

BUILDING A FUTURE-STATE OPERATING MODEL TO PREPARE STUDENTS FOR POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

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Abstract

Education expenditure in the GCC, as a proportion of total government spends, is among the highest in the world. According to UNDP reports, total GCC governments spending on education in 2015 reached US\$95 billion and the fastest growing private education market globally, with private school revenues to triple by 2020 to US\$17 billion, yet the quality of education is struggling and reforms have to be considered.

The first part of the paper discusses the leadership development and support where both public and private schools across three GCC countries were selected to analyze how they keep their high school students on track for post-secondary success by analysing the student data to assess the school performance. This paper discusses the potential of designing a holistic framework to identify potential school leaders early and create long-term development pathways through:

1. Defining talent and leadership in a competency model to create shared understanding of the leaderships skills, experiences and behaviors critical to education system success.
2. Designing the right predictive method to identify a pool of aspirant leaders early, creating long-term development pathways, and differentiating the blueprint framework to suit the nuances of different career stages and cohorts.

The next step to explore is the understanding of the current leadership capability and the readiness of future leaders through identifying the areas of strength and development needs across leadership capability areas and equipping individuals and their leader (school principal) with the skills to objectively assess their strengths and development needs, select development that best suits them, and track their development across their career.

The second part of the research will consist of building an effective operating model through analyzing the economics of education across the GCC, building a strategy & implementation plan, look into the different funding models that public schools depend on globally by encompassing benchmarking of all sources of revenue for the education institutions in the council. In order to come up the desired results, some initial hypothesis on potential cost optimization were proposed for possible implementation. The hypothesis is to divide the operating model into:

- Operating Cost Optimization:

The optimization process would consist of rationalizing faculty headcount based on internal mandates and observed relevant benchmarks on Student-teacher ratio and class size. Another approach would be opening up the public education system to non-national students by offering bilingual/international curriculum to improve capacity utilization. The idea behind this would identify ways to rationalize teacher mix by qualification. For instance, reducing qualification requirements for non-core subject teachers based on internal mandates and observed relevant benchmarks on admin staff to student ratio.

- Capital Cost Optimization:

Capital Costs are dependent on the capital investment governments are putting into the education system, hence the paper will explore opportunities to reduce common costs across segments using observed relevant benchmarks, such as the cost of furniture and equipment. In addition, leveraging the use of technology (front and back of the classroom) would be researched to optimize requirement.

Keywords: public education, post-secondary education, investment returns, donations, innovative education, tuition revenues, digital learning

1. LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Education in the Gulf Region is one of the major concerns of contemporary governments. Education in this region remains a critical component that defines its effort in preparing its youth for civic participation and a global economy. A majority of countries in the GCC regional block emphasize the provision of education that covers all major requirements and prepares its citizens for future leadership roles. In a more profound way, the current educational system on most GCC countries stresses the vitality of education and its central role in succession leadership, mostly post-secondary education. In achieving these objectives, the government is forced to spend more funds on maintaining the desired educational outcomes and inculcating in students the required leadership skills and qualities. The emphasis on leadership and support in most GCC countries is also attributed to the intense three-decade economic progress in the countries. Additionally, in the GCC, leadership essentiality is also increasing in significance for steering organizational progress. Many organizations, with the inclusion of the educational sector, have considered it necessary in seeking leadership development programs and developing effective leaders that contribute positively to the development and the achievement of both short and long-term objectives of these countries.

In this paper, the emphasis is put on the ability and approaches developed by GCC countries in ensuring that effective leadership and support programs are developed in the educational sector that stresses nurturing of students' leadership, mostly in post-secondary education (Guarino and Jeffery 223). Primarily, this study aims at examining the leadership development and support in GCC perspective through an effective conceptualization of the educational systems in three GCC countries and also aims at designing an effective and holistic leadership model that identifies school leaders in their early stages and further creates a long-term pathway for leadership identification. The paper also aims at identifying areas of strength and development needs across leadership capability areas. Later, the study builds an effective operating model through an analysis of the economics of education across GCC countries.

In a comprehensive context, Dajani attests that reforms in education are a big topic in the contemporary Arab world (411). In line with this argument, most institutions, with greater emphasis being realized in the educational sector are discussing on how best leadership development and support through empowering students can be updated to meet the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Most countries concentrate on high schools education and how students in these levels of education can be prepared to undertake later duties as competent and effective leaders. The Arab world has been a site for a growing interest in leadership development by a variety of factors including but not limited to public, private and non-profit sectors which employ differential strategies in nurturing leadership skills and approaches in the younger generation. In this regard, it can be argued that the Arab world is saturated with leadership development support programs. Different countries have designed different leadership development and support programs that aim at meeting a diversity of educational goals (Keller et al 196). In justification of the diversity of leadership development and support programs, an analysis of three GCC countries including Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Kuwait.

