A. Aljaber

Using Institutional Theory to examine the impact of the 2016 Public Administration Reforms on work and employment in the Saudi Arabian Labour Administration System: unearthing the gender and performance management consequences.

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

2024

Using Institutional Theory to examine the impact of the 2016 Public Administration Reforms on work and employment in the Saudi Arabian Labour Administration System: unearthing the gender and performance management consequences.

Ali Mohammed Aljaber

Registration Number: 190228994

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

The University of Sheffield

Faculty of Social Science

School of Management

Supervisory team: Professor Jason Heyes, Dr. Katy Fox-Hodess

July 2024

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Allah, the compassionate, the most merciful for completing this thesis. All the praises and glory to Allah, the Almighty.

I will always be grateful to my supervisors Professor Jason Heyes and Dr. Katy Fox-Hodess, who have believed in me and in my research project and helped me to complete this thesis. Without their useful critical feedback, guidance, encouragement, I would not be able to finish this work. Ever since I started the PhD, I heard that you would encounter ups and downs in your PhD journey; my supervisors were always there for me in my strongest and weakest moments.

This work is dedicated to my home country; the land that I love the most, Saudi Arabia. I have been away for a long time, and I miss it. This work is also gifted to the country that became part of me, the United Kingdom.

A special thanks goes to Mrs McClellan for proofreading the thesis.

Finally, I would like to thank my parents, Mohammed Aljaber and Gariba Aldafrani for their continuous prayers and their patience during my studies in the UK. I would like also to thank my wife for her support throughout this journey and my beloved brothers, sisters, and my family for their prayers, wishes and support.

Abstract

Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 is an ambitious plan designed to develop a more knowledge based and diverse economy and society. Vision 2030 was accompanied by extensive public administration reforms that impact the Saudi government agencies. These reforms have significantly changed The Human Resources and Social Development Ministry work and employment relations. This study aimed to develop a deeper understanding of the impact of the 2016 public administration reforms on gender issues and performance management in the Ministry workplace.

The study analysed the perceptions of employees in four major departments in the Ministry using neo-institutional theory as its theoretical framework. A qualitative case study method was applied. 35 participants were recruited using purposive and snowball sampling; conducting online interviews provided a rich body of information directly related to the issues of the thesis. The participant responses were thematically and concurrently analysed to identify common themes.

Findings revealed several constructs to explain the reforms' impact. Despite the Vision 2030 'promise', this study has revealed that social norms in some departments reflected the acceptance of ongoing gender inequality and gender stereotypes within the Ministry. Empowerment of women is largely currently aimed at leadership roles, and gendered language in the newly de-segregated work environment is a reality.

This thesis provided institutional insights into workplace reorganisation and performance management; Saudis are using modern public administration including new performance management system, new technology and automation. However, one department was slow to adopt change, the forced ranking performance appraisal caused dissatisfaction, and work intensification and negative work pressure were among the reform's consequences.

The key theoretical contributions include the role of neo-institutional theory in revealing these insights, the merit in considering cultural context through the normative pillars, and the merit in considering inhibitors and catalysts to change. Recommendations include consistent guidance to all Ministerial departments and consistent revision of performance evaluation.

Key words: Vision 2030, reforms, employment relations, public administration, labour administration, gender issues, performance management

Declaration

I, the author, confirm that the Thesis is my own work. I am aware of the University's Guidance on the Use of Unfair Means (*www.sheffield.ac.uk/ssid/unfair-means*). This work has not previously been presented for an award at this, or any other, university.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

Glossary of ACRONYMS, Terms and Abbreviations

Note: for sources, where applicable, see first usage in-text otherwise Merriam Webster

[online] https://www.merriam-webster.com/

TERM	DEFINITION
ADAA	The National Centre for Performance Measurement
Abaya	Long robe with headdress (hood) that some Muslim women wear
badawi	Backwards, old fashioned
CEDA	Council of Economic and Development Affairs
G20	Intergovernmental forum comprising nineteen sovereign countries, the European Union, and the African Union
HRM	Human Resources Management
ILO	International Labour Organization
ikhtilāṭ	Mixing of the sexes
Kafãla	contractual relationship between foreign workers and employers
KPIs	Key Performance Indicators
Man' n Lil Rasad	Online platform and mobile application to provide Inspection Services and report on labour market violations (loosely translates as 'monitoring')
MHRSD	Saudi Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development System; used interchangeably with Saudi Labour Administration
Nazaha	Anti-corruption authority, protecting integrity in public services
Neoliberalism	Neoliberalism refers to market-oriented reform policies including de-regulating capital markets, privatisation and introducing performance appraisal
NPM	New Public Management
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development.
OPEC	Oil and Petroleum Exporting Countries
Public administration	Institutional arrangements for the provision of public services
qabali	Backwards, old fashioned

Saudi Labour Administration System	Government entity responsible for labour market policy; used interchangeably with MHRSD and The Human Resources and Social Development Ministry
Saudization	Saudization policy to increase the employment of Saudi citizens in the private sector
Tamam	Online platform and Mobil application to provide Inspection Services (loosely translates as 'Quality')
Taqat	Online public-access portal for offering and facilitating employment and training services
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
Vision 2030	Saudi Transformative Plan
VRO	Vision Realisation Office
Wasta	Nepotism - preferential treatment for someone based on his connections to family, tribe or any third parties without being qualified

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

The public sector has in recent decades witnessed a transformation in many regions, with the emergence of neoliberalism in the 20th Century shaping the content and aims of many administrative reforms (Jones, Parker and ten Bos, 2005; Slobodian, 2019). Neoliberalism emphasised the importance of market-oriented principles, efficiency, and the reduction of state intervention in the economy. As a result, public sector reforms have often aimed to adopt private sector practices, promote competition, and enhance accountability and performance through mechanisms such as New Public Management (NPM). As seen in later chapters, such reforms sought to introduce performance-based evaluation, decentralise decision-making, and increase the use of outsourcing and privatisation to improve public service delivery (Slobodian, 2019).

Tracking the general history of public sector management, traditional approaches appeared worldwide in the early 20th century. These traditional approaches were characterised by hierarchical structures, rigid procedures, and a focus on rule-based administration. Influenced by principles of scientific management and bureaucratic theory, they aimed to enhance efficiency, predictability, and control within public organisations (Uddin and Hosain, 2015). Notable figures like Max Weber (1964) and Frederick Taylor (1911) contributed to these foundations, promoting a systematic, disciplined approach to managing public services, which included clear lines of authority and standardised operating procedures.

The concept of public services management was well established with systems and processes by the mid-50's (Bryson, Crosby and Bloomberg, 2014). At that time, management was seen as a top-down, directive process with lower-level employees being given little if any opportunity for participation and consultation (see Denhardt and Denhardt, 2007).

Moving forward to more contemporary times, public administration reforms were introduced to make government entities more efficient, effective, and economical (Peters and Pierre, 2012). According to Peters and Pierre (2012) the three Es principles (Efficiency, Effectiveness and Economy) have driven a substantial change to the public sector that has involved the adoption of private sector management techniques. Societies in regions such as Central Eastern Europe are known to have used a holistic approach to reforms (Verheijen, 2012). Indeed, in regions such as China, holistic governance frameworks are often incorporated in public services and public services reform; these typically involve enterprises being involved at different stages of the reform process and service delivery (Li and Ding, 2020). Western democracies on the other hand have focused their reforms on the New Public Management (NPM) reforms movement (Cristensen and Lægreid 2004), which tends to be comprehensive and, as seen in Chapter Three, involves re-shaping organisational structure and introducing developments such as centralisation, public finance, and results-based management (United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), 2020). NPM reforms as the most recent acknowledged domain in the public administration field are mainly applied for three reasons: enhancing the financial performance of a government entity, increasing efficiency, and improving service quality.

According to Gruening (2001), NPM has mostly been adopted in the last several decades by the US government, for example to address financial incompetence, inefficiency and corruption (Gruening, 2001). In fact, a key feature of public reforms is delivering high quality customer service to citizens or service-receivers.

Labour ministries or labour administration systems have been affected by public administration reforms (Heyes, 2001). According to Heyes (2001) and Heyes and Rychly, (2013) labour administration has undergone several reforms in many regions but has received less scholarly attention in emerging countries than Western countries (see also Ebisui, Cooney, and Fenwick, 2017; Gavris and Heyes, 2019). In regard to the Saudi Arabian context, an International Labour Organisation (ILO) report highlights that the Saudi labour administration has received little attention from academics (ILO, 2014); however, the ILO has produced numerous reports about aspects of labour administration and workforce statistics in the region (ILO, 2014; Rychly, 2013; ILO, 2018; ILO, 2019).

Reform is a process by which an organisation or society aims to become better through removal of faults and errors, and by eliminating and correcting moral or political or social practices; according to Toonen (2012), this is about a change in content and process. Toonen also asserts that reforms are full of values, political and economic principles and become a marketplace for advisors, academics, and consultants and policymakers (Toonen, 2012).

One of the regions that is perhaps delivering a more nuanced picture of reform for stakeholders in general is the Middle East. Indeed, political change and unrest have long featured in the news broadcast from the region, yet amidst the turmoil seen in areas such as Palestine, Israel, Iran and Syria, the launch of Vision 2030 in April

2016 in Saudi Arabia and its inherent reform projects has been seen as both inspirational and perplexing (Reed, 2016; Asquer and Alzahrani, 2020). Indeed, Asquer and Alzahrani (2020, p3) remind readers that reforms in countries such as Saudi Arabia defy "the standard account of public services reform because of the presence of local political and economic institutions that curb political turnover and ideological shifts". And yet the Vision is seen as a historical transformative plan to change economic, cultural and societal aspects of the country (Vision 2030, 2017; Moshashai, Leber and Savage, 2018). According to the Government's statement, this national transformation plan (NTP) aims to transform the country to be diverse, forward thinking, and aspirational. They aim to improve fiscal administrative practices and make government bodies' spending more efficient. In addition, they are working on better management of the civil service and providing services according to worldwide best practices, and they want to raise the level of transparency and fight all types of corruption (Vision 2030, 2017). The Vision is discussed in more detail in section 2.4.2.

Reform in the public sector is a field that is much researched. However, examining the reform in the regional context of Saudi Arabia, then narrowing down the field of interest to individual government Ministries becomes intriguing; such research has not yet been undertaken, and given the history of Saudi Arabia's apparent reticence in sharing detailed government information publicly (Ramady, 2013, p.3; Alfarran, Pyke and Stanton, 2018; Asquer and Alhrazani, 2020), this becomes a gap that this study begins to address.

1.2 Statement of the Problem and Research Questions

Saudi public administration has faced major management and administrative challenges. Over three decades ago, Al Ghamdi, (1990), stated that the tribal culture embodied in the Arabian societies is reflected in the management practices in the Arab region countries. For instance, authors have found Saudi managers interact within workplace settings based on power relationships to influence individuals' behaviour; this mirrors what is seen in the traditional authority within society and tribes (*ibid.*; Sidani and Thornberry, 2013). Similarly, Budhwar and Mellahi, (2007), regard the type of governments, neo-patrimonial political systems and traditions and culture such as Wasta as discussed in later chapters as the main reasons for the slow growth in the Arab and Middle East region and in the development of their human resources[1].

Specifically, Assad (2002) asserted that cultural norms are a challenge for the Saudi organisation performance. In this respect, cultural norms are seen in various scenarios. For instance, Idris (2007) found that HRM practices in Saudi Arabia are influenced by embodied cultural constructs such as Wasta that prevent Saudi organisations from improving their organisational performance. Wasta refers to offering preferential treatment to someone based on his connections to family or any third parties without being necessarily qualified (Mohamed and Mahamad, 2011). An Arabic term, Wasta refers to the use of connections and networks in different HRM practices such as recruitment and performance appraisal (Hutchings and Weir, 2006). For illustration, Wasta plays a major role in human resources

---

[1] See also the article by Bahout and Cammack (2018) which outlines the "..patronage system and crony networks that distort economic outcomes and suppress job creation"

management such as in employment practices in the government sector; both Branine and Pollard, (2010) and Peretz and Fried, (2012) found that human resources practices such as recruitment, selection and reward system in Saudi Arabia are based on the use of wasta. Also, Alharbi, Thursfield and Bright (2017), in a study that examined performance appraisal in a private company, found that Arabic culture such as wasta played a major role in the conduct of performance appraisal.

Branine and Pollard, (2010), in a study of the relevance of the Islamic management practices in the Arab region, found that management in the Arab states including Saudi Arabia is heavily influenced by national cultural and norms more than the Islamic principles; in other words, although legislature is determined via Sharia law, practices such as recruitment and selection are influenced largely by tribal norms (e.g. Wasta) and not religious doctrine. Such practices are also influenced by the rentier system, on which Arab economies were built, in which payments are given in 'rents' to provide funding for social services and patronage (Samuelson and Nordhaus, 2010). These 'rents' are in return for the use of what Samuelson and Nordhaus describe as 'fixed factors of production'. Although the rentier system has become largely untenable with the decline in focus on oil revenue, management practices that mirror it are seen, for instance, in 'authoritarian bargains' in which distinct social contracts emerge between the government and citizens where public sector jobs, security and social welfare are provided in exchange for political complacence (Bahout and Cammack, 2018).

El-sofany et al., (2012), stated that the public sector in Saudi Arabia faced barriers to the use of technology in its work, including lack of staff training in e-governance, resistance to change and lack of promotion of the benefits of technology. Saudi

public organisations have used traditional management techniques that have been criticised as poor management methods (Abdul Rahman, Jarrar, and Omira, 2014). Such techniques include rigid hierarchical structures, excessive bureaucracy, and centralised decision-making processes. These approaches often result in inefficiencies, lack of innovation, and slow response to changing environments. For example, the heavy reliance on top-down decision-making can delay critical actions and reduce the adaptability of organisations. Critics argue that these methods stifle employee creativity and hinder effective service delivery (Zhou and Shalley, 2003).

Also, Issa and AlAbbar (2015) stated that the Saudi public sector is affected by poor management practices, which has led to delayed decision-making and inefficient performance of government organisations.

Authors such as Alfarran, (2016), Al-bakr *et al.* (2017), Alfarran, Pyke and Stanton (2018) and Asquer and Alzahrani, (2020) evidenced that management techniques in the Saudi public sector rely on harmful cultural norms such as the use of nepotism and gender segregation in the workplaces. Gender segregation in the Saudi workplaces refers to the separation of workers in the workplace based on their gender due to cultural or societal norms (Al-bakr *et al.,* 2017, Alfarran, 2016). Gender segregation in Saudi Arabia was based on providing separate spaces to prevent *ikhtilāṭ*, or 'mixing of the sexes', a concept that is rapidly changing is segments of Saudi society (see van Geel, 2016).

In recent years, Asquer and Alzahrani (2020) suggest little has changed; they stated that the Saudi management system has been influenced by historical negative and cultural conditions since its origin, resulting in deeply negative management practices, which prevent public organisations from working effectively. They justify

these conclusions by viewing the Saudi Arabian regime as "neo-patrimonial" (Asquer and Alzahrani 2020, p. 259); such systems are said to blend traditional systems with newer ones. Weber (1964) describes this as systems of power evolving from being historically based on charisma and paternalism to those centring around rationality and legitimacy.

Importantly, by embracing traditional systems within newer approaches it could be argued that there is potential to utilise such practices in a more positive light. For instance, in contrast with the already-discussed negative connotations, Wasta has been found in part to be a positive practice in early entrepreneurial activities in the Saudi business environment (Albihany and Aljarodi, 2024). Their study found that Wasta benefited social networking for entrepreneurs and provided opportunities for important angles of communication. According to some scholars, a clear distinction has been made between Nepotism in the Western regions and Wasta in the Arab region. Nepotism is usually referred to as using power or influence to obtain advantage, usually for friends or family (Cambridge Online Dictionary, 2024). Western society, which is considered a rule-based society, would view this as a corrupt practice (see Hooker, 2023). Wasta, originating from the Arab nations which are perceived as relationship-based societies, is often referred to as more than just advantage one gains from being part of a family or tribe. Businesses are established, contracts determined and secured and discrete deals that further not just the individual but the wider tribal and family units may well be formed as a result of its use (Kropf and Newbury-Smith, 2016; Hooker, 2023).

However, Saudi Arabia is undergoing a historical reform and transformation, not only in the management of the public sector, but also society. Human resources and labour management within the Saudi Public Sector have undergone many reforms

and iterations within recent decades (Asquer and Alzahrani, 2020) and have been beset with problems and criticisms. Since the implementation of the 2016 public administration reforms, public sector management in Saudi Arabia has witnessed significant change (Kinninmont, 2017; Asquer and Alzahrani, 2020); what was considered traditional public administration has now evolved into using new public administration methods. At this juncture, it is not claimed that the whole reform agenda in Saudi Arabia is moving to NPM, as that is not specified in the National Transformation Plan (Vision 2030, 2017); it is acknowledged that much that is presented does follow NPM, including emphasis on performance review and de-centralisation, as detailed further in Chapters Two and Three. This new approach adopts several management techniques previously unseen in Saudi public sector bodies (Asquer and Alzahrani, 2020). It promotes the idea of citizens being treated by public organisations as customers. It applies quality improvement methods in the public sector, such as using Total Quality Management and performance management methods (Pollitt, 2007). Similarly, since the application of public administration reforms, government agencies have undergone a process of review and reform in terms of human resource management practices (Vision 2030, 2017). For example, the influence of cultural norms and use of *wasta* are expected to have diminished since the public administration reforms and recruitment into the public sector is now a more rigorous, evidence- and qualification- based process.

In relation to the labour administration, major reforms are underway to develop the labour market and the labour market regulations through the Saudi 2030 Vision plan. The labour administration is delivered through the Saudi Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development (MHRSD). The terms labour administration system and MHRSD are used interchangeably throughout the thesis. The MHRSD

have been tasked by the government to deliver the reforms through reforming and developing the labour market, which will impact on the economy in an era that is unprecedented for Saudi Arabia; moving away from oil-based revenue to more economical and sustainable income is a significant change of course for the government, and by default, its labour administration (HRSD, 2023a). Indeed, a recent IMF review demonstrated non-oil revenue through initiatives such as digitisation, manufacturing and tourism expansion had doubled in the 4 years to 2022, with oil-based revenue decreasing by a similar figure (IMF, 2023).

Therefore, having stated the current situation — significant changes in working practices, particularly with regards to gender issues and performance management since the introduction of Vision 2030 — the two research questions for this study to address are:

Research Question 1: What impact has the 2016 public administration reform had on gender issues in the workplace in the Saudi labour administration system?

Research Question 2: What impact has the 2016 public administration reforms had on performance management in the Saudi labour administration system?

1.3 Research Aim and Objectives.

This study uses neo-institutional theory to consider the impact of the NPM reforms implemented under Vision 2030 on gender issues in the workplace and performance management. The research offers a deeper understanding of the nature of the recent public administration reforms, nature of work and employment

and change of culture in the workplace of the Saudi Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development.

There are five objectives for this research:

1. To utilise neo-institutional theory to investigate the impact of public administration reforms on work and employment in the Ministry, particularly performance management
2. To utilise neo-institutional theory to critically explore the barriers and challenges that the Ministry employees face since the implementation of public administration reforms in the newly gender de-segregated workplace
3. To utilise neo-institutional theory to critically explore the way the employees of the Ministry perform their work in their new cultural environment
4. To examine the interaction between old and new cultures in the workplace and to what extent traditional workplace culture is being replaced or subsumed
5. To critically explore the barriers and challenges that the Ministry employees face in the newly gender de-segregated workplace

1.4 Research Design

The researcher took an interpretivist stance (Cresswell, 2013; Bevir, 2009; Savin-Baden and Howell Major, 2013) which theoretically and empirically informed the methodology of the study. This research utilised institutional theory (North, 1990; DiMaggio and Powell, 1991; Adcock, Bevir and Stimson, 2007) as a theoretical lens through which to investigate the institutional changes that have happened since 2016. Empirically, the thesis applied qualitative research within an interpretivist paradigm. As detailed in Chapter Four, the study design is based on case study approach, using four departments in the Ministry as the units of analysis, two functional departments and two policy departments. The data for the case study

was collected through semi-structured interviews and analysed using thematical concurrent analysis.

1.5 Originality and Contribution to Knowledge

As seen throughout this chapter, in recent years there has emerged a growing body of literature examining public administration globally (Peters and Pierre, 2012) and labour administration (Heyes and Rychly, 2013), yet little has been explored about labour administration reforms within a Saudi Arabian context. For instance, the 2014 ILO report highlights characteristics of the Saudi labour inspection department, such as the number of inspectorates, challenges, and obstacles that they face as compared with those of other Arab region States. The 2018 ILO report highlights some aspects of the process of ratification of the ILO's standards of labour administration, conducted between 2001 and 2007 (see ILO 2014; 2018). However, these reports do not provide in-depth investigations or present primary data on Saudi Arabian labour administration, nor do they consider the impact of the recent public administration reforms. Studies such as Alfarran, Pyke and Stanton (2018), who investigated the participation of women within the labour market preceding Vision 2030, have yet to combine such concepts within the nuanced environment of a Saudi government ministry under Vision 2030 reforms. Therefore, this study adds a contextual contribution in addition to the methodological and theoretical contributions. These contributions are presented in the conclusion chapter, and include commentary on the use of an interpretive approach with concurrent analysis through an institutional theory lens. Specifically, the use of neo-institutional theory in this study and in particular, the regulative, normative and cultural-cognitive pillars of the theory contributed to examining the impact of the reforms in the Ministry in a

nuanced way. As is demonstrated in later chapters, considering cultural context through the normative pillars is a particular contribution in the context of Saudi Arabia post-Vision 2030. In addition, a theoretical contribution is evidenced by considering culture norming in organisational change in this study context.

1.6 Structure of the thesis

This thesis is comprised of seven chapters. This first chapter has identified the background to the study including an overview of Saudi Arabia and its cultural, socio-economic and political context as applicable to this study. It has explained the gap in knowledge that will be addressed in the thesis and the specific aim and objectives.

Chapter Two begins a critical review of the literature by introducing the theoretical framework for this study. It explores the field of institutional theory, its underpinning concepts and more recent development. Using neo-institutional theory, in other words, organisational institutional theory (see Caprar and Neville, 2012), the chapter begins to map out the current state of understanding around concepts such as the proliferation of change and indeed 'conforming to change' pressures. It then introduces the case study of this research, mapping the cultural and economic background of the region and introducing the labour administration systems in operation within the area of study.

Chapter Three extends the literature review by providing an in-depth analysis of the literature on New Public Management reforms, performance management, and gender in the workplace, particularly in the context of labour administration. This literature provides key concepts to provide the basis for this analysis of the impact of the 2016 public administration reforms on the workplace within the MHRSD.

Chapter Four presents the research philosophy and explains its use in this study. It then discusses the research methods and justifies the adoption of the qualitative single-case study approach. The chapter also provides details of the data collection methods employed and explains how the data are analysed.

Chapter Five is the first of two findings and analysis chapters. Each of the chapters presents analysis and discussion concurrently. Focusing on the first research question, it presents examples from the transcribed interviews that discuss the impact the participants have experienced as a result of the reforms in terms of gender issues in the workplace.

Chapter Six presents examples from the interviews that discuss how the reforms have affected the way that work is now organised in the departments. This chapter focuses on examining the impact of New Public Management on performance management. Due to the complex nature of the Ministry and the four departments, each department is considered separately in the first section of the chapter. Discussion is offered around differences in administration of the departments, with commentary on how the management of services and how performance management is being experienced by workers in each department. It identifies the core of how the changes introduced in 2016 have started to change long-standing cultural norms such as Wasta and how services such as Inspections are transformed.

The final chapter presents a concluding overview, including identified limitations and how this body of work contributes to the field.

Chapter 2: Literature Review: Institutional Theory

2.1 Introduction

The literature review forms a central pivot for any study and has been described as the building block of any academic research (Snyder, 2019). One outcome of any such review is the identification of what is missing from existing literature, and the knowledge generated becomes the research questions to be asked and answered by the study. As explained in Chapter One, two questions were identified that led to the literature search and review.

This literature review is divided into two chapters. The first of these chapters presents a discussion of institutional theory, delineating the theoretical framework underpinning this study and through the lens of which findings are later explored. In particular, it focuses on organisational institutional theory incorporating the three pillars of institutional theory (regulative, cognitive-cultural and normative). This chapter addresses the background to the reforms in Saudi Arabia, providing the cultural and social landscape in which the study is set, as well as introducing the labour administration studied in this thesis.

The second literature review chapter begins by providing an overview of the contemporary and at times contested aspects of public administration as it applies across various regions and settings, including related concepts, issues and the NPM approach as a public administration reform tool (Gruening, 2001; McCandless *et al.,* 2022). It also addresses key concepts in relation to labour administration as a component of public administration. In addition, the literature review addresses in-depth the characteristics of Saudi Arabia's public administration and the recent

public administration reforms. It explores what is currently known about gender issues in the workplace, such as discrimination, stereotypes and segregation, providing a point of reference and comparison for the later findings as they begin to emerge (D'Agostino *et al.,* 2022). The chapter then compares and discusses how this study relates to the existing literature in the context of the Saudi labour administration, and in the process, identifies a clear gap for inquiry then outlines the research questions that this study asks.

On reviewing the Saudi Arabian public administration situation and status, and the 2016 public administration reforms agenda (the Vision 2030), the impact of the reforms on the Saudi Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development could not be ascertained as they are yet to be formally evaluated in the existing literature. This adds weight to the justification for this study and provides clear areas for this study to address.

Turning to the role of theory, Maxwell (2012) stated that to ensure good qualitative research, it is important to identify existing theories in relation to research problems, rather than relying solely on the researcher's views and perspectives. Moreover, in qualitative research, theory not only underpins how studies are planned and conducted, but also provides part of a conceptual framework that assists researchers to map how literature will inform the process of qualitative inquiry (Collins and Stockton, 2018). Crucially, it also provides a theoretical framework through which the outcomes of the research process (findings) can be interpreted (Collins and Stockton, 2018). Indeed, Guba and Lincoln (1994) suggest that theory-free research does not exist; this view is supported by Merriam (2009), who suggests that every research study is underpinned by a theoretical framework, either explicitly or implicitly.

The adoption of theory in studies is not a simple construct. Whereas Glesne (2011) suggests its primary value is in delineating the chosen method including the paradigm, Anfara and Mertz (2015) suggest its main purpose is to guide the study. Jaccard and Jacoby (2010) suggest its primary utility is during the theory-building stage after data collection has taken place.

For the purpose of this study, I have heeded the sage advice of Ravitch and Carl (2016, p. 46):

> *You must consider the roles that existing, or formal, theory play in the development of your research questions and the goals of your studies as well as throughout the entire process of designing and engaging in your research.*

To that effect, this section now presents the theory selected to form the theoretical framework underpinning this study, and indeed, the theoretical lens through which the literature and the findings are interpreted. Through mapping the history of institutional theory and looking at the various iterations that scholars have presented over the years, justification is given for the choice of neo-institutional theory used in this study, with reference to, comparison with and rationale for excluding other theories.

2.2 Institutional theory

Generally, there are two main approaches to the study of public administration: the historical approach, investigating public administrative systems, policies, and practices that arose in the past, interpreting them to shed light on the current context (Peters and Pierre, 2012), and the institutional approach, investigating institutions

and the organisation of the state, looking into the structure, functions, rules, regulations, and departments of government (North, 1990). Institutional theory is a family of fundamental organisational theories that many researchers have found provide great utility in research that centre around institutions and organisations (Maxwell, 2012). Institutional theory can be viewed from a comparative perspective or from the organisational perspective (Hutchings, Michailova and Wilkinson, 2024), with each focusing on different aspects and levels of analysis. Whereas comparative institutional theory provides a framework for analysis that compares institutions and organisations across regions and countries, organisational or neo-institutional theory allows analysis that focuses on how organisations are influenced within their own environment, from their own frame of reference (Dibben and Wood, 2024a). Likewise, comparative theory seeks to explore and explain how variations in practices and procedures across institutions in different settings and regions can influence issues relating to social policy and legislation. By contrast, organisational institutional theory focuses on how organisations adapt to organisational change and conform to dynamics such as pressure to adopt practices that achieve legitimacy in the eye of the stakeholder (Dibben and Wood, 2024b).

In building a theoretical framework through which to conduct this research, this study began with a broad investigation of institutional theory (North, 1990; Adcock, Bevir and Stimson, 2007) and the subsequent new institutionalism ideology that has emerged over time (DiMaggio and Powell, 1991; Scott, 2013).

Institutional theories began to emerge in the latter part of the 19th and early 20th centuries and have been a cornerstone of study and research on organisations for many years. Hirsch and Lounsbury (1997) argue that in the latter part of the 20th century, there were two broad schools of thought around organisations and

institutionalism – one determined that institutionalism was concerned with 'action' and one determined it was about 'structure'. They suggested that the 'action' side stemmed from a focus on the capacity of people and organisations to construct and enact their environments, navigating through change processes and highlighting how intended outcomes can be fleeting and changeable. The 'structure' side had perhaps a more nuanced focus rooted in organisational demography, with studies that aimed to explain organisational outcomes in functional ways, blaming, for instance, 'failures' on incompetence rather than politics. When the term institutional theory *per se.* emerged, Hirsch and Lounsbury (1997) suggested it was in reality a 'bridging term', an umbrella that encapsulated all perspectives.

