The Struggle Between Cultural and Leadership Values of Women in Saudi Arabia:

An Exploratory Study

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Abstract

In 2015, the government of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) requested assistance in a study of women in leadership roles within Saudi Arabia. The government has been actively promoting the idea of women as leaders since King Abdullah announced in 2011 that we would be adding women into the Shura, his royal advisory council. This study, started in late 2015, was an evaluation of women in leadership roles and involved a series of exploratory interviews over three rounds, with eleven participants. The research questions were focused on learning which values help women to be successful as leaders in Saudi Arabia, which social and cultural dynamics enable or inhibit their progress, and the organizational factors that are critical to their success.

A survey of the literature was used to create an initial questionnaire of 20 questions. These 20 questions were used in the first round, and there were three participants. The intent was to validate the questions and the values discussed within the questions. The second round questions included 15 different questions, had five participants, and built off the findings of the first set of interviews. The final set of nine questions were designed to specifically focus on the themes that developed over the first two rounds, and involved three participants.

The first three interviewees included a representative from the Saudi government, one from higher education, and one from the business community. Interviews were recorded and then transcribed, and textual analysis using QDA Miner 4.0 was used. Codes were generated, and codes were separated into categories and sub-categories. An initial thematic structure was developed, which served as the basis for the second round of questions. Six themes dominated the first round. These were personal qualities, relationships, values and ethics, personal goals and characteristics, family, and society and equality.

The number of questions for round two were reduced to 15 and incorporated the
themes developed in round one. Each of the 15 questions were open ended, and the interviewees were encouraged to elaborate on each. As before, the transcribed interviews were coded, categories and sub-categories developed, and themes evolved. Out of these extensive and lengthy interviews, seven themes eventually evolved, which were the focus of the final round.

The final round of interviews included three highly place female Saudi leaders, one within the government of the KSA, one in the Ministry of Education, and one who worked at the highest levels of international finance. Nine open-ended questions were asked, drilling down on the seven themes that evolved from round two. The interviews were transcribed, textually analysed, coded, categories and sub-categories created, and themes examined. Conceptual maps were developed for each of the three themes, based on responses from the participants.

The conclusion of the study demonstrated that women in leadership roles in the KSA constantly run into conflict with the strong patriarchal culture of that country. Even though the government has actively sought to promote women into high levels of leadership, including the Shura, there is significant resistance. However, there is progress and women have been successful at attaining some high leadership positions with the government, education, and business. One of the biggest challenges, however, is that the strong cultural beliefs, often attributed only to men in the KSA, are tightly held by both genders.
The Struggle Between Cultural and Leadership Values of Women in Saudi Arabia: An Exploratory Study

The purpose of this research is to investigate and gain a better understanding of the cultural and social factors that might enhance the ability of a woman in Saudi Arabia to become an effective leader. At the same time, the research seeks to discover those cultural or social factors that could inhibit a woman in Saudi Arabia from advancing into an effective leadership role. Additionally, what are the values of women in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) who have been successful at achieving leadership roles and how do those values mesh interrelate to the cultural and social factors.

To get a better understanding of the values the allow women leaders to be successful, a review of the literature related to women in leadership roles, especially within KSA was first conducted. While the literature in leadership roles is extensive, it is useful to look more specifically at literature that identifies the types of values found in successful female leaders. For this detailed review, the structure of the first set of questions was created.

**Literature Review**

Alexander (2013) provided insight into the view of female students taking leadership classes at Prince Mohammad Bin Fahd University. Students completed a survey as well as writing an essay on the topic. The four main themes evolving out of Alexander’s research were Perseverance (in the face of obstacles), Being first (in one’s field), Excelling in a male dominated work, and Achieving a dream or a goal. The suggested implications are that these themes frame how women, working in a male-dominated society, might be able to achieve leadership roles by paradigmatically changing their world view in terms of themselves, their work, and in their relationship to men, especially male leaders.