1.1 Leadership Development in Saudi Arabia

On one hand, in Saudi Arabia, the conventional educational systems are embracing leadership and development as an important facet needed in the development of a sound and a requisite future society. School leaders have become central figures in the building of school environments that promote powerful teaching and learning among students. Education in Saudi Arabia, however, emphasizes the improvement of the educational status of women and their role in the leadership and development of the country. In connection to this affirmation,

Alsubaie and Karen contend that for a long time, leadership development and support has focused on male individuals with little concern given to women (2). In this case, schools in Saudi Arabia stress on the ability to instill leadership skills and knowledge to girls in high schools that help them in developing appropriate approaches needed for future leadership in post-secondary education. Such an objective complies with the general goals of education in the kingdom of Saudi Arabia that recommends that students be provided with the values, teachings, and ideas that equip them with skills and knowledge needed in developing constructive direction in the contemporary society.

In addition, Saudi Arabian education aims at preparing individuals to be useful members in the building of the community. The overall visions of Saudi Arabian education also target the orientation of the Ten-Year Strategic Plan proposed by the Ministry of Education between 2004 and 2014. It entails the creation of an engendered society that allows equal participation of male and female citizens in leadership, equipping individuals with knowledge and skills endowed with the right directions, and orienting students with the latest technological innovations with ease and comfort. Leadership development and support in high schools in Saudi Arabia are instilled through the streamlining of the curriculum to include leadership programs and through investing funds in supporting the different educational initiatives in different levels of learning. For instance, Shah attests that the Saudi Arabian government has invested 11.8 billion into the King Abdullah Project for the development of public education, which focuses mainly on the development of the existing curriculum and the training of new teachers (10). The allocated funds also target the development of educational leadership at university levels and in most high schools. Such initiatives confirm the government's commitment to ensuring that leadership development and support is developed in a top-down strategy where schools leaders and teachers orient learners with required skills and knowledge for future development.

1.2 Leadership Development in Qatar

On the other hand, the education systems in Qatar are jointly directed and controlled by the Supreme Education Council (SEC) and the Ministry of Education (MOE). Whereas the Ministry of Education is charged with supporting and overseeing educational activities in private schools, the Supreme Education Council cares for independent schools. The educational systems in Qatar have for a long time relied on the cultural traditions with the intensive use of the intrinsic-nationalistic Arabic schools' norms. The intrinsic-nationalistic and cultural traditions in Qatar obeys the traditions and peoples' conservatism, while similarly, embraces new pedagogic methods and modern technologies needed for the effective practice of education and ensuring success of learners (Alamri and Bader 75). Regarding public schools, the Qatari system of educational calendar runs from early September to mid-June and is divided into two parallel semesters of 17 weeks each (Brewer et al 23). An assessment of the education systems and the inclusion and practice of leadership and development programs among learners revealed that since 1958, three levels of general education had been provided including primary, preparatory, and secondary (Brewer et al 23). Girls and boys are allowed to attend different schools in the educational system and schools provided and managed by the government. The assessment also found that primary schooling in Qatar starts at grade 1 at the age of six years. Moreover, it was found that as of 2001, the kindergarten level had not been established in public education and only private schools were allowed to offer preschool programs and kindergarten.

Concerning exit from high schools and access to post-secondary education in Qatar, students' success is determined by success in end year examinations that are developed by a centralized committee of teachers. Nordquist et al., attests that new teaching and learning methods have been introduced over the last 30-40 years in Qatar aiming at activating learners, focusing on problems solving techniques, and emphasizing interactivity and professional development among learners and teachers (756). As of 1996, learners were required by the educational system to acquire a passing score of 50% in all subjects taken. Students who passed the end year examination received a certificate attesting to their completion of the secondary stage of education (Brewer et al 24). Through these undertakings, the emphasis is put on the ability of learners to develop effective leadership and development concerns that prepare them for the shaping of a better future. Nasser confirms that until the 1990s, the educational systems in Qatar relied on the intrinsic-nationalistic approach, which was later outdated leading to the creation of a new educational system that focused on leadership and professional development among teachers and learners (2). The new system proposed a curriculum concerned with creating a rigid and internationally recognized benchmark (Appendix A-3) that instilled effective leadership skills and knowledge in Qatari students for success along international and particularly western benchmarks (Nasser 4).

Palmer et al., adds that the new Qatar educational system is defined by a number of concerns including the fact that a diversity of professional opportunities are available for women, higher educational expectation and preparation are increasing such as attendance to Qatar University, and a strong encouragement of learners mostly, female students to participate in leadership development and support programs (414). The new educational framework in Qatar also proposes the organization and effective implementation of leadership conferences that emphasize leadership, diplomacy, collaboration, and perseverance of high schools learners in creating leadership for the next generation. Through the Model United Nations Conferences (MUN) organized and held at the Qatar National Convention Center in the Middle East, aims at providing high school teachers and students with quality workshops, which, in turn, equip them with leadership skills and the tools to run successful media and MUN programs. Additionally, the conferences aim at providing an annual platform that film and MUN leaders can develop partnership and exchange ideas. These strategies are important for ensuring successful transition of learners from high school life to post-secondary education and later, future leadership in schools and in other sectors of the country (Al-Thani 6).