DiMaggio and Powell (1991) were among the first theorists to address the changing nature of organisational study using institutional approaches in what Greenwood and Hinings (1996, p1022) refer to as distinguishing between the 'old and the new'. They suggested that scholars consider, for instance, framing their level of analysis from a focal organisational level to a 'field', 'sector' or 'society' perspective. They discussed the utility of 'new' institutional theory in moving from a structural emphasis on 'informal networks' to 'formal administration' (for further examples, see DiMaggio and Powell, 1991; Hirsch and Lounsbury, 1997, p.408). In a further dichotomy between the 'old and the new' theories, Thoenig (2003) argued that under previous iterations of institutional theory, public institutions were taken for granted - in other words, scholars did not consider that public institutions needed to be studied or examined. They defined public institutions as a set of political bodies that administer public affairs, viewing such institutions through a legal framework. Thoenig went on to suggest that under neo-institutional theory, public institutions (incorporating the employees within) are framed by their backgrounds — in other words, their origins

and how they were established — which they consider shape their current realities (see also Hall and Taylor, 1996). These scholars have argued that the neo-institutionalism approach goes beyond the descriptive, and that it incorporates an eclectic frame of reference such as the history, economics, and the sociology of organisations – the sum of which have the potential for a rich conceptual analysis of, in the case of this study, Saudi Arabia's labour administration system as a component of the Saudi public administration.

The term 'conceptual analysis' is used in numerous academic disciplines, giving it various meanings and connotations. However, when turning to the institutional frame of this research study, according to Bevir (2009) 'institutional' analysis is an approach to the study of governance in social science, arguing that institutional approaches study institutions using inductive, historical methods. Furthermore, neo-institutional theory is valued for its ability to explain associations between institutional structures and designs. Frederickson *et al.* (2016) describe institutional structures as the formal and informal arrangements that define the organisation and functioning of institutions. These include elements such as organisational hierarchy, which a formal structure and is the arrangement of authority and responsibilities within an organisation, and 'rules and regulations', the written policies, procedures, and guidelines that govern the actions of individuals and units within the institution. Informal structures include the norms and culture, which represent the unwritten, socially shared rules and practices that guide behaviour within an institution. Institutional designs are the deliberate arrangements and configurations created to achieve specific goals and objectives such as the model of governance within an organisation (for instance, centralised vs. decentralised governance. Such institutions as referred to by Frederickson *et al.* (2016) include government bodies,

as in the Ministries in this study. Concepts that may be explored and explained by this theory include the social constructs or rules within institutions such as state, government, public originations, and informal institutions. Social constructs or rules refer to the shared norms, values, and beliefs that shape behaviour and interactions within these institutions (Palthe, 2014). These constructs include unwritten expectations, cultural norms, and formal regulations that govern how individuals and groups operate. For example, in a government context, social constructs might dictate the appropriate ways to exercise authority, allocate resources, and engage with the public, thereby influencing organisational practices, policies, and procedures.

In addition, neo-institutional theory aids understanding of government organisation results and performance (Mahoney and Thelen, 2009). Therefore, it offers utility in understanding the Saudi labour administration system and its employment relation and HRM system.

Furthermore, one of the most influential works on conceptualising and theorising institutions was produced by North (1990). Although North is considered an economic historian and his work on understanding institutions was conducted from an economics perspective, his conclusions have been applied in many fields (Collard, 1995). For North (1990), public administration institutions operate within what he terms the "the rules of the game". North (1990, p. 3) proposes that institutions are "*the rules of the game in society or, more formally, [they] are the humanly devised constraints that shape human interaction*". This definition highlights that institutions are composed of both formal regulations (such as laws and policies) and informal norms (such as cultural practices and social expectations) that guide and restrict behaviour. North emphasises that these

institutions are fundamental in determining the interactions and behaviours of individuals and organisations within a society. Furthermore, he posits that changes in these institutional rules over time drive the evolution of societies. Understanding these changes is key to comprehending historical developments in public administration and societal structures (Bevir, 2009).

North (1990) classifies institutions as either formal or informal. According to Casson, Della Giusta, and Kambhampati, (2010), and Bevir (2009), formal institutions are seen as rooted in regulations and laws, while informal institutions are seen as rooted in values, traditions, and norms. Similarly, Campbell (2004) defines institutions as having formal and informal rules, norms, regulations, and understanding that influence and shape individuals' behaviour. This study draws in part on North's concepts to identify the formal and informal institutions such as Wasta and gender segregation that exist in Saudi workplaces.

There are criticisms of how institutional theory has been conceptualised, and Hirsch and Lounsbury, (1997), suggest some of this is rooted in the notion that it is an umbrella of several theories without a singular focus, as seen in, say Legitimacy or Stakeholder theory. For instance, prior to the 1990s institutional theory reflected the early functionalist premise of contingency theory, as articulated by scholars like Selznick (1948) and Fiedler (1978), which focuses on the idea that the effectiveness of an organisation is contingent upon the fit between its structure and the external environment. Selznick (1948) suggested that organisations are not merely technical instruments but also social systems that adapt to their environments. Key points of his early functionalist premise include that to survive, organisations must adapt their structures and processes to align with external environmental conditions. Fiedler (1978) extended this premise by suggesting that there is no single best way to

manage or lead an organisation; instead, the best approach depends on situational factors. He stated that the most effective leadership style varies depending on the context, suggesting that organisational structures and processes must be adaptable to varying circumstances.

However, when institutional theory is utilised in studies, there are elements of focus that make such similarities with other organisational theories suitable for this study. For instance, legitimacy theory purports that institutions (organisations / firms / governments etc) have a social contract to conduct their operations in a way that affords legitimacy: in other words, they must conform to societal rules and do no harm (Yusoff and Alhaji, 2012). Under institutional theory, this may be studied through the construct of mimetic isomorphism, whereby organisations will model themselves on others that they believe to have legitimacy in the public eye (Marquis and Tilscik, 2016). Again, a criticism of this is that isomorphism does not account for divergence between organisations, focusing instead on homogeneity (Beckert, 2010). He posits the inclusion of competition to address this and suggests socio-cultural and informational difference must be considered as explanations for divergence. This means that while isomorphism explains why organisations tend to become similar, it does not adequately explain why they might differ. Beckert argues that competition among organisations leads to variability as each organisation seeks to gain an advantage and outperform others, resulting in diverse strategies and structures. Additionally, socio-cultural differences refer to the unique cultural values, norms, and beliefs that shape how organisations operate in different contexts (Palthe, 2014). Informational differences involve the varying levels of access to and utilisation of information, which affect how organisations make

decisions and adapt to their environments. Together, these factors explain why organisations may diverge from one another despite isomorphic pressures.

More recently, two further developments in institutional theory have arisen: institutional logics (Thornton and Ocasio, 2012) which posits that institutional analysis requires a structural and macro approach, and institutional work (Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006), which posits that with agentic power, the social actors (employees) may influence and even disrupt institutions.

A key consideration in determining the relevance of an institutional approach for this study was examining the intersection between traditional and modern practices. This includes analysing labour administration practices and workplace culture before and after the implementation of Vision 2030. This examination highlighted the pressures organisations face to conform to the new practices and standards set by Vision 2030 (Caprar and Neville, 2012).

Other organisational theories in addition to the old and new institutionalism were also considered for this study, including the previously discussed contingency theory and legitimacy theory. Indeed, aspects of public administration, for instance decision-making in public organisations, have been studied through various theoretical lenses and have also been studied in the context of political science (March, 1997). However, the gradually-evolving new institutional theory offers a cohesive and holistic framework of study for this thesis. In particular, this thesis looks to the three pillars of institutions as described by Scott, (2013) through which to interpret the participants' responses and as part of the frame for reviewing the literature and analysing the data:

Table 2.1 Three Pillars of Institutions

	Regulative	Normative	Cultural-Cognitive
Basis of Compliance	Expedience	Social obligation	Taken-for-grantedness, Shared understanding
Basis of Order	Regulative rules	Binding expectations	Constitutive schema
Mechanisms	Coercive	Normative	Mimetic
Logic	Instrumentality	Appropriateness	Orthodoxy
Indicators	Rules, Laws, Sanction	Certification / Accreditation	Common beliefs, Shared logics of action, Isomorphism
Affect	Fear Guilt / Innocence	Shame / Honour	Certainty / Confusion
Basis of Legitimacy	Legally sanctioned	Morally governed	Comprehensible, Recognisable, Culturally supported

(*Source: Scott, 2013, Chapter 3)*

The overview definition of the three pillars according to Scott (2013) is:

Institutions comprise regulative, normative, and cultural-cognitive elements that, together with associated activities and resources, provide stability and meaning to social life. (Scott, 2013. P56).

According to this definition, organisations are shaped by multifaceted, social structures, social activities and they are resistant to change. The elements of these pillars when coupled with associated activities offer meaning and stability to the social life and dynamics within institutions (Scott, 2013). Regulative, normative, and cultural-cognitive pillars influence firms' behaviours (Dibben and Wood, 2024b). Each element of these pillars is important in shaping institutions; it is essential they work in combination or one will dominate. (Scott, 2013)

These pillars set the basic ground for any organisation that guides behaviours of employees, including any acceptance or resistance to change. The next sections will consider each pillar definition, how these pillars have been used by researchers

in the last five years, how the pillars have been used in institutional studies worldwide and in the middle east region in particular to identify notable commonalities and help both justify the research itself as well as the decision to apply the three pillars to the analysis. Importantly, discussion is also presented on the challenges inherent within each pillar.

2.2.1 The Regulative pillar

Scott (2013) defines the regulative pillar as the explicit regulations, rule settings, monitoring, and sanctions in any given organisation. The regulative pillar refers to the influence of legislation such as employment law (Dibben and Wood, 2024b). In this context, the regulative pillar elements include the ability to set regulations, verify the extent of others' compliance with them, and the possibility of applying punishments and rewards in order to influence employee behaviour.

Studies involving the use of neo-institutional theory and the pillars in particular have found contrasting elements at play in the different settings they were conducted, with consistent themes. For instance, the regulative pillar is largely seen as encompassing formal rules which dictate what is expected within organisations (see Treviño, 2016). Yet Palthe (2014) reminds us that when organisations are undergoing significant change — as seen in this current case study — the mandatory requirements such change heralds involves a restructuring that also brings additional administrative and compliance burden (see also Baekgaard, Moynihan and Thomsen, 2019). Börner and Verstegen (2013) found that management response [during implementation of change] and administrative burden were two factors that impacted resistance to change. Also, Sunstein (2019) found that administrative burden causes harm, not just to the workers but also to

the public when navigating new ways of dealing with tasks that are part of the change process.

Other elements of the regulatory pillar that have been studied include the bureaucratic red tape that is generated with regulatory compliance (Kaufmann, Hooghiemstra, and Feeney, 2018). In one study, Pillay and Kluvers (2014) cite how excessive red tape and rigid bureaucracy contribute directly to the inability to reduce inefficiency within public services in South Africa. The administrative changes within Saudi Arabia's public services are in part aimed at increasing their efficiency (Vision 2030, 2017; 2022). Palthe (2014, p64) argues that the regulative change elements are likely to be rapid compared to those associated with the normative and cognitive-cultural pillars, which would suggest that improved efficiency may not have been seen immediately as the changes become embedded into practice.

Part of function of the regulatory pillar rests in regulatory activity [such as meeting licensing requirements], standardisation [of operational policies and enforcement mechanisms (Scott, 2013). Some scholars have argued these are the primary drivers of organisational change: Palthe (2014, p.61) cites economists as viewing rule systems and enforcement measures as key motivators. She also argues that coercive measures are inherent in regulative mechanisms, and that fear of punishment or sanction becomes a factor in perpetuating change. However, such fear has also been attributed to innovation and problem-solving being inhibited (see Börner and Verstegen, 2013).

2.2.2. The Normative Pillar

Dibben and Wood (2024) define the normative pillar as the informal institutions that influence firms. Normative systems contain both values and norms. Values are perceptions of what is preferred by society. Norms specify how to do things by legitimate ways and means to achieve organisations' objectives. Normative systems specify goals, for example "all personnel in the Ministry will have a personal development plan (PDP) in place". They must also specify appropriate methods for achieving this, for example, "training will be delivered to all staff, with supervisors receiving mentorship training". In the organisational context, it is expected that such goals and objectives reflect fair business practices (Blake and Davis 1964 cited in Scott, 2013). The normative pillar is described as having logic based on "appropriateness" rather than being a logic of "instrumentality" or "orthodoxy" (See Scott, 2013, p.60). Its frame of reference constitutes the shared values, norms and beliefs that exist within society and within the very landscape of the organisation itself (*ibid.*). Shadnam and Lawrence (2011, pp 383-384) suggested that the values base of the normative pillar stems from the institutional morality that has become the norm within an organisation, and which not only provides meaning but also guides those within the organisation about what is 'right to do' and what isn't. In other words, they form part of a social control mechanism within an organisation as opposed to the formal control seen in the regulatory pillar. In comparison with the regulative pillar, the professional norms that evolve and are established within an organisation define what is expected of employees, and it is the adherence to those norms that establish legitimacy and trustworthiness (Kant, 2016), These norms become central to the organisational culture; they are seen to guide decision-

making and can become a support mechanism within the whole organisation (Carbone, 2019).

It is important to consider normative change, particularly when juxtaposed with organisational change. Although established norms within an organisation do provide a degree of stability — employees understand that things work the way they always have because that is the workplace culture — when change occurs then norms have to evolve. Initiatives to support employees during periods of organisational change need to consider the workplace culture and how it is to adapt in order for change to be successful (see Diogo, Carvaho and Amaral, 2015; Bloomfield, 2016). For instance, because norms tend to be deeply engrained, there can be tension and division within the workplace when new systems are introduced as they may appear at odds with what is considered routine. Where such conflict emerges, it may be rooted in a misalignment between the old and the new, resulting in resistance (*ibid.*). This is covered further in section 2.3.

Another aspect of the normative pillar of note is the concept of institutional isomorphism (Carbone, 2019). It can be argued that the normative pillar contributes to how organisations try to emulate other organisations' practices and structures as a means of gaining legitimacy from others in the field and society in general (*ibid.*). This can be interpreted as the organisation adopting the prevailing norms as a means of giving confidence, particularly to stakeholders that they are 'doing the right thing'.

2.2.3. The Cultural and Cognitive Pillar

The cultural-cognitive pillar differs from the previous pillars in that its focus rests with concepts such as shared mental frameworks, cognitive scripts, and taken-for-granted assumptions that are said to shape individual and organisational behaviour (Scott, 2013; David, Tolbert, and Boghossian, 2019). Lederan *et al.* (2011) suggest that these shared mental frameworks are formed through socialisation and that they represent the collective understanding that exists within organisations. The cultural-cognitive pillar explains to what extent national culture can influence firms' behaviour (Dibben and Wood, 2024). Cultural systems operate in multiple ways, from the shared definition of local situations in a single society, to the shared culture that shapes the organisation's culture, to shared assumptions and ideologies in the wide society. These levels are intertwined, penetrating broad cultural frameworks and shaping individual beliefs on the one hand, and societal beliefs on the other hand (Scott, 2013).

Cultural-cognitive theorists have described how compliance exists because within organisations it is almost inconceivable for other types of behaviour and routines to exist; procedural and social routine is taken for granted as "the way we do these things." There is a prevailing logic within organisations that becomes embedded and serves to justify conformity [to routines and procedures] which becomes orthodoxy, or how those within organisations see the "correctness and soundness" that underpins any protocol and action (see Marquis, Glynn and Davis, 2007; Scott, 2013). Interestingly, although authors such as Marquis, Glynn and Davis (2007) have referred to the cultural-cognitive elements of organisational behaviour such as conformity resting firmly within a values concept, others such as Gardberg and Fombrun (2006) position culture within the normative pillar; this may suggest some

ambiguity with the pillars' construct. However, authors such as Aksom and Tymchenko (2019) remind us that theory changes, and that each development builds upon what came before. They also remind us that there is a tendency to criticise earlier views of the concepts when introducing a new dimension to a theory which then becomes just another metaphor to describe organisations and organisational change until another theory 'comes along' (*ibid.*).

One of the concepts within the cultural-cognitive pillar is known as institutional logics (Haveman and Gualtieri, 2017). It is suggested that organisations' behaviour can be shaped by the order of principles that guide their governance, values and decision-making. Each sector or industry develops institutional logics that reflect the culture within the organisation and wider society; their operation can be understood through their own unique cultural-cognitive frame of reference (*ibid.*). Understanding an organisation's institutional logics can contribute to an informed plan to address resistance to organisational change. Haveman, Joseph-Goteiner and Li, (2023) suggest that the new organisational norms that develop during a period of change are at odds with what came before (established frameworks), and have the potential to raise cognitive dissonance among employees resulting in a disruption to change efforts. Also, cognitive rigidity can occur within cultural-cognitive institutions, which affects employees adapting to changed ways of working. This ultimately results in inertia if not addressed, and can seriously affect corporate performance (Moradi *et al.*, 2021).

2.2.4 Selection of Neo-Institutional Theory for this study

As seen in the previous sections, neo-institutional theory and the three pillars in particular are well-placed to study the elements that affect organisations. The theory

has grown to link conformity, legitimacy, institutionalism and isomorphism, but can equally explain change and deviation (see Aksom and Tymchenko, 2019). Edwards and Berry (2010) have demonstrated neo-institutionalism's utility in making both directional predictions and generalisations, and it has been seen in this review of the literature around the theory that the three pillars (regulative, normative and cultural-cognitive) allow for aspects of organisational change to be explored and explained. As organisational or neo-institutional theory enables analysis of organisations and how they are influenced from their own frame of reference (Dibben and Wood, 2024a), and how organisations adapt to organisational change (Dibben and Wood, 2024b), neo-institutionalism and in particular the three pillars of institutional theory will be used in this research to interpret the impact of the 2016 NPM reforms on gender and performance management within the chosen Ministry. Section 2.3 now progresses to review literature around the concept of organisational change, with particular emphasis on institutional pressure to conform to change and on the concept of culture norming during the process.

2.3 Organisational change

Organisational change refers to the application of several amendments to organisations' culture, technology, values, structure or process to achieve desired outcomes. Primarily seen as a way of improving efficiency (e.g. Andrews, Boyne, and Walker, 2006), the field of organisational change has evolved in recent decades, with Ashworth, Boyne and Delbridge (2009) suggesting from an institutional theory perspective that organisations' characteristics change over time in an effort to gain legitimacy from stakeholders. Such change processes would stem from the cognitive-cultural pillar, with mimetic mechanisms and indicators

rooted in shared logics of action or isomorphism (Scott, 2013). Furthermore, DiMaggio and Powell (1983) identified ways that organisations feel pressure to make change, describing those pressures as mimetic, coercive and normative forces.

Král and Králová, (2016) suggested that there are different institutional drivers and pressures to conform to organisational change, and ultimately, different outcomes [of change] are possible, and vary according to factors such as the approach to change, communication strategies, and the alignment between the leading component of change and the change agent. The mechanisms of the three pillars, coercive, mimetic and normative forces (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983), offer one structure to explain these processes. Although analytically distinct, their ontological basis is difficult to distinguish (Mizruchi and Fein, 1999). Moreover, Král and Králová, (2016) extended the components associated with organisational change under NPM, categorising them as structure, strategy, process, people, technology, culture, and environment. The next section gives an overview of the institutional pressures to conform to change and their outcomes.

2.3.1 Institutional pressure to conform to change

New Public Management, discussed further in Chapter 3, is associated with and influences public organisations to change and adopt innovative management techniques that are new to public sector organisations (Lane, 2002). However, there are several broad themes within the literature that reflect pressure to conform to organisational change (Auzair and Langfield-Smith, 2005; Ashworth, Boyne and Delbridge, 2009; Nuhu, Baird, and Appuhami, 2019). For example, Nuhu, Baird, and Appuhami, (2019) suggest public sector organisations face increased budget

deficits which may require them to make changes in their operations and financial management to address these deficits. They also suggest decrease in government funding, which may necessitate changes in their resource allocation and financial strategies to compensate for the reduction in funding, becomes a pressure. Such demands and challenges also stem from society, particularly with regards to the public demanding improved outcomes and better services; customers have rising expectations which necessitate public services improving operational quality and efficiency to meet such expectations (*ibid.*).

Interpreting the pressure to conform to organisational change through an institutional theory lens may facilitate our overall understanding; such interpretation then becomes a further lens of the theoretical framework through which to develop insight into the participant responses in chapters five and six. Returning to the mechanisms under the three pillars of IT, the coercive forces inherent in institutional isomorphism (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983) offer the first interpretation for institutional pressure to conform to change within the Saudi public sector.

Coercive forces represent external pressures as exerted by regulatory bodies, governments, or other agencies such as health and safety executives to adopt favoured structures or systems. Often associated with legal requirements, mandatory performance stipulations for registration, and health and safety regulations, they often form part of contractual obligations with other stakeholders, which in itself becomes an organisational constraint (Ashworth, Boyle and Delbridge, 2009). Coercive forces in institutional theory represent political impact and influence rather than technical influence on organisations to change, or as Scott (1987) outlines, they are an emphasis of 'authority relations', in other words, legitimate coercion. Within Saudi Arabia, the Ministry of Human Resources and

Social, the case study of this research, is under instruction to increase efficiency and accountability, as are all other government agencies, as part of the overall Vision 2030 reforms. Indeed, published Vision 2030 documentation and the achievements of the Vision so far reveal how the Saudi government plans further changes throughout the government sector bodies (Vision 2030, 2022). The changes largely target finance and efficiency; the basis of legitimacy for the change is legislative, under the regulative pillar (Scott, 2013). The rhetoric within the published Vision documentation includes the aim of better management of civil services through improved managerial accountability and providing services according to worldwide best practices, alongside raising transparency and fighting all types of corruption (Vision 2030, 2022). One outcome of this is seen when governments spend more on resourcing aspects such as recruitment of professionals from the private sector to support delivery of change initiatives (Ashworth, Boyle and Delbridge, 2009). However, perhaps emphasising the coercive nature of the reforms, Rana *et al.* (2022) suggest managerial accountability demands exert considerable influence on organisational control.

The second of the mechanisms under the pillars is mimetic, another representation of organisational pressure to conform to change, whereby organisations imitate successful practices of others in the field to gain legitimacy (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983). Rana *et al.,* (2022), outline indicators of mimetic pressure within the education sector which are also seen in other public sectors, including demonstrating efforts to improve performance by adopting other more successful agencies' systems and practices; this also occurs due to fear or uncertainty (that an organisation's systems are 'not good enough'). An indication of this is seen in participants' responses, as outlined in later chapters, who described forums within

Saudi Arabia's Ministries whereby teams meet regularly to learn from each other and present successful models for others to imitate. This is an example of acquiescence as an organisational strategy to change, as suggested by Clemens and Douglas, (2005) (after Oliver 1991).

The third of the mechanisms at play within organisational change can be seen as normative forces, which arise from the values and norms inherent in the normative pillar. Such forces are said to raise the professionalism of the employees within public organisations to achieve organisational effectiveness (Boon *et al.,* 2009). Ashworth, Boyne and Delbridge, (2009), describe from an institutional theory perspective how professional standards and professional communities influence organisational characteristics, suggesting they capture how organisations are expected to conform to professional standards of accountability and legitimacy. Of note, Goodstein (1994) suggested that organisations that participate in trade associations and other professional associations become more interconnected, which becomes important for the diffusion of institutional expectations and norms as seen in organisational change. Furthermore, DiMaggio and Powell (1983, p148) proposed the concept of the ''organisational field'', which represents ''those organisations that, in aggregate, constitute a recognised area of institutional life''. Such fields are expected to demonstrate institutional logics underpinning the organisations' principles (Friedland and Alford 1991), and represent the basis of the norms, the taken-for-granted rules including the prevalent beliefs and practices in an organisational field (Scott 2001). In the context of organisational change, organisations within a field will gradually acquiesce to isomorphic pressures that they face to prevent their operations' failure, with more mature organisational fields

operating on well-defined and established institutional norms and rules (Powell and DiMaggio, 1991).

Turning to Saudi Arabia in general, there have been several mergers in some of the Ministries within Saudi Arabia, each of which represents organisational change. For example, in 2019, following a royal decree from King Salman, the Ministry of Energy underwent a major organisational restructuring and was divided into the Ministry of Industry and Mineral Resources and the Ministry of Energy (Vision 2030, 2023). The Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development has also undergone two mergers (MHRD Website, 2020). In the case study of this research in particular, there has been significant institutional pressure to conform to change under the reforms imposed by Vision 2030. For example, the Vision Realisation Programmes include strands related to human capital development, which has direct relevance to the Ministry of Labour Administration (Vision 2030, 2017). This pressure has been actualised through recruitment drives aimed at increasing the representation of women in the workforce and at employing professionals from the private sector. These are undoubtedly changing the norms within the organisation, as discussed by participants in chapters 5 and 6, and can be seen as both regulative and normative pressures (Scott, 2013). However, there is merit in exploring the structure and process of this example of change using Král and Králová (2016, p. 2-3) framework. Firstly, the driver of this change can be classified as largely external, as it is precipitated by the government with new legislation; this is a coercive mechanism (Scott, 2013) with legally sanctioned basis of legitimacy (regulative pillar). The components of the change involve strategy but key to outcomes is the structural change imposed, not only in relocation and redesign of offices but also in the introduction of operational processes such as performance management. Again

using Král and Králová (2016, p. 2-3) framework, the process of organisational change involves 'inhibitors' and 'catalysts'. They describe catalysts to change as including effective leadership, open and transparent communication and providing employees with the necessary skills and knowledge through training and development programs. Factors which inhibit change include rigid organisational hierarchy, insufficient resource and resistance from employees. These factors are reflected on in the context of participants' responses in later chapters, giving a nuanced view of the process of change within the Ministry.

2.3.2 Culture Norming in Organisational Change

According to Palthe (2012), the desired outcomes of the process of organisational change typically include adoption of new practices or behaviours that are intended to improve performance, efficiency, or effectiveness, a shift in organisational culture (including changes in values, beliefs, and norms that guide behaviour within the organisation), increased productivity, profitability, customer satisfaction, or employee engagement, and enhanced organisational resilience. One factor that influences the process of how organisational change is perceived and implemented is cultural norming. Caprar and Neville, (2012), suggest that culture plays a significant role in determining the extent to which change is adopted, and introduce the concept of the "norming effect" of culture. Their study was in the context of sustainability, and found that a cultural context that includes norms and values compatible with sustainability principles is more likely to generate and embrace sustainability-relevant institutions. Also, Palthe, (2014) suggests that cultural norms and values are part of the normative element of institutions, which contribute to the institutional context of organisations. The normative element emphasises the moral

bases for assessing legitimacy and defines legitimate means to pursue valued ends. Cultural norms and values ensure the repetition of behaviours and can therefore influence organisational change.

Furthermore, Palthe (2014) highlights that change capacity and change resistance are important factors in determining the extent of organisational change. Change capacity refers to an organisation's ability to adapt, learn, and apply new innovations, while change resistance refers to the resistance to change from organisational members. The level of change resistance can moderate the effect of dissatisfaction with the current state on organisational change. Furthermore, change recipients may change because it becomes the expected norm (ought to change). Normative theorists emphasise the role of social obligation and focus on informal structures rather than formal structures in organisational change. They also emphasise the immediate environment of organisations in driving change.

A useful model for interpreting culture norming in organisation was developed by Latta (2009). Derived from ethnographic analysis, the OC3 Model (or the Model of Organisational Change in Cultural Context) provides a comprehensive framework for understanding how cultural contexts influence organisational change. The OC3 Model highlights the importance of considering cultural factors at every stage of the organisational change process (*ibid.*). By understanding and addressing cultural influences, organisations can design and implement change initiatives that are more likely to succeed and be sustained over time. This culturally informed approach helps ensure that changes are not only accepted but also embraced and embedded into the organisational fabric.

The model outlines eight stages of cultural influence, each representing a distinct phase in the process of organisational change and how culture interacts with this process. They may also be mapped with the pillars of neo-institutional theory (Scott, 2013), providing a nuanced lens of the stages of cultural influence that are then applied to the analysis and discussion of the participant interviews in later chapters.

The first stage of the OC3 model is Cultural Awareness, which involves recognising the existence and importance of cultural factors within in organisational settings. It requires acknowledging that organisational practices, values, and behaviours are shaped by cultural norms and that any change process must consider these cultural elements. This stage aligns with both the regulatory pillar in understanding the regulatory frameworks and formal rules that shape organisational behaviour, and also the cognitive-cultural pillar in understanding the constitutive schema and shared logics of action.

The second stage of the model is Cultural Diagnosis. In this stage, organisations conduct a thorough assessment of the current cultural landscape. This includes identifying dominant cultural norms, values, beliefs, and practices within the organisation. The goal is to understand how these cultural factors influence organisational behaviour and performance, and aligns with the regulative pillar as it involves identifying formal regulations, policies, and procedures that influence organisational practices. It also aligns with the cultural-cognitive pillar, which focuses on the shared understandings and taken-for-granted beliefs that shape behaviour.

Once the current culture is understood, the third stage of the OC3 model is Cultural Alignment, which focuses on aligning the proposed changes with the existing

cultural context. It involves finding ways to adapt change initiatives so that they resonate with the organisation's cultural values and practices, ensuring that the change is culturally congruent. This resonates with the normative pillar, which emphasises shared norms, values, and expectations within the organisation.

The next stage is Cultural Leverage, which involves leveraging positive aspects of the existing culture to support the change process and reduce resistance. By identifying and utilising cultural strengths, such as strong leadership, cohesive teamwork, or innovative practices, organisations can facilitate smoother transitions and enhance buy-in from employees. This again resonates with the normative pillar which reflects the normative influences that guide acceptable and desirable behaviour in the organisation.

At this stage of the change process, Cultural Adaptation begins. This involves organisations adapting their change strategies to fit the cultural context. This might involve modifying communication styles, leadership approaches, or change management techniques to be more culturally sensitive and effective, and again aligns with the normative pillar's focus on the importance of social obligations and shared understandings. Modifying change strategies to be culturally sensitive also aligns with the cultural-cognitive pillar by recognising and working within the cognitive frameworks that employees use to make sense of their organisational environment.

Cultural Integration follows; this stage focuses on integrating new practices, values, and behaviours into the existing cultural framework. It involves ensuring that the changes become part of the organisational culture and are accepted and practiced

by employees at all levels. This again reflects the normative pillar, as it involves embedding new norms and standards into the organisation's social fabric.