Al-Ahmadi (2011) discussed a number of problems that demonstrate the cultural
issues that inhibit women from becoming leaders. The author mentioned a lack of empowerment primarily because of Muslim customs and culture. Women tend to be under the “umbrella” of male leaders, which limits potential women leaders in many ways, including independent decision making and possibly access to information. At the same time, Al-Ahmadi’s research noted values or qualities of successful women leaders in Saudi Arabia. One significant quality that stands out is Education. Ahmad (2011) in a study of women entrepreneurs in KSA noted the importance of education as did Al-Ahmadi (2011). Other values noted in women leaders were family, community, and friendships. Invariably, successful women leaders and entrepreneurs also needed to have successful relationships with men. These relationships involved the fathers, family, friends, and managers over them in their work. One research study by Tsegay (2013) studied 45 women at length and developed a list of ten success factors. In order of importance to this group, there was integrity, concern for others, self-confidence, enthusiasm, vision, ability, vitality, persistence, charisma, and stability.

Anwar and Abdullah (2013) stated the case that women leaders place a higher value on relationships than male leaders, and their success largely depended on the quality of those relationships within their organisations. According to Anwar and Abdullah, women also prefer direct communication over men. Women are also more comfortable with diversity, and yet have a more difficult time separating their personal lives from their work. Women, according to Anwar and Abdullah, are more skeptical of hierarchical organizations and less interested on the privileges that separate hierarchical leaders. Women also prefer “leading from the center rather than the top . . . [and] ask big picture questions about the work they do and its value” (p. 76). This goes back to the reference about women’s preference for relationships as a form of leading.

Abdalla (2015), conducted a survey of Arab women leaders in Kuwait, the UAE, and
Qatar. In that survey, the majority of respondents (69%) felt that women value personal relationships more than they do power. Kemp and Madsen (2014), research women leadership in Oman, noted that men value authority more than men while women were less accepting of authority. Abdalla also noted that women, especially those working in international leadership positions, tended to focus more on relational skills.

In one last study, Yaseen (2010), using the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ), found that “Women in the Arab world exceeded men on four transformational scales: the attributes version of idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration” (p. 67). According to Yaseen, Arab women leaders seek differing perspectives more often and spend more time helping team members, focusing more on relationships than their male counterparts.

**Research Questions**

1. Which *values* can help women sustain or evolve their leadership skills?
2. Which *social and cultural* dynamics could enable or inhibit women in become leaders?
3. Which *organizational* factors are critical to the success of women seeking leadership roles in the KSA?

**Development of Initial Themes**

Reflecting on this literature review of Muslim women in leadership roles, there are some common themes that repeatedly appear. Leadership is the overarching theme, which is logical as that was the primary search term. Relationships were a dominant theme, followed by less often mentioned themes of self-confidence, perseverance, authority, and acceptance of diversity. Family and cultural values were also consistent themes as was integrity and ability to meet one’s goals. In total, 19 themes emerged from a review of the research literature related specifically to women in leadership roles, primarily with Muslim cultures. These themes are shown in alphabetical order in table #1 and form the basis from which the first round of questions evolved. At the same time, it was important to leave open the
possibility of other themes emerging that were more relevant to the population under study.

Table 1

Initial List of Values or Themes from The Literature Related to Successful Women Leaders

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Ability</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>Enthusiasm</th>
<th>15</th>
<th>Persistence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Achieving</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Excelling</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Being First</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Family</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Self-confidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Charisma</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Friendships</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Stability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Community</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Integrity</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Vision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Concern for Others</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Education</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Perseverance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Round One: Exploratory Analysis

A questionnaire of 20 open-ended questions was created. These were questions discovered in the literature review or evolving from similar questions found in the literature. As the long-term research goal was to move through three rounds of questions, each built upon the other, the validity of these first set of 20 questions would be established in this first round. If the responses did not align with the questions, then the question would be drop or rephrased.

The first round included three interviews, each containing the participant responses to 20 open-ended questions1. [Please note: the questions used in all three rounds are available upon request. However, including them in this paper would have exceeded the allowable paper length]. The interviews were transcribed to paper and then subjected to content analysis. The guidelines for coding as suggested by Saldaña (2009) were used. QDA Miner version 4 software was use to establish codes, frequency of codes, categories and subcategories of these codes.