1.3 Leadership Development in Kuwait

Leadership development and support in Kuwait is no different from the activities in Qatar and Saudi Arabia. For this reason, leadership development programs in Kuwait are invested in the current educational system through the direction of school principals (Alsaleh 98). Thus, culture assessment survey questionnaire for leaders has been shared with principals of 70 schools across Qatar and Kuwait to assess the current state of the culture from their perspective in order to help them drive the transition of effective leadership among their schools (Appendix A-1). The survey showed allocating the necessary budget from the Ministry of Education is mandatory to reach the innovation target as per the IT strategy of the education sector in those countries. In addition, the ability of learners in Kuwait and Qatar to develop effective and desirable future leadership and development skills relies on the nature of leadership and administration employed and preferred by different school principals and schools curriculum respectively (Al-Safran et al 6). Another version of the survey was shared to the staff as well to understand their needs in order to implement the action-plan of the upper management.

2. EFFECTIVE OPERATING MODEL

Since education is one of the most important sectors in the Gulf Cooperation Council, governments are also keen on ensuring that students meet their objectives. In this way, governments ensure effective and reliable financial assistance through regular funding to schools. Financial assistance in education occupies an important and vital part in the successful implementation of educational policies and goals, ensuring reliable access to educational needs and facilities, effective inclusion of technology in classrooms, and designing and implementation of a motivational culture for teaching professionals. In connection to these views, most scholars argue that educational expenditure by different GCC government is an element that is considered in the calculation of the economic growth of the same countries. For instance, a research by Al-Yousif on *Education Expenditure and Economic Growth* posits that education expenditure is a proxy for human capital and economic growth in six GCC countries including Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain, Oman, and UAE (78). Therefore, funding of education in the Gulf Region is the sole responsibility of the government. Wiseman and colleagues also affirm that the National Education System is solely responsible for human capital development in the Gulf Region (363).

By assessing the financial concept and interplay in the Gulf Region, this section of the research determines the potential cost optimization attributed to the effective implementation and maintenance of educational initiatives in the GCC countries. The research uses the cost-benefit analysis approach in assessing the costs of education and the required and reported expenditure by the different professional and programs undertaken to maintain the initiatives invested in making education a progress. Cost-benefit approach is a working model that involving the practical assessment of the reliability of projects, through a wide and longer views ascertainment (Hough n.p.). In this regard, the cost-benefit approach implies the evaluation and enumeration of the involved benefits and costs associated with educational expression. GCC education sector is solely driven by government investment where large major global investors and operators are involved in the provision of finances. All GCC governments give priority to the educational sector and spends about one-fifth of their annual budgets in the maintenance of education through provision of daily requirements and paying of teachers and other professionals involved in overseeing educational progress.

Specifically, according to the GCC Educational Report, GCC governments are seen to be investing heavily in the educational sector with a pledge of an additional US \$24 billion by 2017 (8). Saudi Arabia also intended to double its investment in the past five years in its human capital. In Qatar, between 1980 and 2014, the government expenditure increased from 7.8% to 12.7% (The World Bank n.p.). The increase in percentage signifies an increase in educational demand and the increased enrollment of learners in private and public schools. Similarly, in Kuwait from 1996 to 2014, the educational expenditure increased from 11.325% to 13.37% (The World Bank n.p.). Kuwait also invests heavily in its educational system, presently because of the higher technological demands and the increasing admission of new learners in public and private schools. The costs incurred in education are required to be equivalent to the estimated benefits. Most governments invest heavily in their educational systems with the motivation that the value of education produced, through the outcomes registered by learners will be positive. GCC governments also aim at instilling the best knowledge, skills, and compliance in their learners through a correlational investment in new technology, increase in the number of instructors, and increasing opportunities and open admission into schools (Khan et al 467).

Regarding operating costs optimization in GCC schools, most of the governments spend a better part of their funding in reducing the teacher-student ratio through increasing professional opportunities for instructors, increasing the number of educational institutions, and increased admission of international students. Despite these requirements, Shah attests that the quality of education, which is defined as a learning achievement is not encouraging in the Middle East and North Africa (8). Higher education institutions in GCC countries are also accused of not producing skilled workers as per the market requirements. However, most contemporary governments emphasize increasing teacher quality and heightening professional requirements for instructors. Such initiatives are included in the short and long-term planning strategies of governments which focus on instilling competency skills and knowledge to principals and teachers in order to inculcate required leadership development and support standards (Vardhan). Gender disparity has also been of concern in most GCC countries. Notably, Khan and Maricel affirm that in the GCC countries, in particular, gender parity had been unevenly achieved in primary and secondary education as indicated in gross primary and secondary enrollment ratios for males and females (68).