The penultimate stage of the OC3 model is Cultural Sustainment, which involves maintaining the changes over time and embedding them into the organisational culture. This requires continuous reinforcement, support, and monitoring to ensure that the changes endure and become an integral part of the organisation's way of operating. As this stage requires adherence to established rules and procedures, ensuring that changes comply with regulatory standards, it reflects the regulatory pillar.

The final stage of the OC3 model is Cultural Evolution, which recognises that organisational culture is dynamic and continuously evolving. It involves ongoing cultural development and adaptation to new challenges, opportunities, and environmental changes. Organisations must remain flexible and responsive to cultural shifts to sustain long-term success. This stage aligns with the cultural-cognitive pillar's emphasis on the dynamic nature of shared meanings and cognitive schemas.

Understanding the OC3 Model through the lens of neo-institutional theory provides a comprehensive approach to understanding the management of organisational change. Other theorists and researchers have stressed elements of organisational change that align with elements of the OC3 model, including Fallon (2007), who stressed the commutation of the expectations of the newly introduced operations and cultural norms to make employees aware of the change and its reasons which will lead to the desired outcomes (cultural integration; Latta, 2009). Cultural Integration and Cultural Sustainment may well describe the modelling behaviours,

whereby leaders play an important role being active and consistent in applying the new behaviour, reinforcing new norms by applying different means such as rewards and performance appraisal, and addressing any expected resistance / any challenges employees face in norming the new culture (Kavanagh, and Ashkanasy, 2006).

2.4. The case study of this research

Having established the theoretical landscape for this study, rooted in neo-institutional theory and identifying concepts around organisational change including pressure to conform and culture norming, this section now progresses to outline the chosen case study. Beginning with an overview of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and its cultural and economic background, it explores in some detail the nuanced perspectives as seen in the rapidly changing region, then sites the selected Ministry within the broad arena of Saudi life and economy. Using the three pillars as a lens, it extends commentary on how each element can be interpreted through one or more of the pillars, setting the scene for further inquiry into some of the specific operational concerns such as performance management and gender issues in the next chapter.

2.4.1 Country Cultural and Economic Background

Prior to the country being united and constituted by the King Abdulaziz bin Abdulrahman Al Saud, the region represented areas governed by different tribes. The nation-building process that began after subverting the last tribal uprising in March 1929 was emphasised by the founding King instilling progress, unity and modernity into the new government; elements of the tribes' identity were

incorporated into newly created Saudi society (Al Fahad, 2004). Anthropologists suggest that tribal membership is expressed through many behaviours and affiliations; however, this does not equate with all tribal members supporting such expressions. Turning to Saudi Arabia, tribal affiliation is a unique representation of identity that contrasts with other forms of identity representation such as regional identities, 'Islamic', or even 'liberal' (Maisel, 2014). Vismara (2019) suggests that contemporary views on tribal identity and tribalism have largely portrayed negative stereotypical hegemony related to territorialism and represented by beliefs around disunity, conflict and competition. James (2005) has stated that tribalism is a word and concept that has been stripped of its original meaning, stating it has become synonymous with a social frame around lifestyle, a 'way of being' whereby communities are socially bound by the dominant modality of the tribe. Salzman (2008) suggests a need to challenge this predominant belief, and proposes a definition of tribalism within the Arab regions that is built around hierarchy, values and kinship as opposed to lifestyle.

To a large extent the old tribal ways were considered *badawi* or *qabali* (backward, old-fashioned and disappearing) as the Saudi regime strove to build a modern society (Al Fahad, 2004). It was also made clear that citizens must be loyal to the state (and the head of the state) but not to a tribe or region (Maisel, 2014). Since 1932 the Saudi Royal Family and its government have established a national framework through which it has legislated the people and the economy (Cordesman, 2009). However, the tribes are ever-present, despite being forcefully integrated into what Maisel (2014, p. 100) described as "the newly created Saudi national identity". This becomes a point of debate in later chapters, when the participants discussed this in direct reference to their working environments.

Religion is a major cultural factor within Saudi Arabia that is also ever present, with the vast majority of its population identifying as Muslim, and indeed, the national framework is underpinned by Sharia law (Cordesman, 2009). Some 95% of the population are said to be Muslim, with over 85% being Sunni, the remainder practicing Shia. The country is governed through strict Wahhabi principles, and the Sahwa Movement (or 'awakening' movement) saw prominence in Saudi Arabia from 1960-1980, having significant influence on society (Ibrahim, 2022). These principles are seen as advocating a 'purification' of Islam, in other words, returning to adherence to the words of the Prophet (the hadith) and rejecting any Islamic doctrine written by others after his death. For instance, under these principles visiting tombs is seen as idolatry and promoting polytheism (Brittanica, 2024). Crucially, in promoting full adoption of Wahhabi principles, the movement is seen by many as being responsible for severely curtailing women's' rights; although the launch of Vision 2030 saw the Crown Prince proclaim the return to 'moderate Islamism' and the end to Sahwa Movement, it is still dominant in some areas of society (Ibrahim, 2022).

Saudi Arabia is one of the largest economies in the world and a member of the G20. It is the largest global oil exporter and the largest among the Oil and Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC). According to the World Bank (2019), the 2018 GDP was nearly 800 billion dollars, with a GDP per capita of slightly over 23,000 US$. The economy of Saudi Arabia relies heavily on the oil industry, as 85% of government revenues come from oil and petroleum. In terms of distribution of income, one measure used is the Gini coefficient, which represents how equal the distribution is. World Economics (2019) represent the Gini coefficient on a scale of 1-100, where 1 represents total inequality (all of a country's income rests with one

entity) and 100 represents total equality (all of a country's income is equally distributed amongst residents). In 2019, this figure was recorded as 45.6 for Saudi Arabia; by comparison, UAE was recorded as 63.1, Oman was recorded as 55.7 and Qatar was recorded as 46.2 (*ibid.*). Saudi Arabia is one the largest countries in the Middle East and it is a member of the countries of the Gulf region where most of the population practise Islam and legislation is underpinned by the Islamic laws of justice (Balcer, 2014).

Saudi Arabia is governed by a Council of Ministers, which is led by the King. The Council is responsible for the implementation of internal, external, economic, educational, and defence policies (Bureau of Experts at the Council of Ministers, 2015). It has 23 ministers with a portfolio and 11 ministries of state, including the Human Resource and Social Development Ministry. According to the law of the Council of Ministers (2015), a minister enjoys an ultimate authority in running their ministry, and they are responsible for carrying out their duties under the law of the Council of Ministers, as well as other government laws and regulations (Bureau of Experts at the Council of Ministers, 2015).

The Saudi labour market has four particular features; a high unemployment rate, low representation of women in the workplace, high dependence on expatriates and the 2016 major reforms (The Government Summit, 2013; Elkatiri, 2016; General Authority for Statistics, 2016, 2020). In the latest available report on the Saudi labour market, the total workforce in the private sector was 8.3 million, of which 1.7 million were Saudi nationals (Saudi General Statistics Authority, 2020). The unemployment rate was 12.3% among the Saudi workforce. Notably, unemployment among females is higher than among males. The rate of unemployment within the total

female population of working age is 24%, and it is approximately 7% among working-age Saudi males (Saudi General Statistics Authority, 2020).

The population of Saudi Arabia exceeded 32 million people in 2022. Most of the population are young, with those under the age of 30 comprising 63% of the total population (Saudi General Authority of Statistics, 2023). Approximately 41.6% of the population are expatriates (Saudi General Authority of Statistics, 2023); the extent to which migrant workers are an essential component in the Saudi economy becomes an important feature of the Saudi labour market. Expatriates in Saudi Arabia are part of labour migration, which began following the Kingdom's constitution and when oil production grew in the 1930's (De Bel Air, 2018). With the first oil boom in the 1970's came infrastructure-building along with some economic diversification; this period saw an influx of skilled and semi-skilled workers from other Arab countries and Asia, but it also saw migrants placed on short term contracts with no social or political rights (*ibid.*). At that time there was a growing recognition of an over-dependence on migrant workers, and unemployment among Saudi Nationals led to the introduction of the Saudization policy, a labour market regulation to prioritise employing Saudi Nationals in the private sector (Ewain, 1999; Alhammami, 2022). Later, following a period of economic downturn due to reduced oil revenue and the first Gulf war in the 1990's, there was a change in migrant workers with nationals from other Arab countries gradually being replaced with predominantly Asian workers.

The migrant workers have worked across sectors, including the retail, transport and healthcare sectors over the years, but recent developments in the economy have seen changes in policy that have restricted overseas' workers in some areas. For instance, in retail, only Saudi women are allowed to work in shops selling women's

and childcare products (Fargues and Shah, 2018). Contracts of overseas workers in government bodies and Ministries were to be phased out over a period of three years from 2018, although in some skilled areas they have remained due to a lack of local workers with experience (Javad and Ameen, 2024); in the Ministry chosen for this study, there were no overseas workers. The last twenty years have seen developments within labour administration systems to adapt management practices and policies to this changing migrant demographic (Fargues and Shah, 2018). In fact, the Saudi government introduced a system to monitor the movement and employment of migrant workers in the country through a sponsorship scheme known as Kafãla *(Azhari, 2017)*. Under this scheme, employers act as guardian for the migrant worker, who is not entitled to work elsewhere and the scheme has been heavily criticised by human rights organisations globally (Meirison, Rahmi, and Susilawati, (2023). Important reforms in relation to migrant workers in Saudi Arabia have been implemented since the 2016 public administration reforms as part of Vision 2030; for example, workers are now free to move from job to job inside Saudi Arabia. Another example of the reforms in relation to migrants is that high ranking migrant professionals can benefit from a long residence permit where a professional can live in Saudi Arabia and have all privileges of citizens such as opening businesses and investing.

2.4.2 Vision 2030

Saudi Arabia has implemented two sets of public administration reforms to update the whole system of governance, including public administration and the economy of the country, in the last two decades, which started under the leadership of King Abdullah in 2000 and have continued under King Salman since 2016 (Asquer and Alzahrani, 2020). Drivers of public administration reforms are different across

countries (see Ristic, Damnjanovic, and Trnavac, 2023). However, oil price fluctuation and the need to diversify from oil-based revenue are the primary drivers of the reforms in Saudi Arabia because Saudi Arabia's economy currently depends entirely on oil revenues to both run government activities and services and empower the private sector, which has been criticised due to harmful emissions (Mahmood, Alkhateeb, and Furqan, 2020). In regard to the impact of these reforms, most previous public administration reforms appear to have had only a minor impact on the effectiveness of public administration bodies; Asquer and Alzahrani (2020) have suggested that although such reforms may aim to improve service delivery and quality, barriers arise reducing the impact of reform, including, for instance, commercialisation of services being unpopular with the public and ineffective at cost-efficiency

The Saudi government's strategy for the country in terms of all areas of the economy and the public sector services is guided by the 2030 Vision (Kinninmont, 2017; Asquer and Alzahrani, 2020). The Vision is being driven by 13 Vision Realisation Programmes to achieve its different strategic objectives. Every ministry works on a specific agenda related to their purpose on achieving the different Vision Realisation Programmes. These programmes are: quality of life, financial sector development, fiscal balance, national transformation, public investment fund, privatisation, national companies' promotion, national industrial development and logistics, strategic partnerships, human capital development, and Saudi character enrichment (Vision 2030, 2017; 2023). All are to some extent relevant to the systems of labour administration which are configured and constructed through the Vision Realisation Office and certainly have changed the institutions of the Saudi Arabian labour administration as will be discussed later in this chapter.

Furthermore, with regard to the implementation of the Vision Realisation Programmes, all have a programme card and metrics. The programme card explains every aspect of each including a description of the programme, direct and indirect objectives, and programme chairperson, and programme committee, which are the government entities that are responsible for delivering the programme. Each programme has metrics that are divided into indicators to maximise and indicators to monitor. In addition to this, there are specified metrics of any programme that are reviewed regularly by the programme committee (Strategic Objectives and Vision Realisation Programmes, 2017).

The Council of Ministers has entrusted CEDA to establish appropriate mechanisms and measures to achieve Vision 2030. Of these measures, level one involves defining the vision and the national priorities, and this is the responsibility of the Council of Ministers and CEDA. At level two, the programme and the execution mechanisms are defined. This is carried out by the VRO established within each government body. The third level is implementation and follow-up, and this is carried out by execution bodies. All of these levels are supported by various units that are responsible for communication, finance, budgeting, and performance control (Strategic Objectives and Vision Realisation Programmes, 2017).

Vision 2030 is working under three pillars: the building of an "ambitious nation, the creation of a "vibrant society", and the enabling of a "thriving economy". Although, the second two (creation of a "vibrant society", and the enabling of a "thriving economy) pillars indirectly can affect the public administration in the Saudi public organisations, this study focuses on the first, building an ambitious nation, because as part of its function, this pillar is intended to change the public sector organisations

directly through public administration reforms. However, before reviewing this pillar, it is important to give an overview of the other two pillars.

The "Vibrant Society" pillar outlines an overall goal to:

> *.. create a society in which every citizen enjoys a happy fulfilling lifestyle complemented by a standard of living which provides a safe and secure environment for families, and access to world class health care and education. At the same time, the vision encourages its citizens to cherish their national identity and their ancient cultural heritage and live by the Islamic principle of moderation (Vision 2030, 2017; 2023).*

Within this pillar, it is stressed that through a public and private sector partnership the welfare system would be modernised and that those who are not in the workforce would be supported through training opportunities to seek employment with new jobs being created. In fact, Malek and Nagesh (2017) have argued that job creation for younger people [alongside diversifying the economy] is a key litmus test when determining the success or otherwise of the transformation within Vision 2030.

The thriving economy pillar outlines how it:

> *.. provides opportunities for all by building an education system aligned with market needs to give the youth the skills for the jobs of the future, and creating economic opportunities for the entrepreneur, the small enterprise as well as the large corporation (Vision 2030, 2017; 2023).*

Furthermore, Vision 2030 is complex, covering many facets and sectors; it has six overarching objectives, 27 branching objectives, 96 strategic objectives (Strategic Objectives and Vision Realisation Programmes, 2017). For illustration, figure 2.1 shows the pillars of the Saudi Vision 2030, including 'a thriving economy'. As the figure shows there are six overarching objectives in that pillar ranging for example from growing the contribution of the private sector to growing non-oil exports. Under

each overarching objective, there are different branching and strategic objectives, which for example contains goals like privatising state-owned companies.

Figure 2.1 Vision 2030 Pillars
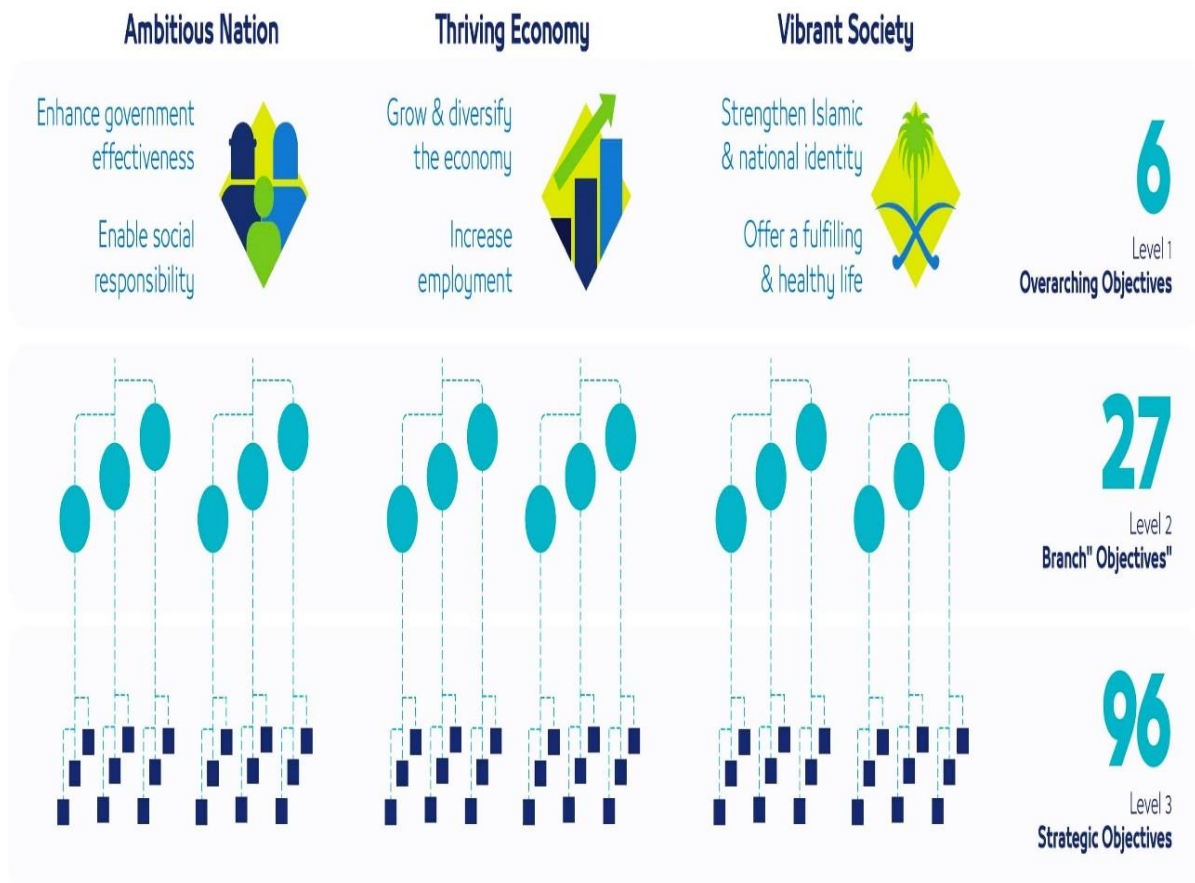
(Source: Saudi Vision 2030 Website, 2017)

Moving on to the focus of the study, the ambitious nation pillar applies:

> *.. efficiency and responsibility at all levels in order to deliver the Vision, including building an effective, transparent, accountable, enabling and high-performing government (Vision 2030, 2017; 2023).*

Figure 2.2 shows the first pillar of the Saudi Vision 2030, An Ambitious Nation. As the figure shows there are four overarching objectives. The overarching objectives are for example balancing public budget, engaging effectively with citizens:

Figure 2.2: An Ambitious Nation Pillar
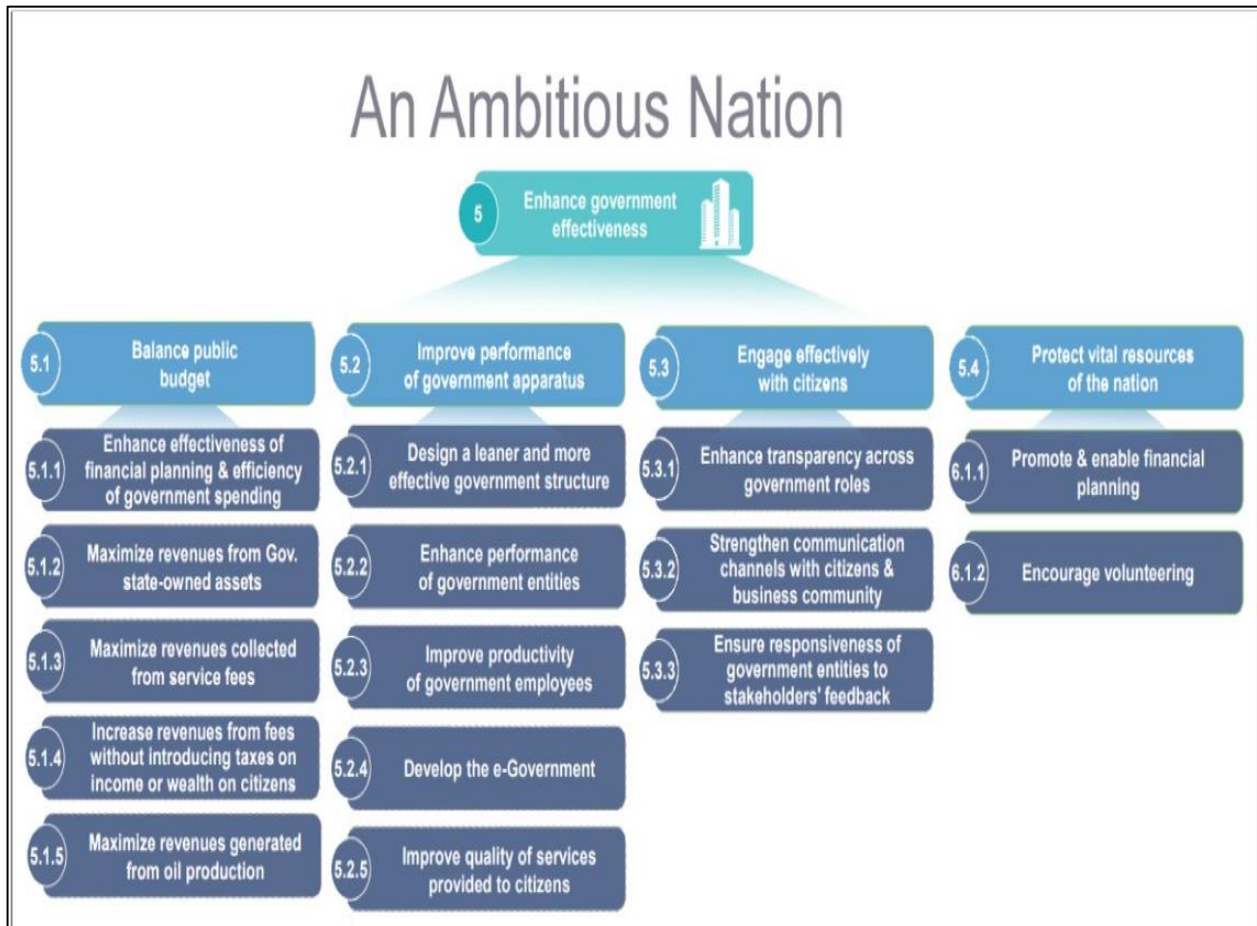
(Source: Strategic Objectives and Vision Realization Programmes, 2017).

2.4.3 Vision Realisation Office (VRO)

With regard to the planning and supervision of the programmes, they are working in the following way. Planning takes place at three levels; overall vision level, vision realisation programmes level, government entities plan level. The overall vision level is the responsibility of the council of ministers and the Council of Economic and Development Affairs. They are responsible for long term objectives, high-level targets, KPIs and overall strategies with the opportunity to revisit every five years during a five-year planning cycle (Strategic Objectives and Vision Realization Programmes, 2017). The vision realisation programmes are the responsibility of the

CEDA and the Vision Realisation office is present in every ministry. The ministries are responsible for five-year initiatives, milestones, initiative budgets with the opportunity of revisiting every year. They plan yearly, and every five years the overall plan is to be reviewed. Their plan should include five-year targets, objectives, indicators, and budget needs with the opportunity to revisit quarterly. All of the mentioned planning is supervised by the new entity, the Council of Economic and Development Affairs (Strategic Objectives and Vision Realization Programmes, 2017).

2.4.4 Labour Administration System

According to Peters and Pierre (2012), public administration and government bodies interact with society in almost every aspect of citizens' lives. In this sense, it is important to study the national system of labour administration as a key component of public administration and as a society-wide institution (Ransome, 2010; Heyes and Rychly, 2013). According to Perry and Christensen (2015), public administration and its institutions are important for meeting social needs and solving public problems. Labour administration roles are central to providing employment, stability, and welfare. Furthermore, effective labour administrations can respond to social challenges, improve working conditions and social dialogue, and ultimately contribute to economic growth (Heyes and Rychly, 2013). Likewise, Korczynski *et al.* (2006, p. 2) emphasise the importance of analysing organisations that manage the labour market because they are vital for the empowering and flourishing of societies. This research therefore becomes important because it provides insights of relevance for policymakers, the academic community and wider society.

Labour administration as a topic has been studied comparatively in various European countries (Hastings and Heyes, 2016; Gavris and Heyes, 2019), in the United Kingdom as a single case study (Heyes, 2001), and in Finland (Temmes and Melkas, 2001), Canada (Dingwall and Chippindale, 2001), and in China and several other Asian countries (Casale and Sivananthiran, 2015). The International Labour Organisation (ILO) offers a frame of reference for study related to labour administration. A specialist organisation within the United Nations, the ILO seeks to promote international labour standards that protect and promote social justice through decent working conditions. On a yearly basis, a general survey is conducted, which enables the organisation to monitor progress in member countries with regards to adopting international standards and ratifying conventions; disseminating the data from such surveys and making recommendations directly to governments becomes an important source of information for member states (ILO, 2024a). For instance, the recently published 2024 general survey recommended that good governance is "embodied in the delivery of functions and in the structural organisation of labour administrations" (ILO 2024b, p. 134).

As a component of public administration, labour administration concerns all public administration activities and institutions involved in managing work and employment in a country. These activities and institutions together comprise the national system of labour administration (Heyes and Rychly, 2013). This system involves a wide variety of government and public administration bodies and entities. Such systems vary in terms of their complexity, but they usually include a labour ministry, a public employment service, labour inspection, dispute resolution services, and vocational and training institutions (ILO, 2010; Heyes and Rychly, 2013). According to Heyes and Rychly (2013), two factors influence this variation across countries: the degree

of centralisation in the system of government, and the extent to which private and third-sector organisations (such as trade unions) are involved in the delivery of labour administration services.

According to the ILO (2010), there are a number of functions in relation to labour administration, namely, the preparation, administration, coordination, review, and implementation of the national labour system. These are in addition to studying and following up on the employment context in the country, including the situations of both employed and unemployed citizens and issues related to underemployment (ILO, 2010).

These functions are practised in four areas. The first involves setting labour standards, such as labour inspection legalisation. The second area is promoting labour relations, which includes all industrial relations activities, such as the right to association, the right to negotiation, and the promotion of social dialogue. The third area is related to employment policy, such as effective public employment services, management of public funds for unemployment, vocational guidance, support for job seekers, and entrepreneurship promotion. The last area involves research related to the labour market, such as information collection, labour market analysis, surveys and forecasts of labour-related matters (ILO, 2010).

The ILO Convention number 150 and Recommendation number 158 are the only attempts to establish conceptual frameworks for the terms 'national system of labour administration' and 'labour administration':

> The labour administration system includes all the public administration bodies responsible for and/or engaged in labour administration – whether ministerial departments or public agencies, including semi-governmental and regional or local agencies or any other form of decentralized administration – and any

institutional framework for the coordination of the activities of such bodies,
which enables consultation with and participation by employers and workers
and their respective organizations (ILO, 1978, p.2).

Throughout the remainder of this thesis, the ILO definition is used to present a frame of reference for the term 'labour administration system'.

2.4.5 Labour administration in Saudi Arabia

In order to elaborate more on the importance of this research and to evidence its unique contribution, there are several considerations to be discussed in regard to the ILO reports and to the information available on the Ministry of Human Resources and Social development website (HRSD, 2023b). As stated previously, little has been published on the topic of Saudi labour administration, with the exception of the publications on the MHRSD website. The MHRSD states that The Saudi Ministry of Labour Administration has undergone many changes since its establishment by royal decree in 1961, under the name of 'the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs' (MHRSD, 2020). In 2005, under King Abdullah's leadership, the Ministry of Labour and Social Development was separated into the Ministry of Labour Administration and the Ministry of Social Affairs, on the basis of a decree from the Council of Ministries. Similarly, in 2015, a royal decree recombined the two ministers under the name of 'the Ministry of Labour and Social Development' (MHRSD, 2020).

Information that is available includes the 2014 ILO report which highlights characteristics of the Saudi labour inspection department, including the number of inspectorates and the challenges and obstacles as compared to those of other Arab region states. A further ILO study (Rychly 2013) mapped out an organisational hierarchy of the country's labour administration in a comparative study of several countries. Other information includes the 2018 ILO report, which highlights aspects

of the ratification process for the ILO's standards of labour administration, conducted between 2001 and 2007. This report showed that Saudi Arabia did not follow the ratification process fully in several ILO standards of labour market policy.

2.5 Chapter Summary

This chapter has provided an overview of the theoretical framework underpinning this study, detailing in particular neo-institutional theory and the three pillars of institutional theory (Scott, 2013). It then progressed to discuss elements key to this research around the process of organisational change: institutional pressure to conform to change, and culture norming. In doing so, a critical lens was provided with the framework developed by Král and Králová (2016, p. 2-3) that provided the concepts of 'inhibitors' and 'catalysts' to change; these become important in interpreting the participant narratives in later chapters as they allow for a nuanced view of the change processes that the participants have experienced that includes the interplay of the three pillars' mechanisms and forces. The chapter then progressed to map out the geo-political landscape of this study in terms of Saudi Arabia the country, the culture and the economy, before discussing the labour administration system and the structure of the case setting (the Ministry).

The following chapter builds on this, providing a critical overview of existing literature on New Public Management, including key performance indicators, and commentary of Saudi Culture and how it impacts on the workplace. Following this, a critical review is provided of subjects relating to gender issues in the workplace: discrimination, segregation and stereotypes.

Chapter 3: Literature Review: New Public Management Reforms, Gender issues in the Workplace and Performance Management

3.1 Introduction

This second literature review chapter sheds light on aspects of public administration. It explores the literature examining the landscape of public administration and the evolution of New Public Management (NPM), exploring aspects including performance management, key performance indicators (KPIs) and the intersection of NPM with human resources management (HRM). This becomes the basis for a critical exploration of the literature as it applies to the characteristics of Saudi Arabia's public administration and the recent public administration reforms, including gender issues in the workplace.

3.2 Public Administration

An understanding of the term 'administration' is required to properly address the definition of 'public administration'. According to a seminal text on public administration by Simon (1970), 'administration' refers to the activities carried out by groups or individuals to achieve certain objectives (cited in Uchem and Erunke, 2013). A more comprehensive definition is proposed by Balogun (1983), who defines administration as follows:

> .. any action that is directed to the analysis of policies, the identification of options and to a substantial degree, the implementation of programmes as well as the efficient allocation of resources. In addition to all these calculated decisions, a typical administrative action is taken into consideration the enduring and the goals of the organisation as well

as the environment within which the action takes place (Balogun, 1983, p. 17).