Table 2

The Thematic Analysis from The Categories and Subcategories Found in Round One and

1 Please note: the questions used in all three rounds are available upon request. However, including them in this paper would have exceeded the allowable paper length.
Having Evolved from The Codes in Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Subcategories</th>
<th>Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>Independence, trust, praise and advice from other leaders, respect of subordinates</td>
<td>Independence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confidence, Self-esteem</td>
<td>Develop opportunities, open doors, self-esteem, trust, caring for others</td>
<td>Self-Confidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiskilling, intuitive</td>
<td>Ability, problem-solving, responsible</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpersonal relationships</td>
<td>Networking, Personal connections</td>
<td>Relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationships with men</td>
<td>Men - equality</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationships with men</td>
<td>Men - negative; surprised that men don’t want you progress above their position</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female connections</td>
<td>Women’s rights, difficult to deal with women</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationships with Leaders</td>
<td>Leaders: praise, advice</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female connections</td>
<td>Managers, opinions valued</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationships with Leaders</td>
<td>Subordinates: caring about them</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role Model</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honesty</td>
<td>Respect, setting an example, commitment, integrity, thoughtfulness, helping others, no favours</td>
<td>Values and ethics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust</td>
<td>Accountability, trust, commitment, rights and responsibilities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honesty</td>
<td>Integrity, honesty, trustworthness</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benefit others</td>
<td>Self-directed towards benefit of the work.</td>
<td>Ability to meet one’s goal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commitment</td>
<td>Work effectively with others</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Success</td>
<td>Achieve the desired position</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship to father</td>
<td>Father, influence, Father’s influence, foundations, grandfather</td>
<td>Family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parental encouragement</td>
<td>Encouragement of Family</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parental guidance</td>
<td>Other people, all people are the same. Father believed there was no difference between men and women</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Societal barriers and traditional culture</td>
<td>Society does not support but accepts, creates barriers</td>
<td>Society and Culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tension based on gender</td>
<td>No difference between men and women at work, treat other workers equally</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Discussion of the Thematic Structure of Round Two**

The First Round served the purpose of refining the thematic structure for the second round of interviews. Seven dominant themes discovered in round one showed direct relationships to the research questions. The theme of Independence associates well with research question #1 as does the theme of Self-Confidence. The theme Relationships directly relates to research questions #1 and #3 and the theme of Values and Ethics directly relates to
both questions #2 and #3. The Ability to Meet One’s Goal directly relates to research question #1. Family as a theme, connects with #1 and #2, while the theme of Society and Culture directly connects with research questions #2.

Part Two: The Second Round of Interviews

The second round of interviews evolved a set of 15 questions and sub-questions that were based on the themes of the first round. Five well established successful women leaders in Saudi Arabia volunteered to be interviewed. The protocols of ethics and informed consent were followed. The names of the individuals were known only to the researcher and are referred to by a number (1-5) coded to the individual’s personal information. Only the researcher knows to whom the codes refer.

The list of questions was addressed to each individual and the interviews were recorded and later transcribed. The interviews were long and provided a significant amount of detail. The researcher would sometimes move in a direction to follow-up on a specific question. The participants were open and free with their discussion and did not seem to feel constrained.

Using the process of narrative coding and looking and evaluating where the participants placed their primary emphasis, the themes were again modified and consolidated. The total themes now were four. Family as a theme becomes integrated into sections of each of the remaining four themes. The same is true for Society and Equality. The thematic framework becomes deeper. The theme of Value and Ethics from the initial round was now just values, and incorporated much of the family theme.
Figure #1: The four primary themes with subthemes as taken from the textual analysis of the second round of interviews.

Discussion

Relationships (refer to figure #1) have been a consistent theme through rounds one and two. Relationships are seen around gender and influence. The gender issues have been discussed previously, but the comments by Metcalfe (2008) are interesting as they harmonize with comments from the participants. Metcalfe emphasized that even on the global stage, the advancement of women is limited, primarily due to patriarchal cultures and strong cultural values that define gender roles.

In the nine subthemes included within the dominant theme of relationships (see figure #1), in almost every aspect, there are positive and negatives. The only relationship that seemed consistently positive was that with the father. Gender frequently plays a role in how a female is received, even as female leader. As one individual commented that the men she supervised were “afraid” of her. Some even verbally attacked her. As noted by Al-Ahmadi (2011), the challenges continue, although there is a shift. Al-Ahmadi commented that a “lack of resources and lack of empowerment” (p. 149) are now the biggest issue and “cultural and personal challenges [are] ranked last” (p. 149) as far as creating roadblocks in relationships for women.

