadership. In addition to skill-based women-only programs, new contextual approaches to gender and gender relations should be introduced. Leadership programs which include both men and women should incorporate gender perspectives in order to create new environments that are empowering for women. Indeed, even women-only programs can transcend the focus on the intrapersonal sphere to engage with interpersonal competencies and areas. As a result, these programs can go beyond the "fix the women" approach and focus on changing the systems that inhibit women's leadership.

Move from a Short-Term Import Model to a Long-Term Collaborative Model

If programs in the region are to transcend the typical "import model" of leadership programs, they must foster long-term collaboration between indigenous and international scholars and practitioners for culturally relevant knowledge production. With the increasing presence of Western educational, business, and diplomatic, and cultural organizations in the GCC, collaboration is no longer an option but a must. The alternative is to create programs that allow leadership researchers and practitioners to engage on an equal basis with local researchers. Rather than approaching the providers of leadership development programs as ready-made suppliers in a fixed market. The goal should be to create a new generation of leadership practitioners and researchers who are innovative in their engagement with the region. One example of this concept in practice was a February 2010 workshop held at New York University's Abu Dhabi Campus entitled "Advancing Leadership for Public Well Being in the Middle East." This gathering provided the opportunity for theorists and practitioners of leadership from the region and abroad to challenge prevalent assumptions about what leadership and leadership development mean in the context of the Arab region. Taking a collaborative approach requires a larger investment than short-term import models, but the returns are significantly higher.

Move from Isolated Leadership Experiments to Sustainable Regional Cooperation

It is crucial for leadership development programs to avoid working in silos and increase collaboration between institutions working on leadership. Engaging in genuine exchange and collaboration between programs would greatly enrich leadership theory and practice at the regional level. There is a real need to create a network of professionals, including regional theorists and practitioners who can exchange knowledge and reflect on the work of leadership beyond institutional constraints. While international networks do exist, there is a strong need for a regional network which would focus on the opportunities and realities specific to the GCC and Arab region. This network could be housed on a rotating basis at existing institutions of the region, but with a clear mandate to provide an independent space for leadership researchers to connect and grow beyond the constraints of institutional affiliations.

To conclude, there is a genuine need to hone what is meant by leadership development in the region, to conceive of the process as a valuable investment worthy of long-term support, and to create environments conducive to collaboration among researchers and practitioners across institutions and countries. The hope is that in coming years, leadership development programs in the region will transcend the cottage industry that currently exists to create a better, and more ethical, leadership development practice.

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Toward this goal, the Dubai School of Government also collaborates with regional and global institutions in delivering its research and training programs. In addition, the School organizes policy forums and international conferences to facilitate the exchange of ideas and promote critical debate on public policy in the Arab world.

The School is committed to the creation of knowledge, the dissemination of best practice and the training of policy makers in the Arab world. To achieve this mission, the School is developing strong capabilities to support research and teaching programs, including

- applied research in public policy and management;
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