In this sense, Peters and Pierre (2012) regard public administration as management activities in the public sector, and they add that public administration is represented by those management activities carried out by the government. Public administrators here in the context of this study are the people concerned with administering different elements of the executive departments, such as the labour departments.

Two definitions of public administration have been published by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), an international organisation that helps countries to implement public administration reforms. The first defines public administration as follows:

> *The aggregate machinery (policies, rules, procedures, systems, organisational structures, personnel, etc.) funded by the state budget and in charge of the management and direction of the affairs of the executive government, and its interaction with other stakeholders in the state, society and external environment (UNDP, 2020, p. 1).*

The second definition describes public administration as

> *The management and implementation of the whole set of government activities dealing with the implementation of laws, regulations and decisions of the government and the management related to the provision of public service (UNDP, 2020, p. 2).*

An attempt by Toonen was made to distinguish between Public Administration as field of study and public administration as practise. He wrote "public administration in the lower case (p.a.) [is the] institutional arrangements for the provision of public

services; in the upper case (P.A.), [it is] the study of those arrangements" (Toonen, 2012, p.561).

The so-called 'classical approach' to public administration has proven popular and has been used by many policymakers and governments around the world. According to Katsamunska (2012), this approach is influenced by Frederick Taylor's ideas on management, which emphasised the idea of government being efficient, hence its emphasis on the maximisation of effectiveness, efficiency, and economy. It is also influenced by Max Weber's ideas on bureaucracy, which proposed that government bodies should be organised on the basis of functional specialisation (Weber, 1978; Katsamunska, 2012). A bureaucracy is an organisation characterised by "hierarchy, fixed rules, impersonal relationships, strict adherence to impartial procedures, and specialization based on function" (Bevir, 2009, p. 37).

More recently, there has been a general recognition that traditional approaches to public services administration are no longer fit for purpose in the changing economic climate and with the general requirements of social and economic advancement that are heralded with developments such as the UN SDGs, and more locally for this study, Vision 2030 (UN, 2015; Vision 2030, 2017; Shi, 2023).

One of the potentially challenging issues in relation to public administration is coordination between public administration organisations or within one organisation. According to Bouckaert, Peters and Verhoest, (2010), coordination is among the top problems facing public sector organisations. Problems with coordination occur because of the complexity of government bodies and rigid bureaucracy (Bouckaert Peters and Verhoest, 2010); however, Bouckaert Peters and Verhoest also stated that countries with a ruling monarchy such as Saudi Arabia

can easily manage the problem of coordination because such systems are not complex and can be managed through one central government that controls everything in the country. This implies that any difficulties with coordination in countries with a monarchy system can be lower compared to countries without a ruling monarchy. And yet Alhammami (2023) found co-ordination to be a problem within human resources management (HRM) in the higher education sector in Saudi Arabia due to communication issues surrounding delegation to regional centres. He suggested that any reforms must incorporate clear procedural guidance given the complexity of labour administration. Hastings and Heyes (2016) also discussed coordination issues in the context of national labour administration systems. They found that coordination of labour administration bodies is important for effective labour policy. In addition to this, they stated that labour administration bodies should coordinate their operations with other government bodies such as the Ministry of Finance.

One further issue in relation to public administration is the issue of hierarchy within public sector organisations. Hierarchy in public organisations refers to "a form of organisation in which people and functions are organised in, and executed through, a well-defined, multi-tiered, vertical structure" (Bevir, 2009, p.100). Every employee performs her/his duties and tasks based on this structure to accomplish a common goal. Bevir (2009) stated that hierarchy can be considered in spatial terms as a ladder. Hierarchies become an issue in public organisation because of the complexity of organisational structure. For illustration, in a study of Western countries of the impact of hierarchy and networks on the work of public administration bodies, Meulema (2008) claimed that hierarchies can hinder effective communication and coordination. In regard to the Saudi context, as stated above,

Asquer and Alzahrani (2020) claimed that the Saudi public administration has been impacted by negative hierarchical structures which prevent public organisations from working effectively. All of the of above-mentioned HRM and Public Administration issues are discussed with the participants and presented in the findings chapters.

In response to the growing need to address expansion of the public sectors and its associated fiscal requirements, the New Public Management (NPM) approach has evolved, which represents an approach to public administration reform (Katsamunska, 2012; Pollitt, 2003, 2007; Hood, 2001). The NPM approach has been adopted by governments to enhance public organisations through the use of private sector management techniques such as using performance measures and target setting (Pollitt, 2003, 2007). Although predominantly adopted in Western countries in the early years of its development (see Ma, 2008), its adoption has expanded across other regions; this approach is now discussed in depth as it is used extensively by the Saudi authorities.

3.3 New Public Management Approach

According to the United Nations Development Programme (2020), public administration reforms can be comprehensive and can bring changes to many aspects of government organisations through processes of re-shaping organisational structure, decentralisation, personnel management, public finance, and results-based management. NPM is the most commonly adopted public administration approach used as a reform tool globally (Hood, 1995).

The origin of the NPM movement dates back to the 1970s (Gruening, 2001). It first emerged in the UK during the 1980s and then began being adopted in other regions,

bringing reforms to the United States, Australia, Sweden, New Zealand, Canada, and elsewhere (Pollitt, 2007; Gruening, 2001). Hood (1991, 1995) was the first scholar to use the term New Public Management (Maesschalck, 2004). As a private sector management tool, NPM is a set of many practices, including an emphasis on performance and on dealing with service users as customers, as well as the application of Total Quality Management (TQM) (Pollitt, 2007, p.110). It is essentially a public administration reform tool that adopts private sector management techniques based on performance management and customer-based service. There is scholarly debate around a comprehensive definition of NPM, but there is an agreement that it involves the importing of private-sector concepts, techniques, and values into the public sector (Pollitt, 2003, 2007).

According to Hood (1991), there are seven aspects of new public management: enhanced management, performance standards, outputs orientation, decentralisation, promoting the idea of competition, private sector management and cost reduction. Gruening (2001) identified 20 characteristics of NPM: budget cuts, accountability for performance, performance auditing, privatisation, customers one-stop shops, decentralisation, strategic planning and management separation of provision and production, competition, performance measurement, changed management style, contracting out, flexibility, improved accounting, incentives, user charges separation of politics and administration, improved financial management, use of information technology. Similarly, Lane (2002) noted NPM features such as decentralisation, privatisation, incorporation, deregulation, re-regulation, and executive agencies.

Moreover, NPM as management tools are also a 'set of many practices' as described by Pollitt, (2007). In fact, in addition to a larger focus on performance,

Pollit suggested such practices include offering employee's performance-related salaries, and he outlined the competitive tendering and league tables introduced to the public sector, thus mirroring private sector practices (2007, p. 110). Of note, Pollit described the TQM practice of treating those who use public services as "customers" as being commensurate with the NPM approach.

NPM reforms are implemented for three main reasons: finance, efficiency and service quality. According to Gruening, (2001), NPM has been adopted in the last several decades by the US government to address issues such as financial incompetence, inefficiency and corruption (Gruening, 2001). Likewise, Dixon, Kouzmin, and Korac-Kakabadse, (1996) have suggested that improving performance and accountability are the reasons that led Australia to implement New Public Management reforms. Brown, Ryan and Parker (2000) also suggest that governments apply NPM to seek greater efficiency, higher quality of service, and enhanced customer experience.

Pollitt (2007) suggested that NPM has benefitted some countries, stating that NPM has ensured a positive improvement in terms of processing times, staff management, and higher productivity. He also stated that there are some measurable efficiency gains, such as an increase in service quality and reduction in government expenses. Similarly, Eisenach, (1994) showed that NPM tools have achieved some progress in relation to the efficiency of the public sector organisations in the case of the USA (cited in Gruening, 2001). Likewise, Brown, Ryan and Parker (2000) found that commercialisation of public sector service may lead to better service delivery. New Public Management as a theory and a tool for government reforms has also been criticised by scholars, with Pollitt (2007) implying that NPM reforms do not necessarily lead to a positive impact on organisational

performance. Also, Shi (2023) reminds us that the theoretical basis for NPM is bounded in private sector management approaches, yet ignores the fundamental differences between the public and private sector, particularly with regard to their values orientation. Shi (2023) suggests that whereas the public sector is oriented toward the public as part of its social contract, the private sector is oriented toward a targeted and small network of individuals. Zhang (2015) reminds us of the diverse and at times complicated public sector aims compared to the specific objectives purported by private sector organisations: whereas public services personnel must have common values with the population, private sector personal follow objectives that target profit maximisation. Zhang's perspective can be interpreted through an institutional theory lens. The basis of legitimacy for organisations can be seen when their objectives are recognisable by the culture in which their service is based, an indicator of this being common beliefs (cultural-cognitive pillar); under the regulative pillar, such indicators include rules and sanction, with expedience set as the basis of compliance (Scott, 2013).

Lapuente and Van de Walle (2020) summarised several empirical studies in an endeavour to extrapolate the current understanding and concerns around the effects of NPM in the context of delivery of public services and policy. Their summation included the assertion that "NPM reforms may crowd out other reforms or values" (p11). An example they cite to illustrate this perspective is that when NPM reforms focus on an individual organisation's performance [for instance, the inspections service in this case study] then they crowd out the attention given to the functioning of the entire programme [i.e. the Ministry]. This is an example of the narrow focus that may inadvertently occur during NPM reforms (see Dunleavy and Hood, 1994, regarding 'agencification' that re-focuses a wider organisational remit

to a narrow objective to increase accountability). It may also occur when attention is diverted from effectiveness to efficiency leading to reduced quality in public services delivery (Hart, Shleifer and Vishny, 1997; Brown, Potoski and Van Slyke, 2016).

Another perspective is seen when organisations become fragmented under NPM, as departments operate independently. Christensen and Lægreid (2004; 2022) suggest NPM reforms' focus on marketisation need to be balanced with an emphasis on collaboration to reduce fragmentation and improve coordination. Such collaboration in organisations can be viewed as an attempt to re-establish shared logics of action; Haveman and Gualtieri (2017) assert that this is part of the cultural-cognitive pillar of institutional theory, and infer that a robust plan that addresses resistance to change would benefit an understanding of the dynamics of institutional logic.

3.3.1 NPM and Performance Management

There are several aspects of public administration and its reform that have been debated within the literature. For instance, Heinrich, (2012), discussed the issue of performance management and target setting, which is part of the NPM approach, and which she states has been implemented in many countries globally as part of a reform of public administration. Performance management refers to all the policies, regulations and strategies that are implemented by public organisations with the intention to raise the performance of an organisation. This topic has been discussed by other public administration scholars. For Hood, Rothstein, and Baldwin, (2001), there are three elements to performance management: information gathering, setting targets and behaviour adjusting (cited in Andrews, 2014). Similarly, Boyne

(2010) highlights three elements comprising performance management in the public sector: performance measurement, target setting and reward and punishment (cited in Andrews, 2014).

In light of the Saudi public administration reforms, the implementation of performance management can be seen in every government organisation including the MHRSD (ADAA, 2020). Additionally, some of the CEDA and VRO regulations are based on the principles of performance management embodied in NPM, which clearly will affect the work of labour administration systems - in the case of this study, the four departments of the Human Resources and Social Development Ministry. However, there are areas of caution with performance management systems under NPM. For instance, Piotrowski *et al* (2018) suggested there is an over-reliance on performance management at the expense of other policy drivers. In this sense, performance management is viewed as a set of predominantly quantitative metrics yet these ignore qualitative measures, which may have unintended consequences including displacing goals (for instance, where a management team focus on targets without prioritising, say, the cultural values within the organisation or the wider community it serves) (Hyndman and McGeough, 2008; Piotrowski, Berliner and Ingrams, 2022). An institutional theory interpretation of this rests within the pillars: focusing on the regulative aspects without the balance of the normative and cultural-cognitive indicators (Scott, 2013)

3.3.2. Key Performance Indictors

KPIs are performance measurements — financial and non-financial indicators organisations apply to know how successful they are (Velimirović, Velimirović, and Stanković, 2011). KPIs are usually seen as private sector management techniques,

however, they are being used extensively in the public sector to better enhance the performance of the governmental organisation and employees (Zakaria, *et al.,* 2011).

KPIs can change behaviours of organisations and can lead to better management of an organisation and improve operational performance (Setiawan and Purba, 2020), therefore, it could be argued that introducing KPIs as part of these reforms is likely to affect the nature of work and employment in the MHRSD. The use of key performance indicators in the public sector is considered relatively new as this method of measuring and monitoring organisational and staff performance is associated with the private sector (Zakaria *et al.,* 2011). Organisations — either public or private — have different types of performance measurements all with the aim of increasing efficiency and effectiveness. Organisations practice combinations of different types of performance management such as Total Quality Management, performance appraisals and most importantly, Key Performance Indicators; each includes activities to establish goals and monitor and appraise staff (Zakaria *et al.,* 2011).

The use of KPIs in the public sector has been hotly debated. Heath (2019, p41) argued that key performance indicators as a tool of control remain imperfect for public organisations. Arguing that there is a tendency in public sector organisations towards "simplistic performance measurement packages, perverse indicators and unintended consequences", he suggests public sector organisations explore a communicative rationality when developing performance measurement that involves a more participatory and deliberative approach. Lonti and Gregory (2007) in a study of the impact of the key performance indicators that applied to reform of the New Zealand public administration from 1992 to 2002 found that key

performance indicators are not effective and may lead to artificial results and outcome. They found, for instance, an emphasis on choosing readily-measurable outcomes that placed departments in a good light whilst more qualitative performance measures were not considered. On the other hand, Dipura and Soediantono (2022) found many key benefits for key performance indicators including enhancing decision making, improving performance, and reducing cost. Similarly, Badawy *et al.* (2016) found that KPIs as a management tool can allow organisations to achieve the best possible performance and outcome.

The Saudi National Transformation Plan (NTP) outlines key aims, particularly around effective communication and policy co-ordination between the different government agencies, especially around elements of budgetary reform (Moshashai, Leber and Savage, 2020). Organisational KPIs have been set that outline what departments are expected to achieve that are couched in terms reflecting oversight and spending rationalisation (*ibid.,* p393). Interestingly, reports on the nature of the operationalisation of the KPIs were couched in terms such as "..as officials are forced to define goals.." (Warner, 2018), suggesting a top-down nature to their implementation. Moshashai, Leber and Savage (2020, p394) suggest the oversight of CEDA imposed on Ministries as part of reforms and introduction of KPIs means that the budgetary process will be 'less subject to manipulation for individual benefit'. Also, an earlier study by Idris (2007) into new performance measures in the New Zealand public sector had found that public sector agencies and individual staff members in Saudi Arabia were unfamiliar with new management structures being introduced at the time and had not recognised their value; when that is coupled with the lack of support from senior management that they also found, it is not difficult to see that resistance to change was common. Under Vision 2030, a national centre

for performance management in the public sector has been established to oversee the alignment of goals and monitor and evaluate the new programmes established (Alghamdi *et al.*, 2022). This initiative, whilst resting within the regulative pillar of institutional theory, also establishes the constitutive schema reflected in the basis of order of the cultural-cognitive pillar (Scott, 2013).

As a means of assessing individual performance with employees, KPIs are considered quantifiable and objective. They have been used successfully in both the private and public sector with authors such as Garengo and Sardi (2021) citing an increase in interest across the public sector. Indeed, Popa (2015) suggested that KPIs are particularly useful as they can link an individual's performance with the organisation's overall goals. Careful design and implementation helps prevent difficulties arising, such as a misalignment between organisational goals and departmental or individual goals (De Waal, 2010). In fact, Parmenter (2007) developed a strategic framework for use within government agencies that helps address or mitigate against some of the pitfalls that arise with KPI implementation. Strategies include organisations adopting a fair, transparent approach, with adequate training for their implementation. Importantly, this also supports fostering an inclusive culture that encourages employees to participate in the change process and that helps align goals (see also (Alghamdi *et al.,* 2022).

To summarise these points, there is merit in aligning the use of KPIs with the three pillars of neo-institutional theory, demonstrating how KPIs are not only tools for measurement but also integral to shaping and maintaining the formal, normative, and cognitive structures within an organisation, particularly during times of organisational change. The regulative pillar focuses on formal rules, policies, and regulations that govern behaviour within an organisation (Scott, 2013). This

corresponds to quantifiable and objective KPIs (Popa (2015) and their objective nature aligns with the formal measurement and accountability mechanisms that are a key aspect of the regulative pillar. Likewise, references to frameworks by De Waal (2010) and Parmenter (2007) suggest the importance of structured and regulated approaches to KPI implementation; such frameworks can act as formal guides to ensure that KPIs are correctly aligned with organisational goals and regulations. Again, adequate and transparent training and implementation strategies to KPI implementation emphasise the importance of formalised processes and procedures that govern the use of KPIs, aligning with the regulative pillar.

The normative pillar is reflected particularly when Popa (2015) highlights the importance of linking individual performance with an organisation's overall goals, thus reflecting the shared values and norms that guide individual and collective behaviour within organisations. Also, Alghamdi *et al.* (2022) emphasise fostering an inclusive culture that encourages employee participation; such inclusivity and engagement reflect the normative expectations of fairness, transparency, and collective responsibility.

The cultural-cognitive pillar encompasses the shared beliefs and cognitive frameworks that shape how individuals perceive and interpret their environment (Scott, 2013). This corresponds to how Garengo and Sardi (2021) imply a shared understanding and cognitive acceptance of KPIs as legitimate and effective tools for performance measurement. Likewise, Parmenter (2007) suggests that strategic frameworks help mitigate pitfalls by aligning KPIs with the cognitive schemas of the organisation, facilitating employees' understanding and acceptance of the changes. The emphasis on fostering an inclusive culture that aligns goals and encourages participation indicates a cultural-cognitive approach to embedding new practices

within the organisational mindset, ensuring that changes are internalised and supported by shared beliefs (Parmenter, 2007; Alghamdi *et al.,* 2022).

3.3.3. NPM and HRM

Another issue related to public administration is the management of employees within public administration bodies. Human Resources Management (HRM) comprises a set of management practices that aim to achieve organisations' goals and objectives. Schuler and Jackson (1987) give examples of such practices including HR planning, recruitment and selection, development, training, performance appraisal and pay. All of these management activities are conducted to ensure efficiencies and thus raise performance and achieve strategic goals of an organisation. Dessler (2013) defined HRM as the management of human capital by a similar set of policies but also including orientation, reward systems and having effective labour relations. According to Brown (2007), the domain of HRM in the public sector covers management practices related to employment, motivation of employees, development and reward.

According to Ingraham (2012), HRM has encountered many changes in moving from personnel management to human capital management and from employees being trapped by rigid bureaucracies to being active employees in public sector organisations. Waxin and Bateman (2009, p. 103) suggest that "the drive to make government more business-like has had significant impacts on public sector employment". One of these impacts on human resources management within the public sector is that because public administration reforms may involve downsizing of organisations, employees are at risk of being made redundant (Ingraham, 2012).

In the case of Saudi Arabia, redundancy has not been a feature of reforms because the political system of Saudi Arabia is influenced by the mentality of the rentier state and the neo-patrimonial system, and the government is aware that "firing" people would create political instability (Baumann, 2019). The rentier state refers to the construct developed by Beblawi and Luciani (1987) that categorises countries such as Saudi Arabia on their disproportionate reliance on inherited resource – oil wealth in this case. Such systems tend to be autocratic and paternalistic, and governments redistribute their exceptional mineral wealth to businesses and citizens via infrastructural development, subsidies and free education and healthcare, for example. Therefore, the rentier state concept plays a significant role in the type of politics and institutions in Saudi Arabia. According to Moshashai, Leber and Savage, (2020), oil wealth and the rentier system are deeply rooted in Saudi life, and the rentier mentality formulates a social contract between the government rulers and the citizens.

When viewed through the lens of institutional theory, the workings of a rentier state reflect some of the mechanisms within the three pillars (Scott, 2013). For instance, as discussed earlier in the section, HRM policy includes recruitment and selection activity (see Dessler, 2013). The basis of legitimacy under the normative pillar is said to be morally governed (Scott, 2013); preferring re-deployment over redundancy demonstrates the paternalistic approach of the rentier state, caring for the employees' continuing employment, even if the motive is in part to avoid political instability. One previous example of the threat of instability for Saudi Arabia occurred in 1980, when austerity measures induced by an oil price slump were effectively blocked by the powerful Najdi tribe (Crystal, 1995; see also Baumann, 2019). The fiscal arrangements for being able to retain and recruit into the workforce

thus avoiding redundancy has been resourced through stockpiling funds during times of high oil prices (Moshashai, Leber and Savage, 2020). Amany and El Anshay (2011) suggested even before Vision 2030 was introduced that in rentier economies such as Saudi Arabia, such stockpiles – not only from oil revenue but also from cultivating PIF initiatives[2] – would continue as the practice is normalised within society. This becomes a binding expectation (normative pillar basis of order, Scott, 2013) amongst a population that has become used to such high investment in public services, just as those citizens in employment have come to view income as synonymous with status (and citizenship) (Tagliapietra, 2017). In fact, Moshashai, Leber and Savage (2020, p.383) suggest that Saudi Citizens have come to expect "easy employment" in government office – jobs that are easy to obtain, not strenuous or taxing, and guaranteed 'for life'. Elements such as performance appraisal were not a feature pre-Vision 2030.

However, the reforms that have been introduced under Vision 2030 also have concomitant practices and procedures that were established to regulate activities such as those within HRM. Indeed, the interface between NPM and HRM processes would appear seamless – Gruening (2001) identifies several areas such as performance measurement and changed management style that are both central to the NPM approach and congruent with good HRM practice. Yet there are criticisms of the NPM approach as it applies to HR activities. It has been said that there has developed a disconnect between efficiency and effectiveness; when NPM reforms are seen to be centred around improving organisational efficiency (and cost cutting)

---

[2] The PIF (Public Investment Fund) is a centralised budget (Sovereign Wealth Fund) that organisations can apply to for strategic initiatives that support the enhancement of the organisation and rest within the aims of The Vision: https://www.pif.gov.sa/en/who-we-are/our-history/ .

some authors have argued that the broader societal interest is neglected, particularly when looking at public services such as housing for marginalised groups (Laffin, 2019).

Several important HRM activities are linked to a positive impact on organisations' performance. For instance, one key HRM activity is recruitment and selection. Recruitment refers to the process of attracting the right number of employees with the right qualifications while selection refers to the process of choosing employees to meet job vacancies in an organisation (Gusdorf, 2008). Many HRM activities can be seen as falling within the concept of the regulative pillar of institutional theory, particularly due to the tight employment legislation that underpins policy and procedure (see Dibben and Wood, 2024b). Vison 2030 reforms have introduced strict recruitment and selection criteria in government agencies that appear to reduce practices such as the influence of Wasta in selection (Vision 2030, 2017; 2022).

Another important activity that falls under the remit of HRM is training and development of employees. Training and development refers to a system that enables employees to acquire the knowledge and skills needed to perform their job effectively (Armstrong, 2006). Training is essential for public service employees, particularly with the progression of regulatory change within the workplace in Saudi Arabia since the introduction of the reforms. According to Rajasekar and Khan (2013), training is important because it enables public employees to cope with challenges at work. In addition to this, it is important because it helps to raise the overall performance of an organisation. Some organisations consider their employees as potential resources; investing in employee development by providing enough training becomes part of overall corporate strategy (Rajasekar and Khan,

2013). However, other authors have found some organisations treat their employees as a commodity and emphasise the idea of maximum use of them with minimum cost possible (Mabey and Graeme, 1997). In regard to this, an Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development report stated that it is important to view public employees as an essential part of any public organisation and to provide them with training (OECD, 1997). Contextualising this within Saudi Arabia, the OECD report stated that training is vital for transition economies such as Saudi Arabia because these countries are in the process of reform (OECD, 1997).

Training and development tend to be linked to employee performance appraisal. Performance appraisal is the process of assessing an employee's performance and communicating with them on how they are doing in order to improve their work (Armstrong, 2006). Within HRM, competency-based models are a preferred option for organising training and development and offer the employee and employer opportunities to assess individual aspects of performance that may require improvement. Although competency-based models are largely seen as the way forward for public-sector organisations in order to deliver high-quality public services whilst also contributing to the knowledge-based economy (Waxin and Bateman, 2009), there are criticisms and challenges. Selvaraj, Ghosh and Jagannathan (2016), found that employees subjectively experienced reviews in ways that led to distrust (when 'negative' appraisals were received) and those who received 'positive' appraisals were seen to relate with contempt with peers whom they perceived to be poor performers. Although potentially seen as a sales pitch, whereby departments can readily evidence good practice and argue the case to others that they are performing well, performance reviews may not recognise the

variety of skills an employee has in more nuanced workplace roles; they may treat competencies as a quantitative measure of performance thus omitting qualitative aspects, and the reviews themselves can appear to be overly-focused on what "should" work instead of what "does" work (Barbieri *et al.,* 2023).

Pay and reward are also important HRM activities. These two terms refer to the monetary and non-Monetary rewards that employees receive when they perform their job (Armstrong, 2006). Finally, there are some other HRM activities that differ from one organisation to another such as HR planning, motivation policies, work life balance policies.

Turning the focus of NPM to incorporate HRM, Brown (2007) stated that the application of an NPM approach has led to the practice of sophisticated HRM techniques in the public sector, which has created changes to employee's working patterns and intensity of work. Moreover, Brown (2007) argued that the HRM model within the public sector has shifted from personnel management to a more modern model that includes all groups and is based on performance appraisal, treating staff as the most important resource. This shift in the human resources management practice is attributed to the managerial restructure and reforms in the public sector (Brown, 2007). Also, Tian (2008) reminds us that due to the primary differences in value orientation between the public and private sectors, HRM practices differ in some respects. They cite a fairer recruitment and selection structure in the public sector, suggesting that the private sector had been beset with discriminatory practices; it might also suggest a note of caution be used when policymakers are determining which aspects of private sector operations to adopt during reforms under an NPM model.

3.4 Reforming the public sector administration in Saudi Arabia within the labour administration system

Having outlined the concepts surrounding the development of public administration reforms, this section now proceeds to review the literature as applicable to this study. Beginning with a reflection on the country and developments that have led up to the reforms, it then addresses the known situation within the Ministry and associated departments, reviews associated literature, and identifies the gap in knowledge that leads to the specific research questions to be addressed.

The delivery and implementation of the public administration reforms are the responsibility of two new government entities: the Council of Economic and Development Affairs (CEDA) and the Vision Realisation Office (VRO) (Vision Realisation Office, 2020). These two new entities brought changes to the work and employment in the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development. CEDA is a government council that is led by the Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia to plan, implement and control the public administration reforms. VRO on the other hand was created by the Ministry to implement and manage the delivery of the reform's agenda. For example, what was the Ministry of Labour Administration (now MHRSD) has twice merged with other ministries since 2016, and these mergers were implemented based on decisions made by CEDA (Vision Realisation Office, 2020). Likewise, labour administration bodies are now implementing management performance measures such as Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) through the VRO at the Human Resources and Social Development Ministry (MGRSD); these are discussed further in section 2.4.3.

The MHRSD has begun a strategic enhancement programme by delivering on a series of labour market structural policies. One example is the aim to make the private sector more attractive for Saudi nationals through two initiatives. The first is the Saudization programme, which refers to a labour market regulation that encourages employers to employ Saudi nationals in the private sector to reduce unemployment (Alotaibi, 2014; Alhammami, 2022). This programme had its roots in the 1970s in Saudi Arabia when the government began a series of 5-year development plans to improve the economy and reduce the reliance on foreign workers (Ewain, 1999). Early impact of the plans was seen in the development of localised jobs and in the increased participation of Saudi Nationals in the workforce (Ibrahimkhan, 2007). However, Alhammami (2022) argues that the programme has not had the expected results, evidencing that despite the Saudi government legislating to insist the public and private sectors localise jobs and recruit Saudi Nationals, efforts within the private sector have been negligible: in 1984, 85.18% of the total workforce were foreign nationals, but in 2014 this had only fallen to 84.53% (Alhammami 2022, p.46).

Perhaps because of the deemed failure of the first Saudisation programme, the second programme, Nitaqat, was launched in 2010 (Alshanbri *et al.,* 2015). Peck (2017) stated that the program was approved in 2010 as a Saudisation initiative whose aim was to increase job opportunities within the private sector for Saudis, which would therefore reduce unemployment rates amongst Saudi nationals. In essence, it was a regulative mechanism (Scott, 2013) from the government that was intended to enforce the recruitment of Saudi citizens over expatriates within private sector organisations by stratifying businesses by sector and size with different targets and incentives for compliance. Nitaqat is the Arabic word for 'zones' or

'ranges', and in the context of the development plan, it outlined the categorisation of private sector companies based on the number of employees (Alhammami 2022). The first category is very small firms with a minimal number of employees (1-9 employees), then small firms with slightly more employees, but still low numbers (10-49 employees). Medium firms are classified as having 50-499 employees, with very large firms employing between 500-2,999 employees. The largest firm size in the highest category is 3,000+ employees (Peck, 2017).

Furthermore, the Saudi Ministry of Labour Administration has added two additional categories within the private sector: existing established organisations and newly established organisations (Alghamedi, 2016). Newly established organisations have a one-year grace period before the stipulations of Nitaqat must be complied with; this mandatory compliance is demanded across all categories, including the smallest of firms. Also, Koyame-Marsh, (2016), and Alghamedi, (2016), stated that each private enterprise is further banded into Premium, Green, Yellow and Red zones, with the premium rating being awarded to those companies which achieve 'superior nationalisation performance' (highest number of Saudi employees) and the scale reducing until the 'red' zone, reflecting poor nationalisation performance and employing the lowest ratio of Saudi nationals into the workforce. These categories are incentivised to encourage upwards progression ['superior' nationalisation performance], and companies that fail to meet regulatory nationalisation demands are penalised; incentives include lower processing fees and more flexibility in managing expatriate employees, whereas penalties include a SR 2,400 per expatriate that is deemed 'redundant' (De Bel-Air, 2018.).