Values as a theme are difficult to define accurately. Almost everyone has a definition, but there are such wide variations as to meaning, which makes it difficult to have a
conversation. Schwartz (1992) completed an exhaustive study of values around the world. What he discovered was that there is a high consistency with specific values such as honesty and integrity, but the ability to define those terms may vary considerably even though the individuals seem to have a clear understanding of the meaning.

The conflict or potential conflict between work and family life is a global consideration. Ahmad (2011), whose research focused on the KSA, noted the struggle that women entrepreneurs in KSA have with work-family-life balance. The desire to achieve, according to Rokeach’s germinal work (1973), is a goal value (“terminal value” in Rokeach’s text). Other goal values may enhance achievement or hinder it, values such as family security, health, or equality.

The reality is that values, as noted before, are very complex and may not be only social constructs. Maslow (1959) was one of the first to suggest that some values have a biological component and drive an individual to seek food, shelter, and water. Until these physiological and safety values are met, individuals cannot progress to the higher values esteem and self-actualization. While the argument sounds academic, it is not academic to the person going hungry or without shelter during a storm. These same drives and needs translate into values and the power of these values in relation to other values was explored further in the final round of interviews.

**Part Three: The Third and Final Round of Interviews**

The last set of three interviews differ slightly from the first two rounds in that the themes were previously established in the first two rounds from a process of content analysis. The interview questions for the final round were specifically designed to delve more deeply into the meanings of those themes. A total of nine questions were asked of each interviewee in round three.

**The Methodology of Analysis for Round Three**
In the first two rounds, the content of the interviews was analyzed to find common codes. Those codes were grouped into categories. Sub categories were designated under each category. The categories and their sub categories then provided the material for the seven themes that were examined in round three (Saldaña, 2007).

In the final round, since the themes have already been determined, the goal is to map the various concepts and ideas related to each theme as well as to look at any other metrics that might give additional meaning as to how the themes find context within the lives of the participants. The mapping of themes of concepts allows for the study of connections between the various concepts presented by the participants. Concept or theme mapping is similar to mind mapping, a process that allows individuals to explore and freely associate different ideas and thoughts. Concept mapping, however, differs from mind mapping in that it is typically a more highly structured, hierarchical arrangement of ideas and concepts where the intent is to show connections or relationships between those ideas and concepts (Davies, 2001). The goal is to not only understand each of the themes, as applied by these exemplar female leaders, but also to try and understand if there is a cross connectivity between the themes, especially in their real-world application. The cross connectivity is important to understand as these can be complex ideas and it is of interest to better understand how these leaders actually inculcate these concepts and ideas into their everyday lives.

The interviews for the final three interviewees were transcribed and then their responses to each question were compared, side-by-side. The three participants represent three different perspectives of women in leadership roles. These three women leaders were intentionally selected because they represent three very different occupational perspectives. Each has achieved a high level of education and leadership within her chosen field.

Research Questions (Restated):

1. Which values can help women sustain or evolve their leadership skills?
2. Which social and cultural dynamics could enable or inhibit women in become leaders?
3. Which organizational factors are critical to the success of women seeking leadership roles in the KSA?

If the interviewees differed widely in their response to the nine questions in round three, then it would be unlikely that there are a shared set of values between accomplished female leaders in the KSA. However, if there are common threads between these three very different individuals, then there might be important information gained as to exactly what those threads might be.

**Analysis of Question #1**

*Question #1: Please discuss how responsibility, independence, and success might differ between men and women in leadership roles in Saudi Arabia (Leadership, Family, Relationships).*

![Conceptual Map of Question #1](image)

*Figure 2: Conceptual map of Question #1: Primary themes (concepts) of question are in blue.*

Each question asked of the interviewees had a specific intent. However, while the questions were shaped to a specific purpose, the comments by the participants may have added new topics, opinions, or ideas. These concepts or subthemes help understand how
these complex ideas connect to one another.

The first interview question was initially focused on differences between men and women leaders in Saudi Arabia as those differences might relate to responsibility, independence, and success. At times, the background of the individual participants might shape responses, but this does not seem to be a significant issue as the discussions were not work related.