Additionally, Khan and Maricel suggests that by 2030, GCC countries aim at ensuring that all learners acquire knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including but not limited to protection of human rights, sustainable lifestyles and development, equity, global citizenships, diversity of cultures, and peaceful coexistence (68). The vision 2030 aims at streamlining the educational system in most of the Gulf region countries and ensuring that the quality of education in this region is aligned to the Sustainable Development Goals. Alignment to the SDGs attempts to correlate the GCC educational system to those of the western nations specifically, the United States education.

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APPENDIX

A-1: Culture Assessment Survey for Leaders

| Survey Questions: | | |
|---|--|--|
| Section 1 - Leadership | | |
| QUESTION | CURRENT SITUATION | IMPORTANCE FOR SUCCESS |
| 1. I am comfortable explaining the IT strategic vision to my staff | 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 Strongly Agree Strongly Disagree | 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 Is Very Important Is Not Important |
| 2. I understand the goals of the IT Business Transformation 2.0 program | 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 Strongly Agree Strongly Disagree | 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 Is Very Important Is Not Important |
| 3. I believe the new or changed processes and tools will help us be more efficient | 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 Strongly Agree Strongly Disagree | 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 Is Very Important Is Not Important |
| 4. I believe the new or planned changes to roles will help us increase our service quality | 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 Strongly Agree Strongly Disagree | 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 Is Very Important Is Not Important |
| 5. The right focus (e.g., attention, resources) is being provided to ensure the success of the IT Business Transformation 2.0 program | 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 Strongly Agree Strongly Disagree | 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 Is Very Important Is Not Important |
| 6. Successful completion of the IT transformation is an important priority of Accident Fund | 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 Strongly Agree Strongly Disagree | 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 Is Very Important Is Not Important |
| Section 2 – Accountability & Empowerment | | |
| QUESTION | CURRENT SITUATION | IMPORTANCE FOR SUCCESS |
| 1. Accident Fund's culture supports innovation | 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 Strongly Agree Strongly Disagree | 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 Is Very Important Is Not Important |
| 2. Accident Fund's culture encourages accountability | 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 Strongly Agree Strongly Disagree | 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 Is Very Important Is Not Important |
| 3. Accident Fund's culture encourages cooperation across business units | 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 Strongly Agree Strongly Disagree | 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 Is Very Important Is Not Important |
| 4. Accident Fund's culture encourages open communication between people | 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 Strongly Agree Strongly Disagree | 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 Is Very Important Is Not Important |

A-2: Culture Assessment Survey for Leaders

| Survey Questions: | | |
|---|---|---|
| Section 1 - Leadership | | |
| QUESTION | CURRENT SITUATION | IMPORTANCE FOR SUCCESS |
| 1. People have a clear idea of what is expected of them in the Information Technology (IT) department | 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 Strongly Agree Strongly Disagree | 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 Is Very Important Is Not Important |
| 2. Directors, IT Vice President, EVP's and CEO is viewed as approachable and friendly | 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 Strongly Agree Strongly Disagree | 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 Is Very Important Is Not Important |
| 3. People in the Information Technology (IT) department are given plenty of support and encouragement from leadership | 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 Strongly Agree Strongly Disagree | 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 Is Very Important Is Not Important |
| 4. Directors, IT Vice President, EVP's and CEO is flexible and fair in their approach to dealing with staff | 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 Strongly Agree Strongly Disagree | 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 Is Very Important Is Not Important |
| 5. People have a clear idea of what is expected of them in our company | 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 Strongly Agree Strongly Disagree | 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 Is Very Important Is Not Important |
| 6. Directors, IT Vice President, EVP's and CEO is viewed as approachable and friendly | 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 Strongly Agree Strongly Disagree | 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 Is Very Important Is Not Important |
| 7. People in our company are given plenty of support and encouragement from leadership | 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 Strongly Agree Strongly Disagree | 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 Is Very Important Is Not Important |
| 8. Directors, IT Vice President, EVP's and CEO is flexible and fair in their approach to dealing with staff | 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 Strongly Agree Strongly Disagree | 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 Is Very Important Is Not Important |
| Section 2 – Accountability & Empowerment | | |
| QUESTION | CURRENT SITUATION | IMPORTANCE FOR SUCCESS |
| 1. IT leads / supervisors do not expect people to check all decisions with them first | 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 Strongly Agree Strongly Disagree | 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 Is Very Important Is Not Important |

A-3: Benchmarking All Sources of Revenues Framework