This policy is a direct forerunner to Vision 2030, and some have declared its aims were consistent with those of Vision 2030 (see Alghamedi, 2016). However, others

are more critical of both Saudisation and Nitaqat, with Peck (2017) suggesting that Nitaqat had inadequate planning and implementation, and it incurred high costs resulting in the closure of around 11,000 firms and subsequent job-losses. Saudization has had a better outcome in the public sector, perhaps explained by the fact that many Saudi nationals prefer working in the public sector due to the better job prospects and increased social status it offers (Fakeeh, 2009; Alshanbri, Khalfan, and Maqsood, 2014, Alsheikh, 2015; Peck, 2017). However, Alhammami (2022) suggests if there is a similar lack of strategic planning as has been seen in both of these programmes, one may predict Vision 2030 will not receive the expected results.

In addition, there are other policies that have been developed by the second labour policy entity, the Saudi Human Resources Development Fund. This fund is levying fees and taxes on private sector companies who hire a high number of expatriates in order to cut the number of foreign workers and replace them with Saudi citizens to reduce unemployment. Saudi Arabia is also expanding the job market by promoting entrepreneurship programmes. For example, the Small Enterprise Owners and the 9/10th Programme are mainly concerned with developing entrepreneurship among Saudi citizens.

3.4.1 Overview of Public Administration Reforms in Saudi Arabia

There are many expectations of the public administration reforms. Public administration reforms can bring many changes to public organisations, including changes to their culture and inclusion, reorganisation of work, and the quality of services. According to McCandless *et al.* (2022), it is expected that public organisations are diverse, inclusive, fair and equitable and welcome all groups.

Furthermore, public institutions should apply rules and practices that solve any issues related to any sort of inequalities and exclusion in the government workplaces. Gooden (2020) emphasised the role of governments in creating and maintaining standards that are free from discrimination against race, gender, and religion. Likewise, reorganisation of work and raising the quality of services are one of the public administration reforms' features within government sectors in particular. Pollitt (2007) and Peters and Pierre (2012) emphasised that changes in public administration can bring many changes to the organisation of work in public sector organisations.

3.4.2 Change in government bodies

Changes in organisational structure are reflected in the number of mergers that have happened in various Saudi Arabian ministries. For example, in 2019, following a royal decree from King Salman, the Ministry of Energy underwent a major organisational restructuring and was divided into the Ministry of Industry and Mineral Resources and the Ministry of Energy. The Ministry of Labour Administration has also undergone two mergers. There have also been significant changes in the organisational process, with government bodies now applying private sector management techniques. For example, government bodies are implementing key performance indicators linked to and monitored by high-level administrators such as the Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia through the Council of Economic and Development Affairs.

In addition, the government has launched new institutions to monitor the performance of its organisations. For example, the National Centre for Performance Measurement (ADAA) monitors the performance of all government bodies, including

labour administration bodies. An independent government body, ADAA was founded in 2015 (ADAA, 2020) and has three main aims. First, it builds and initialises performance measurement processes in public entities by providing support for unified performance tools and models to increase efficiency. Second, ADAA provides quarterly reports to the prime minister on the performance of government entities. This report concerns delivery progress towards strategic goals, the achievement of KPIs, and beneficiary satisfaction with public services. The purpose is consistent monitoring of government bodies and their development to ensure the realisation of Vision 2030.

3.4.3 Implementation of the NPM approach in the Saudi government organisations

As seen in previous sections, the Saudi public administration reforms under Vision 2030 are largely being delivered under the NPM umbrella (Kinninmont, 2017). According to Christensen (2012), national administrative institutions are increasingly challenged by marketisation, privatisation, and deregulation, which are features of NPM reforms (Gruening, 2001). The Saudi public administration reforms provide one such example. The core principle of the reforms is the diversification of the Saudi economy, with the government seeking to establish and approach new markets and empower entrepreneurs and small and medium enterprises (Vision 2030, 2017). The work towards becoming an ambitious nation is a social investment, and the government is attempting to rehabilitate that idea of 'work hard' among its citizens, to empower women, and to become effective, transparent, accountable, and highly performing (Vision 2030, 2017). However, there are at least two aspects of this that require comment in the context of this study, as Vision 2030 is complex, covering many facets and sectors with many objectives (Strategic

Objectives and Vision Realization Programmes, 2017). A major aspect is that the complexity is a challenge for the programme of reform along with the expectations of delivery within a tight timescale. Also, some of the very language used within the Vision is at odds with that associated with NPM. NPM uses terms such as 'efficiency' and not equality, and talks about the public as 'customers', but throughout the pillars of Vision 2030 the public are referred to as 'citizens'. Xanthopoulou, and Plimakis (2021) suggest this raises doubt as to how successful integrating private sector notions to public sector reform can truly be with such a dichotomy within the very language of the programme.

3.4.4 The Use of Key Performance Indictors in Saudi Arabia

Although the most recent public reforms that began in 2016 appear to be significant, and the Saudi government agencies appear to be working more efficiently based on NPM (Kinninmont, 2017; Asquer and Alzahrani, 2020), little has yet been made public about their direct impact. One example of reform in this sector in Saudi Arabia that is seen as an example of NPM is that the labour administration bodies are now implementing management performance measures such as Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) through the VRO at the Human Resource and Social Development Ministry. This section, therefore, now explores the use of KPIs as contextualised to Saudi Arabia, which as is seen in later chapters, was reported directly by the participants within the ministry and therefore their operationalisation and impact is starting to be felt by the employees. Key performance indicators and performance appraisal were discussed at length by several participants. For instance, one participant discussed the need to send monthly updates on organisational indicators each month to his line manager, other participants discussed the nature of their implementation as applied through new HR expectations and procedures,

particularly the adoption of the forced distribution ranking system. Therefore, it is important to establish the current situation regarding their use in Saudi Arabia.

Alharbi (2018) assessed the use of performance appraisal within the Saudi Civil Service, finding that employees accepted the need for the system, but they also criticised its operationalisation in areas such as defining goals. He outlined the performance appraisal mechanisms and model used within the public sector, including factors such as the mandatory yearly review by line managers and attainment goals being set with the worker (Alharbi, 2019, pp. 106-107). Of note, the Saudi Civil Service uses a forced distribution rating system (FD), referred to later by participants as 'forced ranking'. These systems operate through a mechanism whereby supervisors compare and rank employees against other employees within the department. Typically, the supervisors set goals and competencies to be achieved with the employee, then rate each employee's performance in achieving them, with 'scores' ranked into three categories – top, intermediary (vitals) and poor performers (see Mulligan and Bull Schaefer, 2011).

Stewart, Gruys, and Storm, (2010) describe two particular methods of carrying out forced distribution, the first being managers ranking individuals' performance against their peers with a distribution curve plotting all employees from the worst performer along to the highest performer. An alternative is for managers to rate individual employees' performance against a selection of performance standards, rather than all performance standards in a department. In doing so, only a percentage of individuals will fall into a set category – so 20% 'superior', 20% 'above average' etc.

Forced distribution rating systems have had a mixed review within the field. Grote (2005), a proponent of the system, suggests any controversy or criticism of the system does not arise from how it is designed but states poor implementation leads to problems. Gill *et al.* (2019) suggest globally some companies are shifting away from ratings-based performance management, but suggest uncertainty exists in what will replace the system; certainly from this study it is clear they form part of the reforms in Saudi Arabia. Cappelli and Conyon (2018) found performance appraisals become a significant component of a 'relational, open-ended view of employment'; indeed, Stewart, Gruys, and Storm, (2010) suggest forced distribution ranking allows organisations to effectively identify 'poor performers' leading to timely appropriate support and action, including mentoring, training, or early termination of contract to improve overall workforce performance. In a systematic review, Sahay, and Kaur (2021, p2516) found proponents of forced ranking systems suggest that it is a more dependable system that maintains an equilibrium of being fair and instils trust in stakeholders but add the caveat "until something better comes along". In other words, they recognise the evolution of such systems is continuous, and that as part of the process of continuous improvement and in response to new research, new iterations of performance appraisal such as forced ranking will emerge.

Turning to the link between NPM and performance management, using the lens of neo-institutional theory may offer some understanding of the mechanisms involved. A starting point here is to consider the two systems of forced ranking as described above. Whether managers are ranking individuals against all peers, or against a selection of standards to rank in a quota, both systems can be seen as standing firmly within the domain of the regulative pillar (Scott, 2013) as the indicators are rule-bound and a top-down initiative, therefore stemming from coercive

mechanisms. Indeed, according to Boselie, Van Harten and Veldt. (2019), implementing general rules on individual decisions and strictly adhering to them, as seen in the forced distribution rating in performance management, is characteristic of the organisational culture in public administration. Ibrahim *et al.* (2023, p84) found that such top-down management control over policy and procedures is not a guarantee for producing a "results-oriented culture among public sector employees", which in itself is controversial as that contradicts the tenets of NPM. Klein, Ramos and Deutz (2021) suggest focus should turn to an organisational culture with a conducive environment for innovation and improved performance when reforming public sector organisations; Cao *et al.* (2023) link this to developing leadership, and Klindt, Baadsgaard, and Jørgensen (2023) suggest successful implementation of NPM reforms is seen when the organisational culture adapts to encourage employees to work beyond institutional boundaries. When organisational culture enters into the frame, there then becomes a clear cognitive-cultural element to the use of performance management. Cappelli and Conyon's (2018) notion that performance appraisals are part of a 'relational, open-ended view of employment' implies a shared logic of action between employees and managers (Scott, 2013). Likewise, Beer, Boselie and Brewster (2015) suggest performance goals for employees form part of a multi-dimensional performance construct that includes both employee and societal well-being. Creating a culture where these aims are actualised is rooted in the normative pillar (Scott, 2013) with its basis of compliance reflecting social obligation, and basis of legitimacy being morally governed.

3.5 Saudi Culture and its impact in Workplaces

In section 2.4.1, the setting for this case study was outlined, including the background to Saudi Arabian culture and society. The first consideration was the tribal structure of society, and the continuing presence of the tribes as was discussed, which Maisel (2014, p100) described in the context of "the newly-created Saudi national identity". When this is seen in relation to the Vision 2030 reforms, and specifically within the landscape of the public sector reforms, there are conflicting interpretations within the literature of the impact that the tribes and tribalism are having or will have on outcomes. For instance, Grand and Wolff, (2020), suggest that Crown Prince is steering the country's diversification from oil with a top-down approach to reform: driven by the power of a strong state. From a neo-institutional theory perspective, this can be understood through coercive forces — pressures exerted by authoritative entities like governments to enforce change. In this case, the political power and influence of Crown Prince and the Saudi government are key drivers of the reforms. These coercive forces compel public organisations and other institutions to align with the new policies and strategies outlined in Vision 2030. This demonstrates how political authority and legislative mandates can lead to significant institutional change (Scott, 1987; Ashworth, Boyle, and Delbridge, 2009. However, they also suggest if the approach fails, there will be a return to tried and tested 'old ways' based on tribal and familial loyalty. This approach may be interpreted through normative mechanisms ('honour' being an affective component), but the indicators remain rooted in regulative order (rules, law and sanction) (Scott, 2013). Additionally, Bar (2020) suggests the Saudi Arabian monarchy presents as tribal in essence through emphasising kinship with the tribes; this tribalism becomes leverage to build infrastructure and military forces. Within a

labour administration context, previous literature has revealed paternalism within Saudi organisations (e.g. Kalliny, Cruthirds and Minor, 2006). This has been linked directly to tribal affiliation, where authoritarian, paternalistic managers are reliant on their 'social' leadership skills to manage in workplace settings (Beidas, 2009). Wasta has also been seen to be strongly linked to tribal affiliations, influencing progress and promotion within organisations (AlHussainan *et al.,* 2023). Marquette and Peiffer (2018) suggest that the systems adopted in neo-patrimonial cultures have some implications for relationships between politics and society in general. They suggest that though formally separate, the public and the private sectors have blurred boundaries and allow for more opportunities to appropriate public resources privately than in systems that are more formal and bureaucratic.

However, there are conflicting findings in existing literature about tribalism, loyalty and labour administration. For instance, an earlier study by Dadfar (1993) suggested loyalty as a feature of 'ideal management' should switch from the tribe to the organisation. And yet the majority of participants in a study by Alfalih (2016) suggested loyalty to their organisation / employer is dictated by traditional behaviours and affiliations and Islamic teaching, which suggests a nuanced link between what At-Twaijiri and Al-Muhaiza (1996) term in-groups (relatives, clans and tribes) and others, and employing organisations. In terms of looking towards the three pillars of institutional theory for explanations, this suggests a culturally supported basis of legitimacy and shared logics of action, rooted within the cultural-cognitive pillar (Scott, 2013).

Another major influence on Saudi Arabian culture that impacts strongly in workplace settings as discussed in section 2.4.1 is religion. There is a body of literature that has explored various aspects of religion and religiosity in relation to Saudi Arabia,

- 90 -

the Gulf region in general, and employment issues. For instance Alfalih (2016) found managers' use of informal methods of sanction were used before disciplinary policies because of 'tradition and rules of Islam'. Beidas, (2009), suggests this attitude evolved from Muslims' belief in respect for authority in Islamic teachings. Common (2008) found that in the Gulf region organisational culture and centrality of power is based on religious values and a strong sense of community. Likewise, Islam has a major role in the behaviour of individuals and teams in both the private and public sector (Murtaza, *et al.,* (2014). Indeed, Endot (1995) found several Islamic values that are suggested to have a significant impact on organisations and employees, including discipline, dedication, trustworthiness, and responsibility. An earlier study by Muna (1980) found that decision-making within employment relationships involves a process of consultation founded on Islamic traditions as emphasised in the Quran; this has been seen in several later studies, including Alkhanbshi and Al-Kandi (2014).

Turning to the Quran, Al-Bukhari (ILO, 2012, p22) quotes the Prophet (PBUH):

> *Your servants are your brothers. Allah has put them in your care,*
> *so feed them with what you eat, clothe them in what you wear, and*
> *do not assign tasks s/he cannot bear, if you do so, help them in*
> *their hard job*

According to the Islamic teachings, this correlates with employers providing working environments, policy and practice that protect dignity; Islam forbids degrading labour that prioritises efficiency and profit over employees' welfare (*ibid.*).

When viewed through the study's theoretical lens, such influence on workplaces as seen with the relationship between Islam and workplace relations can be seen as directly attributed to the regulative pillar of institutional theory, predominantly

because all laws including labour laws are founded on Shari'a law. However, there are also cultural-cognitive elements (shared understanding and culturally supported) and normative mechanisms (Scott, 2013).

3.6 Gender issues in the workplace

Women have struggled for decades to have prestigious positions in workplaces that are dominated by men due to the prevailing cultural norms and organisational practices that are often deeply engrained into policy and structure within organisations (El-Sofany *et al.*, 2012; O'Neil and Hopkins, 2015). Ely and Meyerson (2000) argued that such practices perpetuate ongoing division and inequity, and that they are often unconscious or subtle, appearing to be gender-neutral in their mechanisms; a recent study by D'Agostino *et al.* (2022) confirmed that second-generation gender bias (SGGB), a more subtle form of bias, is evident throughout public sector agencies within the US. Early work conducted by Acker (1990;1992) changed the thinking around gender issues in the workplace. Whereas women had been 'seen as the problem' (Britton and Logan, 2008), Acker began to conceptualise 'gendered organisations', stating that gender itself was the central component that "presents in the processes, practices, images and ideologies, and distributions of power" (1992, p. 567) within the workplace.

Turning to Saudi culture, Alfarran, Pyke and Stanton (2018) remind us that gender segregation was enforced within the workplace in accordance with Article 4 of the Saudi Labour Law 2014, meaning that men and women cannot work together in the same place. In addition, in 2013 the Ministry of Labour Administration issued an edict requiring employers to build 'segregation walls' in mixed workplaces (Jiffry, 2013). These cultural norms and laws have been said to contribute to women being

prevented from working in high-ranking positions (Alfarran, 2016). However, the situation has changed with the advent of the socioeconomic reforms that took place in 2016. For example, gender separation in the Saudi working environment has decreased, and now it is more common to see men and women working together in the same place.

There is a large body of literature that has investigated gendered organisations and that covers related concepts including barriers to progression, cultural beliefs and forms of discrimination in the workplace (see Acker, 2012; Agarwal, 2018). The following three sections discuss three common concerns and relates them to what is known already about them within the context of the workplace in Saudi Arabia – gender discrimination, gender segregation and gender stereotypes.

3.6.1. Gender discrimination

Salvini (2014 p. 2424) defines gender discrimination as "any situation where a person is denied an opportunity or misjudged solely on the basis of their sex". It represents any unequal treatment based on gender and describes any situation where a person displays prejudice towards another that they wouldn't if they were of another sex. When extrapolated to the labour administration arena, the term relates to behaviour that directly prevents a person from being recruited to or from progressing within the organisation, or even restricts them from filling certain roles due to their gender. Gender discrimination is known to lead to significant barriers to women, particularly in terms of progressing in the workforce and obtaining promotion (Alfarran, Pyke and Stanton, 2018; D'Agostino *et al.,* 2022). Alfarran, Pyke and Stanton (2018) also describe how, despite some discriminatory legal and

social laws being removed in Saudi Arabia, there remains discriminatory practices, such as companies favouring overseas workers over recruiting Saudi women.

It is well documented in the literature that women in Saudi Arabia face limited employment opportunities, particularly in the face of gender discrimination during the recruitment and selection process (Al-Asfour *et al.,* 2017). Much of this is seen in the public sector, but Haddad (2013) reports that Saudi men are paid 50% more than Saudi women in the private sector due to the nature of the opportunities open to them compared to women. Such discrimination restricts women's access to employment despite the fact that Saudi women on average have higher educational attainment than Saudi men; this in part is because women lack vocational skills and experience due to restricted opportunities to gain them (Alfarran, Pyke, and Stanton, 2018).

D'Agostino *et al.* (2022 p336) describe overt gender discrimination as 'first generation bias', i.e. those policies, practices and behaviour within organisations that are directly discriminatory or biased. More subtle, perhaps, is what they term 'second-generation gender bias (SGGB)'. SGGB is described as comprising organisational practices that on the surface appear neutral, but cause women to be treated unfairly in ways that are not always apparent. Ely and Meyerson (2000) provide an example to illustrate the complexities of the concept using 'work-life balance policies'. Common practice across organisations in both the public and private sector, such policies allow for flexible shift patterns and accommodate leave arrangements that typically cover family emergencies. However, although framed under an "equal opportunity" approach, they are seen by the personnel within the organisation as a "woman's problem"; such policies and interventions do not challenge the organisational culture which the authors suggest becomes "the

pervasive and deeply entrenched imbalance of power in the social relations between men and women" (Ely and Meyerson 2000, p. 113). An institutional theory explanation for this dynamic rests between the normative and the cultural-cognitive pillars (Scott, 2013). Whereas work-life balance policies would have a basis of legitimacy by being morally governed (normative pillar), the shared understanding of them within the workplace as "women's problems" are grounded in the indicators of the cultural-cognitive pillar (Scott, 2013).

3.6.2. Gender segregation

The second concern regarding gender is one that is particularly topical in Saudi Arabia. Gender segregation is described as the act of separating colleagues into 'men only' and 'women only' spaces at work (Alfarran, 2016). Labour legislation within the Kingdom stipulates specific requirements within the workplace at both policy and practice level. The Labor Law itself came into being by Royal Decree No. 51 in 2005 (Ministry of Labor and Social Development, 2022) and there are some amendments with articles added and repealed as it has been updated over the years. Article 4 of the Labor Law states "When implementing the provisions of this Law, employers and workers shall adhere to the provisions of Sharia" (MLSD, 2022, p. 4). Although it is clear within the reform proposals that de-segregation in the workplace is part of the Vision 2030, there is yet to be a clear legislative change to that effect. A new provision within the Labor Law was decreed in 2019 which prohibits discrimination against women in terms of hiring and salary (Royal Decree No. 684 of 27/11/1440 H, 30 July 2019; see UNDP, 2022); this decree included direct amendments to the Labor Law including the definition of worker being any person of either gender working for an employer. However, there is no amendment to the segregation of the sexes within the workplace, which falls under the

overarching premise of Article 4; the 6-foot walls Jiffry (2013) described may still legally remain, despite the guidance within Vision 2030.

Authors have found that segregation has become a barrier to women's progress, particularly by limiting their access to types of employment. This also applies to restricting access to training opportunities, leading to professional and social isolation and what may be perceived as limited visibility (Al-Asfour *et al.,* (2017). Jiffry (2013) reports that because of the requirements for segregation women are more likely to apply for jobs in education (where over 80% of staff are female) or other female-centred jobs and are 'slow' at applying for jobs in areas such as tourism. Another aspect of this is the cost to recruiting organisations as a direct consequence of the legal and cultural requirements for ensuring same-sex workspace [full segregation].

Recent changes in the law have seen the need for women to have a guardian when travelling lifted, which may impact on women by facilitating travel to and with work. In the same vein, there are stipulations within Vision 2030 that set out the aim to increase women's representation in the economy to 30% (from 17%) (Vision 2030, 2017). However, the proposed de-segregation of the workplace remains unclear in the absence of legislative change. There is yet to be research evaluation of the de-segregation within the workplace of the Ministry since the reforms began, hence this being part of the focus in looking at the effects on gender issues in the workplace.

3.6.3. Gender stereotypes

The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR, 2023) defines gender stereotype as "a generalized view or preconception about attributes or characteristics, or the roles that are or ought to be possessed by, or performed by,

women and men". They suggest gender stereotypes are harmful by nature – both when overtly hostile and when seemingly innocent, mirroring first-generation and second-generation gender bias as previously mentioned. Alfarran, Pyke and Stanton (2018) link stereotyping with discrimination, suggesting that holding limited information about a worker's ability may result in discriminatory employment decisions based on stereotype.

It has been seen that roles and expectations based on gender stereotypes in Saudi Arabia are based on tribal and cultural norms. Furthermore, they have been seen to influence performance appraisal and leadership assessments, thus impacting on employment practice (see Alfarran, 2016; Song, 2019). Aldossari, and Calvard (2022) have argued that Saudi culture 'demands' women to conform to stereotypes, with families restricting women from working long hours or in some departments. In a sense this normalises stereotypes, which in itself becomes a barrier or a limit to women's opportunities (Song, 2019; Hillard, 2018).

It is also evident from some studies that gender stereotypes may shape the perceptions and unconscious bias that manifests in subtle forms of gender discrimination such as differential treatment of colleagues based on gender. In addition, some women may be complicit in perpetuating stereotyping; Aldoubi (2014) found in a study of Saudi women's experiences in accessing leadership positions that the actions of women who were not supportive of other women were a feature in stereotypical behaviour directed towards women leaders.

In summary, gender discrimination, gender segregation, and gender stereotypes pose significant challenges to gender equality and inclusive governance reforms in the public sector in Saudi Arabia. Addressing these issues requires comprehensive

policy reforms, cultural awareness training, and targeted interventions to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion within government organizations. Efforts to dismantle systemic barriers and challenge entrenched gender norms are essential for fostering a more inclusive and equitable public sector that harnesses the full potential of all its employees, regardless of gender.

3.7 Literature Review Summary

The two literature review chapters have presented a review of the literature on key aspects of public administration, labour administration, human resources management issues and the new public management approach alongside the theoretical framework for this study.

The first literature review chapter began with setting the theoretical framework. In presenting a discussion around the role of theory in research, it outlined and justified the choice of neo-institutional theory and in particular the three pillars (regulative, cultural-cognitive and normative) through which the findings will be debated. It set the Saudi socio-economic background to the study, mapping out the case study for this research and defined terms relevant to labour administration, culture norming and organisational change.

This second literature review chapter discussed the NPM approach to public administration reform as contextualised within the Saudi Arabian HRM and overall labour administration setting. Including debate around concepts related to KPIs and performance management, the chapter explored research related to the issues under study that formed part of the questions later discussed in the participant interviews concerning potential gender and workplace consequences.

On reviewing the Saudi Arabian public administration situation and status, and the 2016 public administration reforms agenda (the Vision 2030), the impact of the reforms on the Saudi Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development could not be ascertained as they are yet to be formally evaluated in the existing literature. This adds weight to the justification for this study and provides clear areas for this study to address.

The following two research questions form the focus of Chapters 5 and 6, which present research findings derived from interviews with civil servants working in the Saudi labour administration system. Within each of these chapters, the emerging themes are taken to the literature for comparative review, and findings are taken to the concluding chapter:

> **Research Question 1: What impact has the 2016 public administration reform had on gender issues in the workplace in the Saudi labour administration system?**

> **Research Question 2: What impact has the 2016 public administration reform had on performance management in the Saudi labour administration system?**

The following chapter presents the methodology adopted for this research.

Chapter 4: Methodology

This chapter presents, justifies and discusses the research design and the methods used to answer the research questions to determine the impact of the Saudi 2016 public administration reforms on gender issues in the workplace and performance management in the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development. Beginning with a deliberation of the available paradigms and the selection of the chosen philosophical stance, including the ontological, epistemological and axiological stance taken by the researcher, the chapter progresses to detail the chosen research design, methodological tools, and methods of data collection and analysis. Each step is compared to other studies in the field seen in the literature review and makes reference to the theoretical framework developed in Chapter Two to maintain congruence throughout.

4.1 Research Philosophy

The terms research philosophy and research paradigm are used interchangeably in the field of social science (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000). Bell, Bryman and Harley, (2022) emphasise that to understand and conduct effective research, it is important to engage with the body of knowledge known as the philosophy of social science. According to Seale (2004), Bryman and Bell, (2007, 2019) and Saunders Lewis and Thornhill (2019), research philosophy shapes many aspects of research, including its design, method of conduct, and interpretation. Coates (2021) suggests that researchers should deliberate and justify the available research paradigms in order to make sense of the paradigm chosen for any study. Therefore, the following section gives an overview of the most common social science research philosophies to assertively arrive at the philosophical stance of this study (interpretivism).

In an attempt to answer the question, "what is science?", Kuhn (1962) defined a paradigm as a set of assumptions that are believed and practiced by a community of scientists to discover and develop knowledge. Drawing from Kuhn's work, many scholars have defined how they perceive a paradigm or research philosophy. For example, Denzin and Lincoln (2000) define a paradigm as a set of beliefs and assumptions that holds the ontological, epistemological and methodological stance of a researcher which they operationalise into a research strategy to ultimately answer research questions. Similarly, Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2019, p. 124) define research philosophy as 'a system of beliefs and assumptions about the development of knowledge'.

4.1.1 Deliberating the Paradigms

Coates (2021) emphasise the importance of reporting assumptions of researchers as this develops a framework that directs research and reduces bias. Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, (2019) identify three categories of research assumptions used within research philosophies: ontology, epistemology and axiology. The first research assumptions that distinguish research philosophies from each other are ontological. Ontology refers to the nature of reality as understood and experienced by the researcher. Guba and Lincoln (1989, p. 83) define this as those assumptions that answer the question "what is there that is known" or "what is the nature of reality?" Secondly, epistemology refers to the extent to which our knowledge of a phenomenon is accepted and how can we gain this knowledge. Lastly, axiology refers to the extent that researchers' values impact the research process (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2016, 2019).

The following section discusses the three concepts and their related assumptions so as to distinguish between the most common social science research philosophies and to justify the choice of interpretivism for this study.

4.1.1.1. Interpretivism

This study used interpretivism, one of the most common paradigms in the social sciences. This paradigm is considered the antithesis of positivism, which is seen as 'scientific' and concerned with natural sciences, although it has been used within social sciences (Lincoln and Guba, 2000; Bryman and Bell, 2007; Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2016). The interpretivist school of thought considers reality as multiple, and the way to discover it is to engage with human beings and allow their beliefs and opinions to play an integral part in shaping the research. According to Bryman and Bell (2022) interpretivists have a contrasting epistemology to positivists. From this perspective, interpretivists believe that human beings, and their institutions are not facts, and also that there can be multiple meanings and interpretations of reality. As mentioned earlier, interpretivists consider the meanings in human narratives, stories, and perceptions to create new knowledge. In addition, the interpretivist paradigm involves subjectivity in research, meaning that research conducted by interpretivists is shaped by their beliefs and opinions (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019). Interpretivism is regarded as being value-bound, and interpretivists regard the researcher to be part of what is being researched. Studies with this approach tend to be conducted with a smaller sample size and use data collection methods that generate rich data, often from human experience (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019), which supports the aim of this thesis.

Importantly, this thesis is underpinned with institutional theory as its theoretical construct. It is deemed that institutional theory offers an interpretive lens through which to understand what is being practiced in an organisation — the Ministry in the case of this research — such as the formal and informal rules, norms, regulations, and understanding how that influences and shapes individuals' behaviour (Scott, 2013; Campbell, 2004). Interpretivism is also helpful in understanding various players in a given context such as culture, the social environment and regulation, thus providing an element of cogence when viewing the methodology and its justification through its lens (Lai, Wong and Cheng, 2006; Baumol, Litan and Schramm, 2007; Bruton, Ahlstrom and Li, 2010).

The changes within institutional theory that have evolved in recent decades, such as the work by Lawrence and Suddaby (2006) which posits the influence of the agentic power of the social actors (employees) on institutions as discussed in section 2.2, lend themselves to an interpretivist approach. Aksom and Tymchenko (2020, p. 1230) for instance point out that "today the need for integrating institutional effects with individual agency and interests drives [the] institutional community towards novel 'developments' [thus acknowledging the individual within the social setting]". Another example is seen in the work of Tukiainen and Granqvist, 2016, p. 1835), who suggest that the impact of institutions can be seen as the "shared rules, beliefs and practices... enacted and (re)produced by various actors", where actors are the individuals within the organisation, not just the institution under study and other stakeholders. Likewise, in relation to institutional theory, Bevir (2009) stated that sociological institutionalists focus on values, identities, ideas, and perceptions when exploring the reality of a social phenomenon.