The concept map may provide the best way to understand not only the concepts, but the interrelationships between the themes and subthemes. Again, there were three main themes built into this question (Family, Relationships, and Leadership), but the concept map shows a predominance of issues between men and women in terms of all three themes. While the participants consistently stated that there is no difference between men and women, they also noted that men have easier access to leadership positions and to more responsible positions.

**Analysis of Question #2**

*Question #2: The research related to female leaders suggests that cultural bias against women leaders make it difficult for women to advance above certain levels or into male dominated professions. How did you deal with possible issues of gender bias both from your superiors as well as those you supervise? (Leadership, Society and Equality, Relationships, Values and Ethics).*

The responses from the second question were mapped by the themes targeted by the question, and subthemes were then connected to the themes. Figure #3 below is a graphic representation of the conceptual map of the second question.
Figure 3: Conceptual map of Question #2: Primary themes (concepts) of question are in yellow.

This question was focused on four themes: society and equality, relationships, leadership, and values and ethics. Even the themes themselves are complex constructs. While the theme ‘Values and Ethics’ did not elicit a large number of responses, the other three did, and the complexity of these themes are easy to visualize in figure #3.

The concept map is essentially cut into two halves. The top half shows the themes of
Society and Equality and Relationships. There are strong connections between these two themes, especially in the relationships of women to other women. The bottom half of the concept map focuses on leadership, but the comments are typically gender-based, so it would be easy to draw another connection back to Society and Equality.

**Analysis of Question #3**

*Question #3: Some have described the role of female leaders as more complex than that of their male counterparts because of the additional female roles related to family. Would you please describe any differences between the familial responsibilities of male leaders and female leaders and how you have dealt with these additional responsibilities?*

The responses above taken from the third question and including all three participants were mapped by the themes targeted by the question, and subthemes were then connected to the themes. Several different images that follow are used to gain a better understanding of the connectivity of the themes and subthemes to the lives of the participants. The themes that were the focus for the third question were Family, Relationships, Society and Equality.

![Conceptual map of Question #3](image)

*Figure 4: Conceptual map of Question #3: Primary themes (concepts) of question are in light blue.*

The conceptual map for question #3 is less complex than that for the first two
questions. Three themes were the focus: Family, Relationships, and Society and Equality. The question itself specifically included the term ‘familiar responsibility,’ so responses also had the same focus. It was clear from the responses that women perceive themselves as the primary care givers, that this is not a man’s job, and that this is also the societal expectation.

**Analysis of Question #4**

*Question #4: We each have many values that make us both interesting and individuals. What are the values that helped you become a successful leader? Are they the same values that sustain you as an effective female leader or have they changed as you matured into your leadership role? (Goals and Characteristics, Personal Values, Values and Ethics).*

*Figure 5: Conceptual map of Question #4: Primary themes (concepts) of question are in green.*

The question asked was specifically focused on leadership. The responses
concentrated on being able to succeed as a leader and the values given to these women by others. The concept map, figure #5, can provide better connective information.

The focus is on values and there are 11 values espoused related directly to work. The origins of values appear to be from male role models, although not the husband. Values were developmental as were goals and characteristics focused on serving society.

**Analysis of Question #5**

*Question #5: Within the organization in which you currently work or one in which you recently worked, can you describe specific processes or factors that impede your ability to be a successful leader? Are there specific processes or factors that enhance your ability to be a successful leader? (Society and Equality, Values, Leadership).*

*Figure #6: Conceptual map of Question #5: Primary themes (concepts) of question are in yellow.*

The responses taken from the fifth question and, including all three participants, were
then mapped by the themes targeted by the question, and subthemes were then connected to
the themes. The themes that were the focus for question #5 were Society and Equality,
Values, and Leadership.

The concept map for question #5 as represented above in figure #6 appears to be well
balanced, representing the three operative themes. There is a connection between leadership
and values. The theme of society and equality reflects strong gender perceptions and equality
seems to be a missing aspect. Relationships between female leaders and their counterparts
seems to be the biggest challenge, whereas support from men is essential.