In the context of Saudi Arabia, Alasmari *et al.* (2021) use institutional theory to study the sustainability of initiatives within the Saudi Ministry of Health hospitals. This theory helped them to have a holistic overview of the hospitals' environment to include external institutional characteristics such as the coercive regulatory power wielded by the centralised hierarchy within the Ministry of Health. Likewise, Singh and Alshammari (2020), examined the coercive, normative, and mimetic mechanisms (Scott, 2013) of institutional theory to determine the legal framework of cyber security in the case of Saudi Arabia. As this research considers the impact of the 2030 Vision on gender and performance management following the introduction of Vision 2030 and its associated reforms in the Saudi Arabian Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development, institutional theory through an interpretivist lens was deemed to be an applicable philosophical position from which to examine the issues arising. It will help to have a better grasp of the environment surrounding the case study as well as understanding the role of the external powers such as the 2030 Vision and the role of policy makers.

It is important to note that interpretivist philosophy is a term that can be used broadly to incorporate other philosophies including phenomenology and social constructivism, all of which differ in some way but follow interpretivist principles (Cresswell, 2013). All such philosophies consider reality to be subjective and multiple and they value human interaction with reality. For illustration, these philosophies often approach the reality of a social phenomenon by studying and understanding the human perception behind it. Therefore, interpretivist research enables an in-depth understanding of and interaction with the social context of a case study, allowing the researcher to grapple with the reality of the case study context (Cresswell, 2013).

Addressing the unsuitability of the other research philosophies that are widely used in social science (e.g. positivism, realism and critical realism, pragmatism) underlines the suitability of interpretivism. Positivists consider empirical inquiry based on numerical data to be the most suitable strategy to explore the reality of a social phenomenon (Cresswell, 2013). Positivist research also considers the correlation between variables and aims to apply a scientific approach. Likewise, critical realists argue that reality is single, and objectivity is required for the development of knowledge (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2016). In contrast, the reality of the impact of Vision 2030 on workplace culture and inclusion, the organisation of work and performance management may be experienced in many different ways by the individuals who work there. With that in mind, the best way to explore that reality is to interact with the people involved and document their subjective experiences. Therefore, interpretivism with institutional theory is suitable for this research.

4.2 Research Approach

Research approaches are linked to the research paradigm and reflect the reasoning a researcher uses to develop the theory of the research. In relation to research approach, researchers usually choose between deductive, inductive and abductive approaches to analyse the findings of their research (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill 2019). The next section will justify the use of the inductive approach.

4.2.1. Inductive Approach

The inductive approach is one in which researchers start collecting data to build a theory: in other words, unlike more scientific approaches which begin with hypotheses, the inductive approach uses data first and then links the data to theory

(Bell, Bryman and Harley, 2022). Using this approach, authors conduct a literature review of known concepts prior to gathering data, then take their acquired data to the wider literature for comparison with their own. This reduces the potential influence of existing evidence on newly acquired material gathered during interviews or other methods of data collection. The research adopts the inductive approach for two central reasons. First, the inductive approach enables an in-depth understanding of the subject and its social constructions, which is congruent with the philosophical stance of the researcher and with the qualitative methodology tool used in this research (Saunders Lewis and Thornhill, 2016). Second, the inductive approach is helpful because this research is data-driven (*ibid.*), because as seen in Chapters 2 and 3, little is known about the Saudi context and little is known about the impact of the 2016 public administration reforms on the workplace, including gender issues and performance management in the Saudi Arabian Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development. According to Bell, Bryman and Harley, 2022), an inductive approach is most appropriate if a topic is new or there is little existing literature in the area, which is the case here.

4.3 Research Design

The Research Design is a strategy for answering the research question entirely based on theoretical premises, entailing the individual collecting data, analysing it, preparing it, and then presenting it in a way others can understand. Also closely linked to the underpinning paradigm, the design guides and informs methodological choice to aid maintaining a congruent approach throughout the study (Robson and McCartan, 2016). This study uses an inductive, interpretive design that is underpinned by institutional theory to answer the following research questions:

Research Question 1: What impact has the 2016 public administration reform had on gender issues in the workplace in the Saudi labour administration system?

Research Question 2: What impact has the 2016 public administration reform had on performance management in the Saudi labour administration system?

Underpinning the research using interpretivism and institutional theory, this study applies a qualitative design, using a single case study strategy to answer the research questions. This qualitative design and single case study strategy are congruent with the philosophical stance described above. The following section examines the suitability of the qualitative approach and case study strategy as a research design.

4.3.1 Qualitative method

The decision on the research method used in any study must remain congruent with the philosophical stance of the researcher (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019), and two factors underpin this decision. First, the primary purpose of the study, and second, the nature of the research questions. The primary purpose of this research is to study the impact of 2030 Vision on gender issues in the workplace and performance management within the Saudi labour administration Ministry. As stated previously, the labour administration system in Saudi Arabia has rarely been studied, therefore the qualitative research method will enable me to study the impact thoroughly.

The second factor relates to the explanatory, qualitative orientation of the research questions. According to Bryman (2016) and Bryman and Bell (2019), the nature of the research questions (exploratory, descriptive, or explanatory) plays an integral role in determining the most appropriate methods to answer research questions. Therefore, taken together, these two factors justify the choice of a qualitative methodology.

Furthermore, a qualitative methodology is suitable because it presents two advantages. First, such methods allow for an in-depth investigation of social phenomena to develop a rich understanding of the case study. Second, a qualitative methodology supports data gathering from a variety of sources, such as interviews and documents (Yin, 2009, Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill 2019, Priya, 2021). These two advantages are also congruent with the philosophical stance of the researcher.

A key feature guiding the methodology of this study was the absence of current public information about the impact of the reforms within the government Ministry, in what is seen as a neo-patrimonial society (Asquer and Alzahrani, 2020) where government and Royal pronouncements are seen as fact (Alfarran, Pyke and Stanton, 2018). As such, using qualitative interviews seemed apt - the evolving theory was seen as being grounded in the facts and evidence emerging from the participants' experience and narrative (Alfarran, Pyke and Stanton, 2018). This is detailed further in Section 4.3.5.

4.3.2 The Single Case Strategy

The research strategy can be seen as the plan for conducting research that incorporates the steps to be taken; the method, by comparison, comprises the tools

to be used at each step (Johanneson and Perions, 2014). According to Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2019), the type of research method influences the researcher's choice of research strategy. In the case of a qualitative method, many strategies can be used, depending on the type of research – for example, a case study may incorporate multiple sources of information such as a metasynthesis of literature, interviews etc., whereas phenomenological inquiry may focus on the lived experience through a single method such as participant observation or interviews (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019). Owing to the type of research question developed in this work – and the Saudi labour administration having received such limited research attention – the single case method is deemed the most suitable research strategy here.

It is important, at this stage, to define the case study approach and determine the suitability of the single case study approach for this study. Creswell (2007, p. 73) writes

> *Case study research is a qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information (e.g., observations, interviews, audio-visual material, and documents and reports), and reports a case description and case-based themes.*

Highlighting the advantages of case study-based research demonstrates its suitability and the rationale for its adoption in this research. The approach enables an in-depth understanding of the topic (Gerring, 2007; Yin, 2009; Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2016; Priya, 2021). George *et al.* (2005) note that many social science scholars rely heavily on quantitative research, and they argue that researchers should use more research strategies that are based on the qualitative approach

because it can provide in-depth information about a phenomenon. Also, the case study strategy provides multiple insights into what is happening in real life, which is of value as most studies based in Saudi Arabia prior to Vision 2030 lack in-depth qualitative data (see Schell, 1992; Gerring, 2007; Yin, 2009; See also Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019). For instance, Ramady (2013) found that studies conducted in Saudi Arabia on issues related to labour policy prior to Vision 2030 were limited because such data is not publicly available. Such publications, according to Alfarran (2016), do not enter the public domain because of the Saudi ruling system, where information is guarded, and pronouncements issued by Royals and Ministers are taken as fact.

Single case research is also helpful because it allows data gathering from a variety of sources (e.g., interviews, observation and document analyses), which in this study refers to an investigation of government documents relating to Vision 2030 and labour administration as well as interviews with employees and directors at all management levels in the Saudi labour administration to answer the research questions. Gathering a broader range of data also addresses issues regarding validity and reliability with the chosen strategy in the broader context of the generalisability (or not) of qualitative data. There has been periodic debate amongst scholars over time about whether small qualitative studies can be considered generalisable in the same way that an adequate, randomly-selected quantitative sample that is compared to the population could (Morse, 1999). In fact, Morse goes on to identify how qualitative data can become generalisable if the research is conducted in a way that demonstrates rigour. Citing attributes such as purposefully selecting participants for the contribution they can make to emerging theory and achieving saturation, she suggests that:

> *[..the knowledge gained] should fit all scenarios that may be identified in the larger population. The theory also is applicable beyond this immediate group and is applicable to all similar situations, questions, and problems, regardless of the comparability of the demographic composition of the groups (Morse, 1999, p. 5).*

Reliability in quantitative research refers to consistency of measures, whereas validity refers to the ability of the measurement tools selected to measure the required items (e.g. variables), and to yield valid data. However, in qualitative research, Robson and McCartan (2016) refer to reliability as a process of being thorough and honest. Hammersley (1990) similarly argues validity in qualitative research refers to the extent to which research is representing accurate truth about a phenomenon. He further suggests that is important for the findings of qualitative research to be plausible, accurate and based on credible evidence. Because most of the data in this study was gathered through interviewing individuals, this process also involved building rapport during the interviews and being mindful of any power balance issues between myself as the interviewer and the participants; I reflected on this in my reflexive diary, a sample of which is in section 4.3.5 and discussed further in 5.1 as related to coding. Validity is a concept that requires particular attention in qualitative research due to three distinct threats delineated by Lincoln and Guba, (2000) – researcher bias, reactivity and respondent bias. The first, researcher bias, refers to any influence of the knowledge or assumptions of the researcher on the process of the research. To mitigate against this, the research was designed in a way that the findings were compared to the literature after the interviews were conducted and concurrently with the thematic analysis. Whereas the literature review conducted in chapters 2 and 3 ascertained the current situation in Saudi Arabia regarding Vision 2030 and critically reviewed known concepts

surrounding labour administration / public administration, etc., the interviews were conducted as openly as possible, with a 'clean slate', hence any themes that arose during the analysis were fresh and not forced by previously published findings (see Glaser and Holton, 2004).

Reactivity and respondent bias are two other constructs that affect validity. With respondent bias, the interviewee themselves responds in a way they believe the researcher wants, rather than offering a response that is congruent with their own beliefs and experience. Reactivity is the influence of the researcher as a person on the respondent. Both were mitigated against by way of a strategy promoted by Robson and McCarten (2016) involving both member checking (in which the researcher confirmed the transcripts were accurate with each interviewee) and by ensuring the involvement of the researcher was limited to the study itself and only during the course of the data collection stage (see also Carlson, 2010).

4.3.3 Sampling: Case study selection

In determining the group and setting in which to conduct this case study, the author examined what areas would best represent the labour administration in Saudi Arabia and found the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development to be the only government department with the over-arching remit for labour policy and administration. After the introduction of the reforms within Vision 2030, the Ministry merged with two other ministries, the Ministry of Civil Service and the Ministry of Social Development. Therefore, the Ministry is now divided into four sectors —the Labour Sector, the Civil Service Sector, the Social Development Sector and the Shared Services Sector. Each sector has three or more deputy ministries or entities responsible for various labour administration functions and labour market policies.

According to the ILO, labour administration has four principal functions — labour inspection, employment, labour relations, and research (ILO, 2018). This study will focus on four departments within the Ministry and its work: two function units (the Labour Inspection Function and the Employment Function) and two policy units. In Saudi Arabia, the two function units are represented by Department A (Inspection Function) and Department B (Employment Function), and the two policy units are Department C (Saudization Policy) and Department D (Labour Market Policies). The four departments form the units of analysis of this research; these are their main responsibilities:

1- Department A (Inspection Function)

Department A is responsible for Monitoring and Developing the Work Environment. It audits how private sector organisations comply with the provisions of the labour law, regulations, and ministerial decisions. It seeks to increase the compliance of companies with labour laws to achieve protection for both parties to the contractual relationship and to create a decent and safe work environment that enhances the participation of Saudi National employees and attracts, develops, and maintains employees' competencies, in accordance with the best international standards and the standards of the work environment and occupational safety and health.

2- Department B (Employment Function)

Department B has redesigned its support programmes under its three main pillars of employment, training, and empowerment. Department B's employment operations include training and vocational guidance, with a new strategy emanating from three key objectives: supporting the development of human resources,

increasing the efficiency of matching supply and demand for jobs, and enabling groups to enter, or remain in, the labour market.

3- Department C (Policy)

Department C at the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development works to deliver Saudization policy within the public and private sector and replace the expatriate expertise that currently dominates within the general workforce with Saudi nationals. In addition to this, it supports their engagement in the labour market in line with their qualifications and their competitive advantage in relation to many labour market sectors. It also works on providing more valuable job opportunities by working on enhancing the labour market policy to accommodate Saudi Arabian citizens.

4- Department D (Policy)

Department D is one of the agencies related to the labour sector in the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development. The agency is a centre for making, evaluating and developing general policies for the labour market.

4.3.3.1. Unit of Analysis

The unit of analysis in qualitative research refers to what is under study. Theorists have treated this in different ways within the literature, with Creswell, (2009), suggesting social science researchers choose a unit of analysis that will generate enough data to provide a holistic understanding of the subject under study, whether that is trying to examine the behaviour of one single person, or in a group setting. Roller and Laverack, (2015), suggest more specifically that the unit of analysis is the portion of the content of the data collection that is the basis for drawing codes

and themes for analysing – be it a sentence, a paragraph or a whole interview. For the purpose of this research, the four departments highlighted in section 2.4.4 form the units of analysis.

4.3.4 Sampling: Participant Selection

Sampling within any research study is a key process that becomes central to the research strategy and indeed to delivering quality data that is able to comprehensively answer the research questions (see Mason, 2002). This study followed the model of sampling for interview-based qualitative research proposed by Robinson, (2013), which suggests a four-stage approach to sampling. The first stage is to select a 'sampling universe' from which interview participants are selected. In this study, this became the four departments within the Ministry, or the unit of analysis as identified in section 2.4.4. The inclusion criteria for the study had been specified for the case selected (government department responsible for labour administration), but for the participant selection further elements were considered. Robinson (2013) suggests that for a sample to be considered representative researchers should delineate specific attributes for the selected interviewees such as demographic, geographic and physical parameters. However, there are a range of grades of staff working in the Ministry and in each department, from basic grade workers to senior management and deputy minister. Mason (2002) provides a rationale for recruiting a heterogenous sample which appeared suitable for this study — if there is a commonality across a diverse range of individuals, it may represent a more generalisable finding. Therefore, the decision was taken to select a diverse range of male and female participants, each representing the different roles and responsibilities within the departments and also having different levels of

experience and working at several different pay scales within the teams reflecting this.

The second stage of Robinson's (2013) model is to determine participant numbers using theoretical and practical considerations. Initially, the researcher conducted three pilot interviews with peers who were familiar with Saudi Arabia using the research questions. During those interviews, other prompting questions were tested to determine whether they would help the interviewee expand on their responses, and the peers gave feedback on their merit such as whether they were 'leading' or 'open', leading to a final schedule. Each interview took approximately 30 minutes; 15 minutes was added to this to allow for lateness, technical glitches and general introductions, consent signing etc. Recognising the practical limitations associated with the data collection stage and estimating it would take approximately 45 minutes to conduct an interview, a sample size of 35 participants was chosen. When compared with other studies, Mason (2010) examined 560 PhD studies and found that the mean sample size was 31 interviews, hence this above the average number.

Potential interview participants were identified using both purposive and snowball sampling techniques (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2016). The purposive technique is a non-probability approach that involves choosing participants on the basis of their ability to answer the research questions (Yin, 2009; Robson and McCartan, 2016). The researcher assumes that those selected will have unique attributes, experience and knowledge based on their position [within the organisation] and therefore ensuring their inclusion becomes part of the sampling strategy (Robinson, 2013). Snowball sampling is an extension of this, in that is it also a non-probability sampling technique but commences after initial purposive

recruitment of participants who then are able to suggest / introduce others to the study (Robson and McCartan, 2016; Bryman, 2016). One potential drawback of snowballing sampling is that the researcher has less control over the sampling; another drawback of snowballing is that it is possible to encounter sampling bias (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019). For this particular study, ascertainment bias was a concern. This refers to a situation where some members of the target population (employees within the Ministry) are more likely to be selected than others (Spencer and Brassey, 2017). As the researcher was not familiar with the workers in the Ministry, the potential for this type of bias was overcome by attempting a stratification approach (Robinson, 2013). This involves stratifying the sample population by category, such as role, according to the study purpose. In this study, the intention was to interview a range of staff at different grades who will have been impacted in different ways by the introduction of reforms. Therefore, the researcher began by recruiting a director from each department to represent the most senior grade at operational level. During the discussion with each director, other grades / roles were identified, and a sampling grid was drawn up to target a spread of grades from senior management to junior grades with no management responsibility to facilitate the likelihood of achieving a deeper understanding of the subject matter.

In order to 'source' the remainder of the sample (Robinson, 2013), participants who were employed at the grades identified following the initial discussion with the directors were invited using an invitation letter containing the study information sheets and consent form. Initially, the researcher used a professional social media platform[3] where a great number of the Ministry's employees are engaging to contact

---

[3] Identity of platform withheld for confidentiality purposes

potential participants for remote interviews. Remote interviews were offered at that time because there were some restrictions in place within Saudi Arabia relating to the Covid-19 pandemic and the need for continued social distancing. After sifting through replies and applying the sampling frame to ensure a spread of grades, a total of 25 participants were initially recruited. Later, when COVID-19 restrictions were removed, the researcher made a second attempt to recruit a final group of participants to achieve the target of 35 by traveling to Saudi Arabia and meeting employees face to face. This involved visiting the Ministry and being introduced to staff, leaving information leaflets for their perusal in communal areas such as staff rooms and giving out the researcher's email address. A further 10 were recruited this way, meaning the target of 35 was achieved. All of the 10 additional participants opted for video interviews, stating a preference as it suited their schedule. Although there are some disadvantages to video interviews, such as missing non-verbal cues that may prompt further questioning / elucidating, the practicality of being able to conduct the interview across two different time zones with little disturbance to routine outweighed this. In addition, it reduced the need for further travel in the region, hence reducing cost, and Oliffe *et al.*, (2021) suggest participants feel more comfortable (see also Irani, 2019).

4.3.5 Data Collection and Interviews

There are several data collection methods available for researchers to use in social science research, such as questionnaires, participant observation, focus groups and interviewing. Questionnaires have been criticised by some as being rigid, directive, and as they are often used to test hypotheses, linked to the positivist stance and deductive approach (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000). Likewise, participant observation can be an effective qualitative data collection tool, but the practicality of

this study meant it was not an appropriate choice, as to gather enough observational data would entail a lengthy period of time. Some of the context of the study related to women and the changes in segregation within the workplace; although the researcher could have observed this objectively, without the in-depth interview with women some of their nuanced experiences would have been challenging to capture (see DuWalte and DuWalte, 2011). This study sought to have in-depth insights and understanding of the impact of Vision 2030 from the perspectives of the Ministry employees. Semi-structured interviews were selected because although they are able to focus on a core topic, the approach allows for a more nuanced interview as the interviewer is able to follow what Magdaldi and Berler (2020) describe as topical trajectories.

An interview protocol was created that outlined the research questions and that included prompts to aid the interviewer to collect primary data (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019) (See Appendix 3). The data collection of this research was conducted in two phases. The first data collection phase started at the end of February 2022, and ended in early June of the same year. The second data collection phase started in early February 2023 and lasted until the end of March 2023. The data generated from the first interviews were transcribed and collated, and areas of interest were scrutinised to determine if there were any subjects that required more detail. A second phase interview protocol was generated that enabled more in-depth questions to be asked. This is a form of serial interviewing (Read, 2018) in which interviews with participants are completed more than once to generate a wider reach [of participant] and more in-depth participant narrative. For this study, no participant was re-interviewed, but the participants for the second stage were drawn from the same cohort hence had access to the same

departmental protocols, processes and overall working environment. The researcher conducted a total of 35 online semi-structured interviews with senior, middle and lower-grade officials. In the first data collection phase, the researcher conducted 25 semi-structured interviews, and in the second data collection phase, the researcher conducted a further 10 semi-structured interviews.

The interviews were all conducted in Arabic, the native language of all the interviewees and the researcher. This needed particular attention, as the thesis was being presented in English therefore the integrity of translation was crucial. Van Nes *et al.* (2010) suggest the act of translating qualitative data is an interpretive act, therefore careful consideration needed to be given to the process to avoid altered meaning. A particular consideration here also rests with how language is not only a means of conveying meaning, but it is also part of how meaning itself is constructed. Within different social groups, an expression may well have evolved to have a different intent, hence translating was not simply a literal word-for-word process. Abalkhail (2019, p. 69) argues that a researcher and a translator have different roles during the research process, and that when the researcher is an 'insider' speaking the same language, they may understand "embedded meanings of language and culture", which enables cultural knowledge to surface. I did the translations myself as a native Arabic speaker, but I am aware my command of the English Language is 'good' after living in the UK for several years but I am not what experts would consider a fluent, native speaker. I used a variety of support mechanisms including some dictionaries, but I also asked peers to read excerpts if I felt I had not captured the correct word for a second opinion. One example was this, which is part of an excerpt from my own reflexive notes:

"I'd read that translating cultural norms and stories and placing them in context wasn't just simply a matter of finding synonyms in a thesaurus, but it was about capturing the meanings people had constructed (Simon, 1996). As a very new qualitative researcher and not being a professional translator, I found it hard to translate contextually because I had to construct men's and women's narratives and represent them as accurately as possible in English – something I had never done – but I felt my innate understanding of Saudi culture and its history would help me. I had to think outside the box to find the equivalent meaning, and this meant adjusting the narratives of the participants slightly to hold the cultural/language identities, so the translated text was coherent with both the target language – English – and the native Arabic.

One example was the translation of a quotation from one interviewee who I asked to clarify what he meant by the following: "women problems are too many." His response after clarification was:

لا شك أن مشاكل النساء كثيرة، ولكن إن أحسن المدير التصرف معهن فإنه يرتاح لأنهن أكثر انضباطا من الرجال

الغيرة من بعض، اللباس، والأمور الشخصية

إن لم يعرف المدير احسان التصرف معهن فإن العمل سيتضرر

Perhaps because of the misogynous nature of this quote, and my discomfort, this quote was not a simple statement to translate because it references the cultural background and the constructed norm the participant believes in. I saw that the main words were ''أحسن المدير التصرف معهن'' *which refers to "What management principles the manager put into practise to manage women, and* ''فإن العمل سيتضرر'' *which means "productivity will be affected".*

To convey the traditional meaning of the entire sentence in English, I had to ask the participant if he can give examples of 'women problems' and it was translated and transcribed as follows:

'There is no doubt that women create many problems, but if the manager handles them well, he will get benefit from them because they are more

disciplined than men. Women problems are too many, for example, Jealousy among each other, clothing, and focusing on personal matters. If the manager does not know how to handle them well, the productivity will be affected'.

To make the translation more understandable for an English audience, I had to make the sentence read smoothly in English and yet retain the original historical and cultural feel; Venuti (1995) calls this domestication".

Taking note of recommendations from Aloudah, (2022, p. 7) who suggests that "… *There is a need to thoughtfully decide when the best time to translate data to preserve its meaning occurs*", the translation from Arabic to English commenced almost immediately after the interviews were transcribed to limit the time gap between the interviews and the transcription then translation. This allowed potential queries with the respondents to be made whilst still fresh in their minds; in fact, the recordings were clear so this was not a particular concern. Chen and Boore (2009) suggest a process of forward translation followed by back translation. To that effect, I began by translating the entirety of the transcribed data from all 35 interviews into UK English. The translations were peer-reviewed by a fellow Arab and English-speaking PhD candidate, who scrutinised the English translations compared with the Arabic originals and back-translated a selection of them to determine their accuracy (see Chen and Boore, 2009). This study was not resourced to fund a professional translator, as advocated by van Nes *et al.*, (2010), but the assistance of peer-checking fulfilled this role and demonstrated a further element of rigour.

When relating the interviews conducted to the stratification within the sampling, Table 4.1 provides a breakdown of department, grade (including whether they had managerial responsibilities) and gender of each participant:

Table 4.1 Breakdown of participants by department, grade and gender

	Department	Department Type	Seniority	Gender	Managerial Responsibilities
P3	A	Function	Senior	Male	Yes
P5	A	Function	Senior	Male	Yes
P9	A	Function	Senior	Male	Yes
P34	A	Function	Senior	Male	Yes
P11	A	Function	Basic grade	Male	No
P16	A	Function	Basic grade	Male	No
P18	A	Function	Basic grade	Male	No
P20	A	Function	Basic grade	Male	No
P25	A	Function	Basic grade	Male	No
P29	A	Function	Basic grade	Male	No
P33	A	Function	Basic grade	Male	No
P26	B	Function	Senior	Male	Yes
P27	B	Function	Middle	Male	Yes
P28	B	Function	Basic grade	Male	No
P30	B	Function	Basic grade	Male	No
P31	B	Function	Basic grade	Female	No
P32	B	Function	Basic grade	Female	No
P35	B	Function	Basic grade	Male	No
P24	C	Policy	Senior	Male	Yes
P17	C	Policy	Senior	Male	Yes
P15	C	Policy	Middle	Female	Yes
P23	C	Policy	Middle	Female	Yes
P1	C	Policy	Basic grade	Female	No
P10	C	Policy	Basic grade	Male	Yes

P12	C	Policy	Basic grade	Female	No
P21	C	Policy	Basic grade	Male	No
P7	D	Policy	Senior	Female	Yes
P14	D	Policy	Senior	Male	Yes
P4	D	Policy	Middle	Male	Yes
P6	D	Policy	Middle	Female	Yes
P8	D	Policy	Middle	Female	Yes
P2	D	Policy	Basic	Male	No
P13	D	Policy	Basic	Male	No
P19	D	Policy	Basic grade	Female	No
P22	D	Policy	Basic grade	Female	No

4.3.5.1 Breakdown of participants

It can be immediately seen in Table 4.1 that the eleven employees interviewed in Department A (labour inspection) represented a cross-section of grades, but were all male. The fact that no women participated in this study from department A provided a point for discussion on the status of women in that department, which is discussed in the first findings chapter; at a practical level, no women from that department replied to the recruitment drive. Four of the interviewees in this department were senior with managerial responsibilities, and the rest were lower grade staffs From Department B (employment), one male senior manager was interviewed, one male middle grade staff member with management responsibility and five basic grade staff, two women and three men, were interviewed.

Of the staff interviewed in the policy Department C, two were senior grade males, two were middle-grade women with management responsibilities, and four were basic grade staff (two men and two women). Lastly, from department D, there were

seven officials, a male and a female at senior grade, one male and two female middle-grade staff, and two basic grade women and two basic grade men.

This sample group of respondents were all officials in some capacity across a spectrum of grade and responsibility within the Ministry and were therefore central to providing valuable information about the 2016 public administration reforms and their impact from experience. For example, the senior management staff in the chosen departments provided valuable data on the overall nature of the reforms and its impact as they perceived it on their subordinates. In addition, the middle and lower grade employees provided insights relating to the role and duties of employees (inspectors and employment officials) and front-line employees including their working patterns, the organisation of work and intensity of work. Eleven participants were women; nine of these were employed in the policy department, five of whom had management responsibilities. As will be seen in later chapters, this provided a different angle of analysis in the finding chapters due to their managerial oversight when compared to lower grade male and female staff. Within the findings, discussion also arose about the increasing proportion of women in the workplace, which is explored in the relevant sections.

Each department is headed by a deputy minister, and the participants represent a range of staff with different roles / grades. The remit of each department is divided into 'Policy' and 'Function' The decision was taken to use A, B, C and D for each of the ministerial departments and to use a simple descriptive title for the individuals' roles that enables the reader to draw a working understanding for the roles which contextualises each participant's experience yet provides clarity for reading.

4.4 Data analysis

There are several common methods of qualitative data analysis in the field of social science including thematic analysis, template analysis, and discourse analysis. In concurrence with previous scholars using interpretivism (Burchill *et al.*, 2022), I used thematic analysis to analyse the data. Indeed, thematic analysis has been widely used across the social sciences and business management studies and involves searching for themes and recognising relationships (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019; King, Brooks and Tabari, 2018). In addition, the analysis was conducted concurrently to data collection, a process outlined in further detail in section 4.4.2 and also in Chapter 5.

The analysis for this thesis is primarily concerned with the impact of recent public administration reforms on performance management and gender issues through the lens of neo-institutional theory. In considering thematic analysis as the most suitable method for this thesis, recent guidance from Braun and Clark (2023) was followed. They suggest that thematic analysis be considered as an 'family' of analyses, as it does not represent one method. In fact, Braun and Clark (2023) suggest two typologies, or ways of organising and interpreting data "*inherent: coding reliability, code-book and reflexive TA, and thematic coding*" (2023, p. 1). Inherent thematic analysis focuses on reliability and on consistency in the process of coding, in particular through developing and using a code book. This process serves as a useful resource and prevents misunderstanding when there is a team of researchers conducting the study. Reflexivity is built into the process, ensuring an internal dialogue about the researcher's own role and positionality, thus reducing bias (*ibid.*). Thematic coding refers to the iterative process of segmenting, labelling

and categorising data thereby capturing the complexity and richness, in this case, of participants' experience. They go on to state that they have three methodological common threads: they each have code / theme development, they each are able to capture semantic or latent meaning, and each is flexible as opposed to theoretically informed and delineated.

Using a thematic coding approach was deemed to be the most fitting analytical technique for two particular reasons. Firstly, it gives a systematic and flexible approach to analysing qualitative data (Braun and Clarke, 2022). Secondly, thematic analysis enables the researcher to analyse large sets of data — this research generated over hundred thousand words within the transcripts. Thematic analysis involves six phases of data engaging and analysis, starting from familiarising ones- self with data and ending up to producing the findings report (see Figure 4.1).

Figure 4.1. Braun and Clarke's (2006) phases of thematic analysis
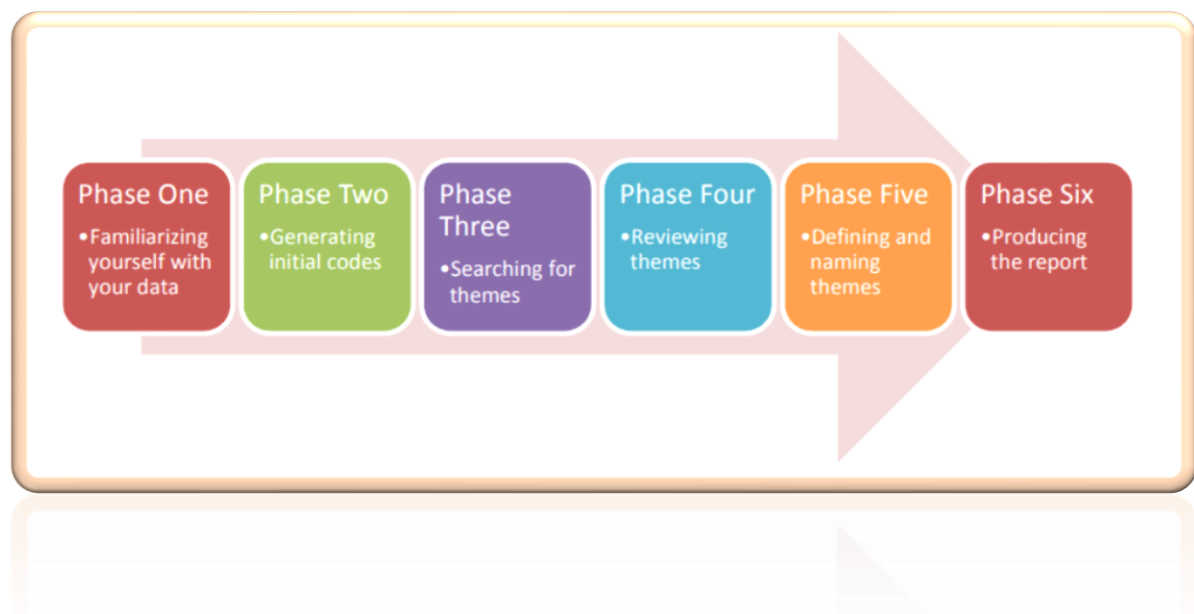
(Source: Braun and Clarke, 2006)

4.4.1. Coding Process

Thematic coding analysis was used in this research (Saldaña, 2015; Bryman, 2016; Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2016; Saldaña and Omasta, 2018). Coding is the process by which 'codes', or short phrases / words are attributed to portions of text acquired through data collection that symbolically capture the essence of what has been said (Saldaña, 2015). The text in this study comprises the transcripts of the interviews, but in other studies could be printed articles (such as when conducting a metasynthesis of the literature), field notes, film excerpts etc. The researcher reads through the text by 'sifting' – a process of scanning and reading text in order to develop a sense of what has being said and to form patterns. Saldaña (2015) suggests this is conducted in cycles, repeated until no further codes emerge; this allows for the initial codes to be added to or indeed reduced. Richards and Morse (2007) describe coding as a heuristic that does not have one specific formula and it leads the researcher from the data gathered to the idea that eventually becomes new findings or theory. Bridging the codes to the theory are categories and themes; categories are simply labels under which groups of codes are placed, whereas themes are more descriptive. This is an example from the process in this study:

CATEGORY: Words

    Sub-category: GENDERED LANGUAGE

        Code: Women tidy up

        Code: Women look for details

        Code: Men finish things

                THEME: WOMEN AND MEN ARE ALIKE

Each of the findings chapters begin with a map of the themes that emerged during coding. Developing the themes was an iterative process in itself; reading and sifting and re-reading led to many words emerging, that were grouped and re-grouped into categories and themes until a saturation point was reached and the final themes were selected. The use of memos allowed for comparison and for patterns to emerge highlighting contrasts. Miles and Huberman (1994, p. 224) suggest this process 'generates meaning'. Each code and theme related in different ways with other codes and themes, with the research question, with the frame of reference inherent with the participants and indeed with the ontological assumptions inherent in the researcher. For instance, when one participant discussed 'equality' their understanding, experience and use of the concept may have differed from other participants and with the researcher's. In one sense it became a challenge when participants' diverse narrative at times diverged and at times converged because as a novice researcher there was a dilemma over where to categorise these disparate views. However, to clarify how different perspectives were expressed and then their meanings discerned, the approach by Rubin and Rubin (1995) proved fruitful: each category was described with a 'statement of content' by which the codes were categorised. Only after this was done as they emerged were they then compared with others, preventing dissonance. So, in the previous example, the category WORDS had an inclusion statement "The participant shares observations using words that convey importance". When sentences appeared in the transcripts that fell into that inclusion statement, they were clustered under it even if the meanings were the opposite to others [dissonance] - e.g. *"people have become accustomed to seeing women excel", "...and all the actual work takes place there [in the men's segregated area]".*

4.4.2. Analysis

Deciding when to compare and integrate literature with findings has been debated by qualitative researchers, with some suggesting researchers may be overly-influenced by previous literature and that the process of sourcing the literature can become singular, following the trail of what others had found (previous literature) with little room for building directly from the voice of the participants (Snowden and Martin, 2011, p. 2869). Others have suggested that data collection should take place before any literature review is conducted to prevent bias, and that the literature is sourced following the trail of themes raised during data collection (e.g. Glaser and Holton, 2004).

For this study, considering how and when to compare the findings with other studies involved looking towards other qualitative studies' methodologies in the NPM and organisational reform field in general and Saudi Arabian context in particular. It was apparent that most studies involving qualitative methodology involved some form of preliminary literature review, with emerging findings being compared with other studies and theories (e.g. Min, An and Ki, 2024). The approach for this study was based on a method of analysing transcripts (data) whilst concurrently comparing the emerging data with pre-existing literature, as developed by researchers including Bless (2023). Bless (2023) examined the public sector performance in South Africa and determined that conducting a preliminary literature review enabled the research to be conceptualised and the research questions to be framed (Strauss and Corbin, 1994). Furthermore, when data had been collected then collated and coded, it enabled analysis and comparison simultaneously. In this study, therefore, participants' experiences were analysed concurrently with comparison with the literature previously reviewed in chapter 2 and 3 but also by sourcing new literature

where further clarification was needed, thereby producing a contributory review of known findings.

4.5 Access and Ethical Considerations

Allmark *et al.* (2009) identified four essential ethical considerations: privacy and confidentiality, the consent form of the research, accidental harm to the participants, and the risk of using the participants' information in an exploitative way. Another issue that was considered for this study in particular surrounded capturing accurate meaning and intent in the participants' experiences when translating into English for analysis. This is considered here as another ethical concern. The researcher addressed these ethical issues that may potentially have occurred before, during and after this research.

In regard to Allmark *et al.* (2009)'s first ethical consideration, privacy and confidentiality, the data collected through interviews was anonymised for better protection of the participants' information (Loue, 2004). In this regard, the researcher submitted an application to obtain permissions and ethical approval from the Sheffield University Management School before conducting any fieldwork. (See Appendix 1).

Secondly, regarding the consent form of the research, the researcher gained written consent from all interviewees prior to the interviews, using a consent form with an information sheet, following the research ethics policy of the University of Sheffield. In relation to ethical standards, it is important to state that there was no influence from any officials in choosing interviewees; the Directors in each department were asked for 'grades of staff' to approach, not 'names of staff'.

The third issue is the possibility of accidental harm to the participants. In this regard, interviews were conducted online with participants asked to find a space they considered safe where they would not be interrupted. To reduce the potential for psychological harm during the process, the researcher asked questions in an empathic way using active listening and affirming statements (see Lavee and Itzchakov, 2021). The researcher conducted the recruitment of interviewees and the actual interviews in the participants' native language to ensure not only comfort but also to ascertain that consent had been fully understood. In addition, the interviewees were informed they were free to not respond to any question during the interviews or withdraw in any time during the interview without the need to explain their reason.

Returning to the translation stage of this thesis, Van Nes *et al.* (2010) suggest the importance of describing the translation process is key to giving insight to potential loss of meaning being avoided. Another aspect of this process was the back-translation (Van Nes *et al.* 2010) process undertaken of segments as part of member-checking to ensure meaning was preserved. Each participant was afforded the opportunity of reading the sections of transcript pertaining to their interview in the original Arabic, and each participant was also offered the opportunity to check the excerpts in English as used in the thesis: these excerpts had been back-translated meticulously to ensure accuracy when determining whether the correct word or phrase had been selected (see Aloudah, 2022). All of the participants were happy to accept the translations as conducted by the researcher and did not feel the need to alter or amend anything.

The final issue is the utilisation of the participants' information in a way that avoids harm. In regard to this ethical issue, the investigator provided the participants with

an information sheet detailing the purpose of the study and explaining that all the participations' information will be stored securely and used for research purposes only. Finally, all of the response sheets and all of the participants' material were stored in accordance with the Data Protection Act (2018).

4.6 Chapter Summary

This chapter has defined the research philosophy and research design that were used to answer the research questions relating to the impact of public administration reforms on gender issues and performance management in the Saudi labour administration system. The research takes an interpretivist stance underpinned by institutional theory, with a single case study method applied to explore the topic. The interpretivist stance has multiple features that are congruent with the researcher's world view such as reality being multiple, and engaging with human beings helps shape the research through exploring their beliefs and opinions. The researcher conducted 35 semi-structured interviews with a number of deputy ministers and public servants, using purposive and snowball sampling techniques to collect the data needed to analyse the impact of the 2016 public administration reforms.

The chapter outlined and provided justification for the methods used and leads into the next two chapters which concurrently present the results, their analysis, and compares them to the theoretical framework and previous literature to highlight points of convergence and divergence with the same. Findings are then taken to Chapter 7 which forms the conclusion of the research, discusses the major contributions it has made and also its limitations and makes suggestions for future research.

Chapter 5: Results Analysis and Discussion – Gender Issues in The Workplace

5.0 Introduction

The first of these two results chapters discusses participants' responses to questions centred around gender issues in the workplace. As seen in the literature review in Chapters Two and Three, any discussion about gender issues in the workplace within the current Saudi Arabian context was largely unknown territory, as previous literature was conducted prior to the first wave of reforms under Vision 2030 being fully established within society as a whole, and within the public administration field in particular (El-Sofany *et al.*, 2012; Alfarran, Pyke and Stanton, 2018; Alhammami, 2022). It was clear that this was an important subject to study from the evidenced gap seen in Chapter Three. Moreover, in light of new legislation regarding women in employment (such as the new provision within the Labor Law prohibiting discrimination when hiring women and paying their salaries, Royal Decree No. 684 of 27/11/1440 H, 30 July 2019), inquiry was merited.

Each of these two results chapters presents a map of the main themes that emerged during coding; in this chapter, these were gender segregation, women in the workplace, 'all are welcome here', gender-based stereotypes and women in the workplace. Methodological discussion is presented around the process of coding and analysis, with each of the two chapters divided into sub-sections headed with the themes. An initial discussion around the nature of the themes is presented, supported by examples (excerpts) from the transcription of the discussion with each participant. Each element of narrative is then compared with the literature, forming a discussion which compares the participants' responses and the codes / themes

with what was previously known within the literature. The theoretical lens is central to this process, where insight emerges as to the nature the impact the reforms have had using neo-institutional theory. At the end of each section, any clear finding is specified; findings are discussed further in the chapter summaries before being taken to the concluding chapter for further discussion. Whilst reporting from the participants, their departments and gender are identified using the following abbreviations:

Department A, Inspection Services Function = AISF

Department B, Employment Services Function = BESF

Department C, Saudisation Policy = CSP

Department D, Labour Market Policy - DLMP

Developing the themes was an iterative process in itself; as described in Section 4.4.1, reading and sifting and re-reading led to many words emerging, that were grouped and re-grouped into themes until a saturation point was reached and the final themes were selected. The use of memos allowed for comparison and for patterns to emerge highlighting contrasts; Miles and Huberman (1994, p. 224) suggest this process 'generates meaning'. Analytic memos are a reflexive part of analysis which MacQueen and Guest (2008) describe as metadata activities, and which Saldaña (2015) suggests provide substantial data for coding. Rogers (2018) treats analytic memos as a journal that researchers can use to reflect on their writing of codes and themes to determine patterns that are emerging that ultimately may inform theory. When reflecting on this process it was possible to recognise that each code and theme that emerged from the transcripts related in different ways with

other codes and themes, with the research question, with the frame of reference inherent with the participants and indeed with the ontological assumptions inherent in the researcher. For instance, when one participant discussed 'equality' their understanding, experience and use of the concept may have differed from other participants.

As we saw in the opening and literature review chapters, much is already known about public service reform in general, yet less attention has been given to the context of countries such as Saudi Arabia, which as Asquer and Alzahrani (2020, p. 3) suggest, defy "*the standard account of public services reforms because of the presence of local political and economic institutions that curb political turnover and ideological shifts*". Moreover, Saudi Arabia is a neo-patrimonial system, which as Lindberg (2003) suggests, does not necessarily tolerate ideological shifts. Certainly, when conducting the interviews and transcribing them, some potential dissonance was captured that may have its roots in the neo-patrimonial landscape of the participants' experience, and which is taken into the analysis sections and into the concluding chapter.

At this juncture of the thesis, and before progressing to the analysis and discussion of findings, it is also important to return to the design of this research being a case study. Whilst carrying out background reading for this study, it became apparent that other authors were reporting on the difficulties in acquiring some information from government sources, and this case study is sited within the public sector in departments under direct control of ministries. The very nature of in-depth case studies involves sourcing detailed information about a small, distinct area of inquiry; whereas permissions had been granted to conduct the study and the interviews, sourcing detailed published information such as recent labour market statistics and

the development of new systems and procedures was not possible. Alfarran (2016) found the same in their thesis; they stated that the lack of published statistics and evaluation [of Nitaqat] meant that any assessment of its effectiveness was problematic to ascertain with full authority. Indeed, Ramady (2013, p. 3) found that contemporary research in Saudi Arabia on issues such as the Saudisation and Nitaqat policies — labour policies which were forerunners to Vision 2030 — are by default limited as there is no "*descriptive or quantitative data*" publicly available. Alfarran (2016, p. 185) suggests reasons for such publications being unlikely to enter the public domain are related to the structure of the Saudi ruling system as compared to other countries', and that any pronouncement made by Royals and Ministers "*are taken as fact".* This also concurs with the country being a neo-patrimonial system as identified by Asquer and Alzahrani (2020).

Acknowledging this position, the decision was made to offer detailed examples from the participants' narratives in some distinct areas of this and the next chapter. In keeping with the nature of case study research, as outlined by Cresswell (2007), the interviews were an ideal opportunity to capture the 'inner workings' of life in the department. Although they could not provide validated statistics, the participants gave a unique insight into the dynamics of working under Vision 2030 which forms part of the overall contribution of this thesis. To that effect, there are specific areas in the following pages that outline in detail how new processes such as "Taqat" and "Tamam" work and mandates of some departments that are presented to mitigate for such information not being available elsewhere in the public domain.

5.1. A reflexive note on coding for this chapter

Throughout the inductive development of this research, this chapter was initially focused on the issue of women's empowerment only. However, through the use of a reflexive diary, I became aware that by focusing on 'women's empowerment and inclusion' I was perhaps restricting a more comprehensive discussion of 'culture' that I originally mentioned in my objectives ("To critically explore the way the employees of the Ministry perform their work in their new cultural environment"). Amongst the whole collected transcripts there were 174 uses of the word 'culture' - far broader than I had realised, and it included several things related to the Saudi context. For instance, it was discussed in terms of 'Saudi' mainstream culture (such as religion's influence on things like the law and how women are seen in society), and 'Saudi' workplace culture (including concepts such as competition and Wasta). These two concepts will be discussed further in these findings chapters.

In practice, and when carrying out the sifting and coding of the transcripts, it soon became apparent that many of the examples that emerged related to workplace culture were inexorably linked to women's experiences. Fetterman (1998) suggests the central requirement for all qualitative analysis is 'clear thinking' from the analyst. As a novel researcher, I was guided by Robson and McCartan, (2016), who suggest early input makes large impressions: starting the data analysis soon after the data collection meant that the interviews were fresh in my mind and I was able to capture the first wave of codes whilst transcribing. The transcripts were powerful, and I realised by trying to differentiate 'workplace culture' from 'women's empowerment' and deal with them separately, I was in danger of introducing bias. Creswell and Poth (2018) remind researchers of the axiological stance of interpretive research,

which involves a researcher's values being acknowledged as part of the iterative process. Engaging with this dilemma using analytical memos and my reflexive journal resulted in the decision to present the women's empowerment data within every theme it featured, maintaining congruence.

5.2 Themes and codes related to Workplace Culture and Gender-Related Issues

As we saw in Chapter Two, many Saudi government entities have been rooted in negative cultural norms including the use of nepotism, and those seen in traditional administration such as rigid hierarchical structures, and excessive bureaucracy (Asquer and Alzahrani, 2020, Al-Bakr *et al.,* 2017, Issa and AlAbbar, 2015, Abdul Rahman, Jarrar, and Omira*,* 2014, Alfarran, 2016). However, the voice of a large number of ministry employees such as the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development is missing, especially in an era where significant economic, societal and cultural reform is taking place (Vision 2030). In keeping with the underpinning theoretical framework of this study,, this chapter frames its findings with the cultural-cognitive pillar of institutions (Scott, 2013). This chapter explores participants' responses to the first research question:

What impact has the 2016 public administration reform had on gender issues in the workplace in the Saudi labour administration system?

When asked about the cultural and inclusion changes that have happened since the implementation of Vision 2030, the participants talked about several different elements that are aligned to the influence of Vision 2030. They described new norms and a new direction that is taking place and it was clear from participants' responses that this new direction does not come without consequences. Throughout sifting and coding, the following themes emerged (see Figure 5.1):
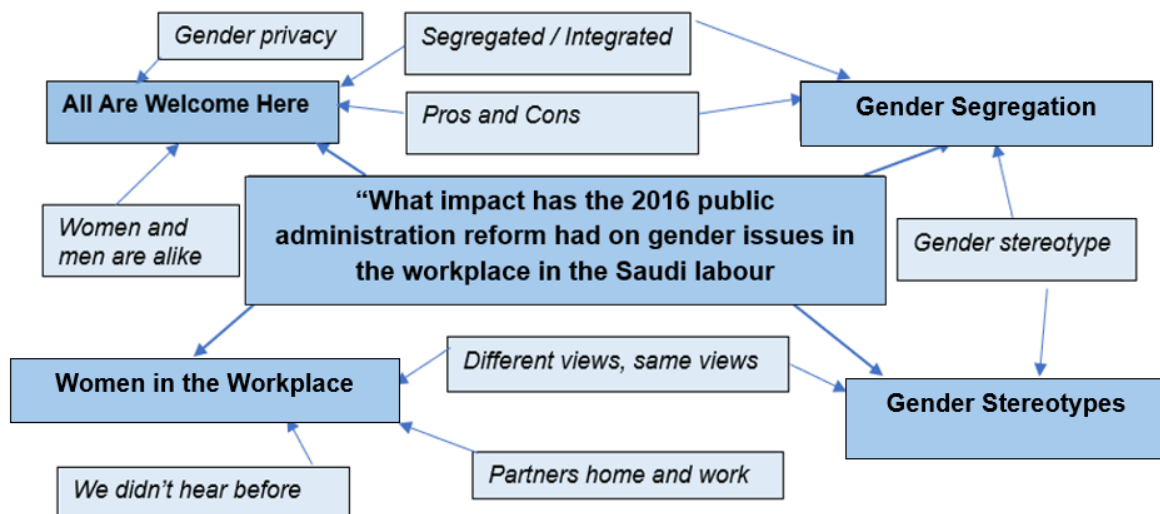
Figure 5.1: Themes and codes, RQ1

(Source: Author's own work)

Almost every participant had observed something they described in their own words about 'the new norms' and the 'new direction the country and the Ministry are taking' and talked about these in the semi-structured interviews. The words and synonyms for them were repeated several times in every interview, not only when we talked about gender issues and women's empowerment but at other junctures. This was repeated for each research question; for instance, the second theme that emerged during analysis, 'Women in the Workplace' was also directly influenced by the participants' discussion, especially the female participants on the increased

attention from the government for women in terms of listening to their needs, improving their skills and empowering them. The first stage of the coding exercise was conducted by writing words and phrases on sticky-notes and grouping them on a flip chart, then a grid was produced in a Word document. Whole phrases where they appeared in the text were copied and pasted into different boxes in the grid, which was labelled with codes from the flip chart and they gradually formed into themes. A sense began to form from the participants' experiences that changes accompanying Vision 2030 on women and the workplace have consequences for both male and female employees. Participants from both sides have talked about the consequences of working together, such as the change in workplace culture with the 'new situation' of shared spaces and the consequences of leadership issues among women, such as challenges and tensions, which are explained in some detail in the next sections and in particular formulated the last two themes: gender-based stereotypes and women in leadership roles.

5.2.1. Gender Segregation

Gender segregation / desegregation was mentioned by many participants, and was deeply entrenched in discussion around women's empowerment and the new culture in the workplace. It was clear from the participants' narratives that the country and the Ministry are taking a new direction and new norms are starting to be constructed; Saudi Arabia seems to be developing a new culture, where integrating women into mixed gender workplaces is a key aim.

P18, a male inspector, P3, a male manager in the same department, and P12, a woman working in policy shared similar views about gender integration in the workplace being the new norm:

In my opinion, it neither has a positive nor negative impact. It's normal; it's like having a male colleague next to you, the situation doesn't differ, honestly. (P18, Male, AISF).

The place where I work, there are women who work normally without segregation of the genders, the condition of working in a separate department has been disregarded. This was done routinely, as guidance was issued to assign women to work in the men's department, and they are treated normally until they become accustomed to it (P3, male, AISF).

… the change is not only in our ministry. It is everywhere in Saudi Arabia. (P12, female, CSP)

Others directly linked mixed-gender workplaces to women's empowerment:

I believe that women have been empowered in several aspects. Firstly, by changing the general Saudi culture. Secondly, through attraction, empowerment, and Saudization within employment settings. Thirdly, through the systems and regulations implemented by the state at the national level, where people have become accustomed to seeing women present and excel in every field. This has become the norm, showcasing successful examples of female leaders. (P14, male, AISF)

According to the participants, women's empowerment appears to have become the cultural norm in the Ministry, and it is directly influenced by the 2030 Vision. For example, P3, P7, P20 and P8 reported their understanding of the Vision's goals in relation to empowering women:

The issue of empowering women is one of the goals of the Vision, so the Ministry's aim has become to empower women. (P3, Male, AISF).

… Also, among the most important goals of the Ministry is to empower women as an essential part of the country's resources, which is excellent. (P7, Female, DLMP).

There is no doubt that Vision 2030 has an important role and that without this Vision, women's empowerment would not have evolved. (P20, Male, AISF).

Of course, the Vision changes women's empowerment...These are all indicators of a vision that came from the goals of the vision. The basis of the change came from the vision. When change is one of the goals of the vision, the parties interact, but the issue is relative... There was a decision by His Excellency, the former Minister of Civil Service, to involve women and reduce gender segregation, as well as the establishment of the Women's Empowerment Agency and the assignment of an assistant undersecretary from among the female employees of the Ministry and the appointment of more than one female general manager. This was the first time it happened in the Ministry. (P8, Female, DLMP)

At a practical level, and from initial discussion with the Director prior to starting the semi-structured interviews, it was explained that the integration between men and women is visible in four particular ways. Firstly, new job advertisements do not specify male or female candidates preferred. Second, placement of new employees does not specify if they are to be working in a gender-specific section; it simply states they will be hired as an inspector. Thirdly, leaders from the segregated areas are involved extensively in every meeting together, regardless of their gender. Lastly, segregation of men and women has been removed gradually to allow workers to adjust unless they are requesting same-gender spaces. Each of these processes form part of the catalysts for change (Král and Králová, 2016, p. 2-3) (for example, open and transparent communication and providing employees with the necessary skills and knowledge through training and development programs).

The views of these participants are convergent with what has been written recently regarding the 2030 Vision having some impact towards empowering women in

different government sectors. For example, in a discursive essay centred around the education sector, McGregor and Alghamdi (2022) argued that women have a central role in nation building. They posit that Saudi Arabia has increased the potential of women in the workplace by increasing their access to university education and suggest that the Vision 2030 supports women's rights to demonstrate their leadership potential (see also Kattan *et al.,* 2016). Likewise, in the festival and entertainment sector, Almathami, Khoo-Lattimore and Yang (2022) found moderate changes in empowering women but suggest there is more to be achieved. In addition, Alhammami (2022) observed the fading of old discourse around religious norms in relation to gender segregation in Saudi universities.

However, there were some dissenting voices. Some participants reported things were unsettled, including this comment from a woman in the policy department:

> *When I sit with my colleagues, they do not accept the idea of working in a mixed-gender workplace and want to remain in a segregated workplace (P23, Female, CSP).*

This may indicate some resistance to change may be present amongst the male members of the department. There is no doubt that enforcing gender de-segregation in the workforce is a top-down directive from the government, which as an institutional pressure to change falls into the category of the coercive forces inherent in institutional isomorphism (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983). This resistance becomes an inhibitor to the change (Král and Králová, 2016, p. 2-3).

P23 shared further evidence that the old norm has not been changed by Vision 2030 and that the old cultural traditions remain. P23 used teachers in her example to illustrate her concerns because Saudi schools are known to be fully segregated and fully managed by women. Therefore, she explained that women will always prefer

these types of workplaces due to the culture. In other words, in the absence of an established frame of reference for women in the Ministry, she talks about one that does exist – women teachers. Thus, she is suggesting that many women prefer this type of workplace:

> *Even after Vision 2030, there are still cultural norms and existing traditions. I believe that women's empowerment stems from cultural attitudes.*

> *I believe that women's empowerment is not related to Vision 2030. I think that empowerment is a cultural issue, and it remains the same before and after Vision 2030. In my society, women see themselves as teachers, where segregation takes place (P23, Female, CSP).*

Similarly, P24 agreed that the mixed gender workplace is not preferred by some women because of 'family obligation':

> *Yes, some women want to be away from supervision, so their supervisors won't see them. Others have family obligations, such as spouses or parents, who may direct that women should not work in a mixed-gender environment. (P24, Male, CSP).*

P30 mentioned the tribal, family and religious burden of women working in a mixed-gender workplace, with P25 adding further narrative:

> *…. Yes, the tribe plays a role, as well as the family and religion. The nature of the city where the workplace is located also matters. Cultures differ, and some cities in Saudi Arabia accept the presence of both genders in certain positions, while others reject it. Religion and cultural beliefs are influential factors.*

> *We have often encountered requests from women to provide them with separate workspaces. The integration may not make others, both men and women, feel comfortable. The cultural background we come from is one of the factors that influence acceptance of working in a mixed environment. (P30, Male, BESF).*

Some women refused and left the Ministry, while others integrated. I know a woman who refused because of her husband; he didn't allow her. This happened in Najran, and then she was transferred to Riyadh. (P25, Male, AISF).

Both P30 and P25 allude here to regional differences in response to de-segregation, and link this with tribal, family or religious values. Both participants were asked for more details and to offer clarification. For example, people in Southern Saudi Arabia tend to be more adherent to tribal and family obligations and people of the West and Central areas, where Riyadh and Jeddah, the two largest Saudi cities, are located, tend to be more open-minded because these regions are interacting more with global communities either for business matters in Riyadh or for pilgrims in the West (Almathami, Khoo-Lattimore and Yang. 2022). P25 who is originally from the South of Saudi Arabia was able to explain this by referring to the region's adherence to the tribe and family obligation. These examples of narrative fall under the normative pillar of IT; social obligation is seen as the basis of compliance under this pillar. Likewise, the 'honour' of the family or tribe is an affective element of the normative pillar, as moving workplace to satisfy family obligations protects their 'honour' (Scott, 2013).

In answering questions related to the impact of tribe, family, and religion possibly hindering women's empowerment, these responses demonstrate an undercurrent in the workforce across the Ministry that indeed, these factors affect women's empowerment, perhaps in different ways. We saw in Section 2.4.1 how elements of the tribes' identity were incorporated into the Basic Law of Governance and into Saudi society (Gov.sa, 1992; see also Al Fahad, 2004), and we also saw that in subsuming the tribes' mores within the newly formed Kingdom, the expectation in law is that loyalty is to the nation, and the head of state, not the tribe or region

(Maisel, 2014). However, these excerpts also support previous authors who found that Saudi society is still influenced by old cultural norms (e.g., Almathami, Khoo-Lattimore and Yang, 2022). From the literature, Alhazmi (2022) stated that Saudi society has been a society that does not mix genders in public spaces; gender segregation was the norm in all government agencies, hospitals, and private companies. Turning to the institutional theory lens, gender segregation could be seen as emanating from the coercive power (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983) wielded by the Sahwa, an extremist religious movement, creating a strictly conservative society (see Chapter 2; Alhazmi, 2022). According to Alhassan and Németh (2023), public spaces in Saudi Arabia have been developed under the practice of gender segregation for decades, and the reforms will not bring an end to these cultural restrictions. Alhawsawi and Jawhar (2023) found that Saudi culture has a diverse impact on disempowering women. From the institutional theory lens, this also shows the power of old culture in influencing changes and can also be seen as coercive (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983). Specifically, this occurs when formal and informal pressures are exerted on organisations (and by default, the workers within) from governments, society, and other organisations to make changes or indeed resist changes (see Cardona, Pardi and Daso, 2020).