**Analysis of Question #6**

**Question #6:** Of all the questions we have discussed, what three goals and
characteristics stand out to you as the most important that have allowed you to become an
effective leader? (Personal Goals and Characteristics, Leadership).

*Figure 7: Conceptual map of Question #6: Primary themes (concepts) of question are in
yellow.*

The concept map shown in figure #6 shows a balance and an interconnectivity
between the three themes. Very specific values and goals and characteristics were listed as
were qualities of leadership. These three were connected primarily through the quality of good communication and desires to help the environment and serve the country and society in general.

Analysis of Question #7

Question #7: I appreciate the time you have spent with me. We have talked about a lot of different topics that have helped you become the successful leader that you are. What three words of advice would you give to young Muslim women in Saudi Arabia that want to move up into significant leadership positions? (Open question).

Unlike the previous questions, this question did not have one of the designated themes associated with it. The question is looking for ‘words of advice’ from the participants. The suggestion is that words of advice would equate to positive values help by the interviewees.

Figure 8: Conceptual map of Question #7. There were no primary themes included within this question. The focus is on what three words of advice would you give to young Muslim women in Saudi Arabia that want to move up into significant leadership positions.

The conceptual map for question #7 as represented in figure #8 offers positive goals, according to the participants, related to knowledge seeking and education, and emphasizes
the need to ‘work’ for your dream. One participant was clear in her beliefs about the differences between the current (‘new’) generation and her own generation.

**Analysis of Question #8**

*Question #8: What advice would you give about their values to young women leaders who seek to achieve significant leadership positions?*

Question #8 was similar to question #7, but was specifically focused on suggested values for young women leaders who desired positions of leadership. There were a number of values such as sincerity and honesty, but no consensus. As with the previous question, one of the participants focused more on a more negative perspective of the younger generation, so within the few works within this interview question, there are no strong anchor points.

*Figure 9: Conceptual map of Question #8.* There were no primary themes included within this question. This is a follow-up to question #7, with a more specific focus on values.

The thematic or conceptual map shows lack of a strong consensus between the interview participants. Four values were suggested. An equal amount of conversation was focused on the “wrong focus” of the younger generation. The intent of question #8 was to
understand the perceptions of the interviewees as related to the values for young women aspiring to roles of leadership.

**Analysis of Question #9**

*Question #9: What have your values/belief driven you to do and what have they stopped you from doing? What values should young aspirational women leaders have to achieve significant leadership positions?*

Question #9, which was the last of the interview questions, was used to bring the focus back to the participants rather than a younger generation. The goal was to find common values or beliefs that either helped them move forward in their careers or possibly worked as a road block.

*Figure #10: Conceptual map of Question #9.* There were no primary themes included within this question. This is another follow-up of values.

The conceptual map for question #9 is one of the simpler maps. The map is almost a condensed version of the earlier thematic maps. Independence and the ability to feel comfortable depending on one’s self was a value learned in the home and was taught by a male role model. The need to make it on your own talents while remaining ethical seems to be a key to this question.
Conclusions

A total of three rounds of interviews were conducted with a total of 11 participants. In the first round, an exploration of possible values, beliefs, goals, and ideas was started with the object of refining a consistent set of themes. That was completed at the end of round two, and then a set of seven questions (expanded later to nine), were designed to explore deeper into the infrastructure of the themes, their application in real life to the participants, and their significance to these female leaders and to women leaders in Saudi Arabia in particular.

The last round provided a deeper form of analysis, relying most heavily on conceptual or thematic mapping of the key points abstracted from the interviews. The fact that the women participating in these interviews are at very high levels of leadership both within their own country and, in at least one case, internationally, proves that women can advance to very high levels of leadership. Even so, there is at least some belief that they cannot achieve the very highest levels. How do women deal with this?

Part of the issue is that many women seem to accept what they believe to be the reality that their role is primarily that of the family care giver and that significant leadership roles are not available to them. As suggested by Toh and Leonardelli (2012), the issue is that these beliefs are held very tightly by both genders. Until that changes, the issue of a significant number of women moving into important positions of leadership will probably not change much from the current situation, despite the active attempts by some business and the government. How does one “loosen” the societal tightness around issues of cultural gender identity? At present, that is unclear, and some countries may be trying to tighten these issues even more. This is fertile ground for future research.
References