5.2.2. Women in the workplace

Many participants reported that since Vision 2030 was launched and the associated reforms began in the Ministry, they have created a culture that employs and empowers women. They suggested that women's voices can be heard, and their representation is increasing in the Ministry:

The elimination of gender segregation has allowed women to be heard and empowered. For example, we now listen to opinions from the women's section more easily in teamworking. Unlike in the past, we either did not hear what they had to say or had limited access to the women's division. (P2, Male, DLMP)

The Vision 2030 agenda main objective is to empower women. Vision 2030 has led to the increase of women employment in many places in the private and public sectors. Vision 2030 also raise the awareness of the importance of women at workplaces and awareness of the need for women in the Ministry to serve other women. (P9, Male, AISF)

P2's narrative is highly suggestive that the process of culture norming is evolving within his department in the ministry (Palthe, 2012). This involves the adoption of new practices or behaviours and a shift in organisational culture — ".. *we now listen to opinions from the women's section*.." Caprar and Neville, (2012), stress that culture plays an important role in how far change will be adopted in an organisation. Cultural norms and values form part of the normative processes within the normative pillar of Institutional Theory (Scott, 2013), and facilitate organisational change through their influence.

These two male opinions were supported by some female participants as well. For example, P8 and P22, female workers in Department D, stated that the number of women in the workplace and their productivity are increasing:

It contributed a lot to empowering women and making them feel they were accepted in the right place for them [not just allocated somewhere to work because they are women]and making them gain new experiences that in the past went to the men's section under most of the decisions, and all the actual work takes place there. Also, the side meeting sessions and brainstorming sessions are now more effective due to the participation of both sexes. Previously, the woman was far from many work-related

matters [in the Women's section], so it reduced her visibility within the department. Still, now things have become better, and the woman has become acquainted with many necessary details which support her

…

Yes, the integration of the two genders contributed to increasing women's representation and thus achieved positive results for work. Still, there is a challenge because the collaborative work environment is not always accessible [if some workers request segregated workplace for cultural reasons]. (P8, female, DLMP)

In the past, we were in separate locations. The vision embraced integration, and I support integration because the productivity of female employees has increased. We have become complementary to each other. Previously, we were not in the same place, but now we are in the same place and directly receive information, which is a positive development.

Many were opposed to this integration, but I am not opposed because I have seen the results of this integration. Instead of taking information by sending an email and waiting for a response, I now directly approach the office of the specialised employee if they do not respond to the email, and I obtain the required information directly. (P22, Female, DLMP)

The points made here by P8 and P22 make for interesting reading. They are giving a woman's perspective based on their lived experience within the workplace, and each expresses a nuanced perspective unique to that experience. Both talk about productivity increasing, citing examples such as brainstorming sessions being more effective. P22 discusses improved communication, but also there is a sense of empowerment in the right to approach offices directly rather than being 'unseen' through email communication. Turning to the literature, this provides an example of how the reform within the Ministry appears to have increased women's visibility,

demonstrating change since Al-Asfour *et al.* (2017) found segregation becomes a barrier to women's progress causing their limited visibility. This again becomes an example of gender de-segregation becoming a catalyst to change (Král and Králová 2016, p. 2-3).

A positive part of how women are experiencing the workplace following the reforms appears to be in improving their rights. Women talked about this in two areas: overall women's rights and those in the workplace. The government has implemented two significant socio-economic reforms to empower women, the first being to allow women to drive and to travel independently without need for a male guardian, and the second being to increase women's representation in the economy from 17 per cent to 30 per cent by 2030. The impact of these two specific reforms appeared in some interviews. For example, participant 6 said: "*It is easier for me now to commute to the workplace and to attend meetings in different buildings of the Ministry*".

Participant 14 said this about the right to drive:

> *Women have been empowered before and during work. During work, they will be empowered based on their capabilities, e.g., qualifications. However, before work, they have been empowered by allowing them to drive. After driving, right, women can go to work easily. Therefore, everything is now possible and available to them. (P14, DLMP Male).*

Women's participation has increased in the Saudi economy after the reforms of the 2030 Vision, as seen when Participant 15 stated that the Labour Inspection Department was previously dominated by men; however, now, there are many women inspectors.

These pieces of evidence suggest that allowing women to drive and increasing women's participation have had an impact on empowering women. This finding is supported by Al Otaibi, (2018) and Asquer and Alzahrani, (2020). Furthermore, according to Faudot (2019), allowing women to drive and the regulations to increase women's participation in the economy from 17 per cent to 30 per cent by 2030 was a revolution for women of Saudi Arabia. To elaborate more, an updated indicator of women's participation in the government shows that female participation already exceeds the 30% target of the Vision, having reached 33.2 per cent in 2020 (Vision 2030, 2022). Turning to the theoretical framework of this thesis, although the reforms have largely been coercive mechanisms as part of the regulatory pillar (Scott, 2013), the government's decision following Royal edict to increase the number of women in employment / the economy may be rooted in mimetic isomorphism, under which organisations will model themselves on others that they believe to have legitimacy in the public eye (Marquis and Tilscik, 2016). A broader mimetic process may well be at play here; the United Nations 17 sustainable development goals involve women's empowerment in each, with UN Women (2012) saying:

> *Achieving gender equality and women's empowerment is integral to each of the 17 goals. Only by ensuring the rights of women and girls across all the goals will we get to justice and inclusion, economies that work for all, and sustaining our shared environment now and for future generations.*

In contrast to these experiences, three male participants discussed some concerns in relation to the increase of women within the workforce at the Ministry:

> *…The number of women is immense, and this affected the work negatively. There are disruptions. This is my opinion. (P11, Male, AISF)*

From my perspective, women's empowerment has come in a way that does not serve the interests of men. There are some departments that bring in female employees in different positions without measuring their competence and leadership. This puts pressure on them to perform, and their accomplishments come at the expense of the competence of men. Some women come to work with us after participating in Vision achievement programs in a certain entity, and they demand a salary of 30,000 or 40,000, with only 5 years of experience. This has created salary discrepancies due to their presence. The person who used to receive a salary of 10,000, which was sufficient for them, now demands 30,000. These are among the significant issues, and the reason behind them is women. Women's empowerment has taken a wrong path; we simply hire women to increase the numbers. (P26, Male, BESF)

In terms of drawbacks, there are more employment opportunities for women than men, which can be justified due to higher unemployment rates among women. We could say that this is a negative aspect for men. However, overall, there are justifications for this situation. (P30, Male, BISF)

As reported by these participants, there is disquiet over the new situation that colleagues find themselves in. The well-publicised Nitaqat and Saudisation plans over the preceding years which targeted improving employment opportunities for Saudi Nationals also outlined increased opportunities for women (Alfarran, 2016). And yet P26, a Senior grade staff involved at management level identifies issues such as salary expectations and discrepancies, with a clear question mark over why this is taking place (to increase numbers). P26 was referring to the idea that because empowering women has been prioritised and there is shortage of skilled women, some highly skilled women have asked for high salaries; as a senior manager with recruitment and management responsibilities, it is assumed P26 is in a position to know about the salaries.

- 152 -

When turning to the literature and the theoretical stance of this study, two important aspects were revealed. Naseem and Dhruva (2017) stated that female participation in the labour force has been neglected for over fifty years in Saudi society, which has resulted in their economic participation being extremely low. Therefore, Vision 2030 is now paving the path for women to have more work opportunities and to work on creating successful women role models for the younger generation (Naseem and Dhruva, 2017). Similarly, Alharbi (2022) concluded by recommending the Saudi government increase women's employment opportunities and empowerment through successful reforms as women's empowerment is symbolic for society's improvement. This may explain the higher salaries some successful women have asked for due to being in high demand.

Institutional theory in relation to this point offered an explanation in that change brings costs; organisations need to spend when change occurs and perhaps the discrepancy in salaries that P26 mentioned is the cost of women's empowerment. In addition, some changes and reality are perceived differently by the individuals and groups of individuals who define them (Berger and Luckmann, 1991). Two high-ranking women officials, P7 and P8, had this to say about the increased representation of women in the workforce:

> *… in my opinion, in the past two years, women used to take a man's share of employment opportunities but now they are equal, which is a good thing. (P7, Female, DLMP)*

> *What happened was the empowerment of women, with the concern for efficiency, and in the same way, women were employed only to create a balance in employment between the sexes. We indicated that 50 per cent of jobs should go to women when vacant positions were put up and 50 per cent to men. Here, some departments were using the recruitment of*

women as a balance regardless of efficiency, especially in regular jobs. But in leadership positions, there had to be a competency requirement, and there was a focus on competency. (P8, Female, DLMP)

As discussed earlier, P7 and P8 are directly referencing the recent policy and the directive of Vision 2030 to increase women's representation in the workforce and in employment Whereas in the previous excerpt, P8 intimated that the competency requirement rested with leadership positions and not the lower ranks, two participants, one male and one female, believed all women were required to be qualified and demonstrate competence:

> *First, I would like to say that the increased employment of women was based on competence, not only employing women. In our department we do not discriminate between the genders, but rather hire qualified people. (P4, Male, DLMP).*

> *I don't see a significant increase in numbers; women were already present, and their numbers were significant in the ministries. But people didn't know them, they didn't know their actual count. Only the human resources department and the deputy knew, but male employees don't see them, so they don't know if they are numerous or not.*

> *I don't see any problem. The issue was with their performance, which needed development. Usually, men develop their skills among themselves, while women had lower performance. It required patience. I just want someone who understands quickly, someone I can talk to and leave the conversation quickly. I want them to grasp things faster. That's why I told you that developing women's skills was very beneficial. The training courses provided by the Ministry were also very helpful.*

> *There is no problem for men because their proportion is still significant. Our agency has women, but some agencies didn't have any women at all. Inspection was primarily conducted by men, but now the number of female inspectors has increased. The increase in the number of female inspectors*

is not only because we want female inspectors, but also because the nature of the work requires a larger number. The job seekers among women are more in number, approximately 70% are women and 30% are men. We didn't hire them at the expense of men, but because there were no male applicants. (P15, Female, CSP)

In fact, turning to the theoretical lens for this study, institutional theory has much to offer as an understanding of the institutional dynamics at work here. Much of this thesis is about institutional change, specifically the changes seen since the introduction of Vision 2030. Selznick (1984, p.5) describes an institution as "a natural product of social needs and pressures, a responsive and adaptive organism". P15 here suggests 'women have always been here' and that the main issue is related to improving their performance in the workplace. In other words, there seem to be complexities when ensuring women are offered training to ensure their skills match the competence requirements for them to fulfil their role obligations, especially with the Ministry addressing the need to increase the number of women in the workforce. Previous authors have found similar, with Alfarran, Pyke, and Stanton (2018) suggesting that skills discrepancies arise because there has been restricted opportunities for women to gain vocational training, despite having higher educational qualifications than men. P15 has a leadership position and was able to outline the type of post graduate training she had undertaken since joining the Ministry, including in-house training (aspects such as risk management) as well as the first part of a Women Leaders Programme (INSEAD, 2023).

Bjorkman *et al.* (2007) describe how employment policies and practices are transferable from different institutional environments, but the 'newness' of the situation here — women in what was previously a segregated workplace — means that, to use Selznick's imagery again, the 'responsive and adaptive organism' of the

workplace needs to adapt in ways not previously envisioned within Saudi Arabia. Ferner (1997) suggests that the type of change seen when organisations reform — for instance, bringing more women into the workforce — impact on HR practices and procedures; for those in the workplace, such as the respondents here, it may be that the new norms that are being constructed in the non-segregated workplace need to be acknowledged so that participants such as P11 ("…this affected the work negatively. There are disruptions. This is my opinion") and P26 ("...From my perspective, women's empowerment has come in a way that does not serve the interests of men") can feel supported.

This appears to be a cultural barrier for many of the male participants, a new way of relating with women from outside their immediate family and social circle, and Vance and Paik (2010) remind us that such barriers can create difficulties in adhering to best practice. Another example of a cultural barrier was seen earlier when P25 was referring to the role of family and tribe preventing some women from participating in the mixed gender workplace. In fact, the OC3 Model (Model of Organisational Change in Cultural Context) provides a useful insight into some of the resistance to change being expressed by these participants (Latta, 2009). In particular, the third stage of the OC3 model (Cultural Alignment), describes aligning any changes with an existing cultural context. To ensure congruence, new change processes are adapted to resonate with the organisation's cultural values and practices (normative pillar: shared norms, values, and expectations within the organisation; Scott, 2013). It would appear that the desegregation along with the increased presence of women and all this entails has been difficult to endorse for some participants whose lived experience until the reforms has been markedly different – the 'new' does not align with 'the old'.

5.2.3. All are welcome here

It was clear from the interviews that many participants had seen a significant change in workplace culture since the beginning of Vision 2030. Some suggested the new workplace culture accompanying the 2030 Vision is 'welcoming all men and women'. However, there were cases where this seems rhetorical, as will be seen from these contrasting examples.

For example, P6 had observed 'many rules' related to women in the workplace:

> *I think Vision 2030 has a significant role in empowering women. Many rules encourage women's employment and empower them in different leadership roles. In the past, some essential employment opportunities were exclusively for men. However, now government bodies must not specify gender in employment advertising. (P6, Female, DLMP)*

Regarding the 'many rules' P6 mentioned, P7 stated:

> *Empowering women is an excellent economic goal. The Vision has carried it out everywhere, which is suitable for women, as instead of living on social security, they are now part of the state's economy. Indeed, in the Ministry, there is high empowerment of women who have proven themselves and found terrific opportunities during this period…. The Ministry also supported the movement of female employees, the provision of childcare homes, and the payment of part of the costs of daily care for children. All these measures are to empower women. (P7, Female, DLMP)*

Along with the normality of the situation, women's empowerment is becoming an embodied culture in the Ministry in all four departments under investigation. For example, P21 from department C replied:

> *After the vision, there is no need to ask about women's empowerment because there has been a significant change. Empowering women was*

one of the goals of the vision, and you can see them working alongside you. (P21, Male, CSP).

According to P22, a female employee, the Ministry seems to be the first government entity in the country to integrate women in the same workplace, which confirms the idea of all are welcome here, 'even women':

We are the first ministry to implement the integration of both genders in the workplace directly. If the Ministry had not contributed and integrated, we would still have separate buildings for men and women. We would continue as we were, with a male building and a female building, and during meetings, we would gather in a hall in the men's section. But now, we are together with the men in the same place. (P22, Female, DLMP).

Two male participants from different departments had this to say about having more women in the workplace:

I believe it is a response to the general trend of empowering women in the country. Certainly, after the Vision, empowering women became a priority. In general, most entities, whether in the private sector or government sectors, responded to this trend and became keen on empowering women. (P16, Male, AISF).

From my perspective, women constitute half of society, and they are indeed an excellent addition…. Therefore, I believe that this integration adds value. (P28, Male, BESF).

These respondents are describing a work dynamic that is in direct contrast to what has been written pre-2017 (when Vision 2030 was published) about the workplace culture in the Saudi government sector. For example, Al-Ahmadi, (2011), observed that women in the Saudi public sector were experiencing challenges including lack of resources and lack of empowerment. In fact, women and men working in the

same place itself is a significant change; the Saudi public and private sectors have only known segregated working since the introduction of Vision 2030. Many scholars have identified the segregation of genders as one of the most significant burdens for women. For example, Meijer (2010), stated that gender segregation in Saudi Arabia is everywhere in workplaces, hospitals, restaurants and charitable organisations.

The old construct of the Saudi society — segregated workplaces — seems to remain the acceptable norm for participants from Department A, as seen in several examples of participants' narratives, thus they describe de-segregation as a 'trend'. This also may explain why there were no women participants from this department, despite the efforts made to recruit participants within it. Burr (2003) suggested such changes take time to become established as new norms; at this stage of the narrative, it was difficult to determine whether it was the newness of the situation that was affecting the dynamics between male and female staff in department A, but the following excerpts demonstrated differences.

P12 had this to say:

> *There is a big difference. As an employee in a ministry where there is a significant male presence and dominance, you know, we're talking about a country and all that, so we had limited interaction with men at first. It was somewhat forbidden. But with the new changes brought by the Vision, everything started to change. We started to interact normally and work together. We women had a separate place, a separate office, and they [men] would come to us, so it was completely different. Now we work together in a mixed-gendered place. (P12, Female, CSP)*

However, some male employees had reservations about working alongside female colleagues:

- 159 -

Yes, there are drawbacks. The work environment is not ideal when you sit in one place with women colleagues for 8 hours. It's different when you have female colleagues; the way of speaking and the topics of conversation are not always work-related, and that's where the problem lies. On the other hand, with male colleagues, you can talk more freely and comfortably. This creates negative aspects in the work itself because it creates an unfavourable work environment. (P26, Male, BESF).

… It may not be a challenge but rather a weakness in the way people interact and understand each other. These are not conflicts but rather a lack of understanding of how to interact with the opposite gender. The communication style used to be within the same gender, but now there is a difference in understanding, which leads to a lack of comprehension in the interaction. (P27, Male, BESF).

P27 was referring to what he saw as the challenge of communication between genders, and thus a lack of understanding. Likewise, P30 and P21 said:

Having a mixed-gender workplace may make some individuals feel uncomfortable, especially in societies with conservative norms. Men may not feel at ease at work, and the same goes the other way. (P30, Male, BESF)

In my personal opinion, due to the culture and beliefs, some individuals or departments rushed into this matter, and it requires a gradual approach. Female employees don't feel comfortable because women need a dedicated space to work more comfortably and productively. (P21, Male, CSP).

Several Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development employees reported the coercive power devolving from the government to empower women and change the gender-segregated workplace in the Ministry (Regulative Pillar; Scott 2013). Women participants reported that the socio-economic reforms have created both resistance and conformity. The resistance is co-constituted in relation to religious

and patriarchal tenets and social norms; this cultural resistance is clearly an inhibitor to change for these participants (Král and Králová, 2016, p. 2-3). For instance, some participants, both men and women, reported resistance to the new mixed workplace culture. Others reported socially constructed mores such as lack of understanding of each gender's needs and feeling uncomfortable when working together. Therefore, some have asked for dedicated gender-specific space to remain within the department. P21 believed de-segregation has been a 'rushed decision' and said there was a lack of time to absorb it all, to learn, to understand the new policy before it was enforced.

P4 and P24 both endorsed the integration of genders:

> *The process of reducing gender segregation and the process of integrating women were done quickly, but they were quickly accepted by everyone. (P4, male, DLMP).*

> *Regarding work in the Ministry, what was expected to take 10 or 15 years in terms of women's empowerment was achieved within two years. This success was surprising to everyone, even the most optimistic individuals did not anticipate such rapid progress. (P24, Male, CSP).*

> *We can only accept this situation, because this has become the direction of the state and the Ministry. The situation is new for the employees, as it is a change in culture before the change in work. It is true that this cultural change may have pros and cons. There may be an initial rejection of this change and the new culture. (P3, Male, AISF).*

Clearly there were differing opinions as seen in this range of narratives. There were no specific departmental differences as workers from each department shared similar diverse opinions, but consistent themes included the speed of the introduction of de-segregation with divergence on whether having women in the

previously segregated workspace was a positive or not. P3 captures the dissonance that may be experienced – knowing it is a 'good thing' to have desegregation but acknowledging initial resistance until new norms are bedded in.

Many scholars have called for women's empowerment and a change of cultural norms and beliefs to accommodate women in Saudi workplaces (e.g., McGregor and Alghamdi, 2022: Almathami, Khoo-Lattimore and Yang, 2022). However, some of the participants' experience and beliefs contradict what the literature has been calling for. This suggests the old cultural norm seems to be very well constructed among some groups of people, and there appears to be resistance from some of the women themselves. For instance, two female participants confirmed concerns around losing the privacy that is afforded with a segregated workplace:

> *I prefer a segregated gender workplace because every gender has its own privacy. (P1, Female, CSP).*

> *But I would like to say that everything has a negative side, as this merging has affected privacy, but this is simple compared to the achievements that exist when merging between the sexes. Likewise, there may sometimes be no harmony between the genders, as well as the fact that this culture is new to us may create some difficulties, as we have been used to years in a separate department. Still, the integration did quality work and is in the interest of the Ministry. (P7, Female, DLMP.)*

Similarly, P8, a female manager from department D, echoed the view of P7 with regard to the challenges of a mixed-gender workplace, with others making similar comments:

> *However, one of the challenges of the shared environment for women is to work for long periods in a mixed environment. Some challenges may*

occur to them, but this does not preclude that this mixing is in the interest of work. (P8, Female, DLMP).

In the beginning, yes, there were some challenges, such as dealing with different gender because, as you know, we do not use to working with the opposite gender as this may create shyness and embarrassment. However, after we got used to it, things changed for the best of the work as we now collaborate with each other to accomplish tasks. And it was good for women as they participated more and engaged more in the work. (P13, Male, DLMP)

There seems to be support from some managers in continuing to maintain the old, segregated workplace.

From my personal perspective as a team leader, I always give my subordinates the freedom to work any way that affords them comfort in the workplace. Therefore, there are separate units and offices for women and men, as well as shared units. For example, some women who cover their faces prefer to have separate spaces, and in the shared space, there is no physical proximity between individuals. However, interviews and meetings take place in non-segregated designated areas. (P27, Male, BESF).

Some of them are satisfied with the situation, while others prefer privacy and isolated offices. That's why I have some isolated offices and some open ones. Each person is free to choose the place they feel comfortable in. There is also a break room for those who want to rest. However, some women are not happy with this integration. (P24, Male, CSP)

Both P24 and P27 are managers, and stated clearly that there is provision for anyone who wants to work in a segregated workplace. On further discussion, it was explained that to allow employees to work in a comfortable manner, managers such as P24 and P27 were flexible with their employees and allowed them to choose either working in mixed gender workplace or separate ones. This flexibility may also

indicate a level of uncertainty in implementing the Vision 2030 reforms in regard to women and men's segregation – the policy states de-segregation, yet managers are flexible. In this case, it results in a challenge for the reforms to change the old-constructed norm of segregated workplace in the government entity when a workplace narrative has been constructed that allows managers to 'bend' the rules. Askeland (2020) argues this dynamic within institutions causes a persistent and deep-rooted tension, with a lack of clarity over which rule to follow. Using an institutional theory lens, Askeland (2020) explains that deep rooted norms and tension (and even conflict) arise as the result of the disparate values that are established within the workplace. They suggest that values become socialised as they are constructed through groups and turn into actions within the normative structures that exist in organisations. Using this narrative, the manager being flexible to meet the disparate demands of women and men employees, in the case of this research, is juggling to meet their demands. This act of bridging disparate groups to meet such demands becomes institutional pluralism, where an organisation is faced with a situation where it is working within multiple institutional spheres – in other words, a segregated workplace and a non-segregated workplace at the same time. Kraatz and Block (2008) describe institutional pluralism as where an organisation is subject to "multiple regulatory regimes, embedded within multiple normative orders, and/or constituted by more than one cultural logic". (Kraatz and Block, 2008, p. 2). The Ministry is an ideal example of institutional pluralism, where the old and the new cultural norms and logic are confronting each other. The first regulatory regime seems to be established by religious conservative actors, who believe in the old norms; the second regulatory regime seems to be arising from the reforms of policymakers who want a more liberal modernised workplace.

However, this sort of flexibility and understanding from leaders could also be considered good practice, given the fact that the Saudi Arabian context is different than, for example, Western societies (Alsubaie and Jones, 2017).

> *We have a separate women's workspace, but I don't know the exact numbers and statistics. It is partially separate because [the separation is desired by both parties], and each party wants a specific wing. We have an open hall, and the female employees wanted an isolated area. Personally speaking, when I travelled and studied abroad and saw the difference in mixed workplaces, I understood the mixed-gender work environment and this cultural barrier was removed for us. But for my colleagues who never travelled abroad and saw other cultures they do not accept mixed gender workplaces. Even though we may have become accustomed to it abroad, when we came to work in Saudi Arabia, there is a kind of difficulty, and even some men refused integration, not just women. (P11, Male, AISF)*

> *The nature of upbringing regarding seeing women in independent workplaces separate from men also has an impact. Therefore, when we work, we feel that the other party is not comfortable in the workplace. Some entities seek employee comfort, so they provide them with a designated place to perform their work. (P30, Male, BESF)*

Flexibility and understanding from leaders can be explained through a cultural lens. Saudi Arabia is an Islamic country where most of its citizens are Muslims. Islamic laws require women to wear a 'Hijab'. Hijab is an Arabic term that describes a whole cover of women. Most Saudi women wear Hijab, which sometimes can be difficult for women in a non-segregated workplace. Fenster (2005) stated that women's wear or clothing in public places are constructed by gender norms, traditions, and religion. In a non-segregated workplace, women might face practical issues such as ensuring their hijab stays in place during various activities, or social challenges

- 165 -

such as feeling self-conscious or being subject to scrutiny or bias from colleagues. These difficulties can stem from balancing adherence to religious and cultural dress codes with the expectations and dynamics of a mixed-gender professional environment.

Participant 15 stated this:

> *In the beginning, this new culture was challenging, but later on when they saw that the new culture is comfortable and suitable for both genders, they accepted and adopted to the new environment and their families too (P15, CSP).*

P32 stated clearly that she was prepared to wear Abaya (another term for Hijab) all the time in her workplace. She also referenced how when a woman is a mother, that causes stress:

> *When we used to work in separate environments, for example, I sit in my workplace and don't wear my full Abaya because I'm in a separate place. The men can go out and come in through the door freely, with no problem. I'm not prepared to wear my abaya [over my clothes] and go out to breathe fresh air and then return [and take it off again]. However, if the place is mixed, I would be in my full Abaya at all times. This is uncomfortable because the entire building is made of glass, and there is no proper ventilation. When a woman is a mother, this can hinder her work and cause her stress. (P32, female, BESF).*

It was unclear from P32's input what exactly she meant when taking about being a mother may hinder work. As an inexperienced interviewer, and being Male, I did not feel it was my place to question her further, something which I later reflected on in my reflexive diary. Clarke (2006) stated that researchers must be mindful of questioning participants when discussing sensitive issues which may affect participants. They asserted the reflexive approach helps lower the risk of

- 166 -

undesirable effects such as people becoming uncomfortable. This is taken for discussion to the limitations of the study in Chapter 7, as other issues arose due to my gender when interviewing women.

Furthermore, in relation to privacy, two inspectors (P5 and P34) suggest having same-gender inspectors in some circumstances:

> *…. Also, having women as inspectors help us in market inspection in some markets that are fully managed by women. (P5, Male, AISF)*

> *There might not be any that come to mind at the moment, but there are many aspects. I'm talking about women entering the field of monitoring. One of the most important aspects is the privacy of women in their workplace, where only women can enter women private places like gyms and hair salons. There are restrictions on gyms and hair salons, meaning that women are not allowed to enter men's gyms or hair salons. However, if they do enter, there may be some leniency, unlike men who cannot enter such places for women. This is the main observation I've noticed in services. (P 34, Male, AISF).*

Saudi Arabia has started expanding on the number of female employees carrying out inspections due to the reforms only recently. It is not clear from the information given whether the policy of increasing women in the department is as a result of the overall Vision 2030 targets or whether there has been a call for females to conduct inspection visits. However, P34 was referring to this issue as positive practice. In the past where men dominated inspection services, female-only business such as Gyms and Hair Salons were out of the scope of male inspectors. However, with the increase of women inspectors, this has helped the Ministry to enter such places and carry out the inspections needed. When the service is audited as part of routine organisational KPI evaluation, it is probable that the numbers of inspection visits to this sector will be demonstrably higher, given the participants' narratives.

From the above discussion, it seems that a new culture is forming where the desegregated departments become workplaces where men and women are welcome. However, some of the male and female participants were opposed to gender integration at the workplace as it conflicted with their beliefs, which reflected the deep-rooted cultural norms. The fact that some women participants rejected the mixed gender workplace needs to be further studied, especially from a feminist point of view.

5.2.4. Gender-based stereotypes

Segregation between genders in the Saudi workplaces, especially in the government sector, was the norm until 2016. However, reforms came and removed segregation and changes always come with consequences, and this raises questions such how is this new mixed workplace going to work? Certainly, one consequence is the gendered language that was used by both genders when discussing the workplace and has become the norm; the below analysis will examine those.

When answering the first research question so far, it has been seen that since the introduction of Vision 2030, there has been a new norm constructed that women and men are alike in terms of work tasks, responsibilities and compensations, even with some dissenting voices and challenges. For example:

> *We have cancelled the gender segregation and became equal in all tasks, responsibilities and compensation and created a kind of gender homogeneity in the workplace. This is in the interest of work and achieves the goals and tasks of the Ministry. The previous segregation of the sexes creates difficulties in controlling employees, creating difficulty setting up*

offices and spending many budgets. The elimination of gender segregation contributes to participation, and this is good. (P9, Male, AISF).

Women and men here are alike. Women and men are partners in the workplace. We both have the same authority to make decisions or be in high or leadership positions. (P1, Female, CSP).

Some of the participants shared more practical details of what it feels like to work under the Vision, therefore describing more clearly some of its impact:

The elimination of gender segregation took place in all agencies. All departments have male and female employees without segregation. This step is considered to have enabled the woman. Previously, women were far from work, far from decision-making centres. Previously, they did not attend meetings, and if new events occurred, they did not know about them until late because of the Separation of the genders. This previously made it difficult to work for us as a woman. Remote work may be a solution, but in some things, we need brainstorming, which we can do now by joining meetings with men and come up with great products and get the work done. In the past, not sharing opinions reduced the quality of work. But now that they work in one place, this gives the work strength, and I am happy with that. (P7, Female, DLMP).

However, one aspect that also became clear was related to direct interaction between staff of all genders; some male participants appeared to be conforming to well-established and constructed stereotypes of gendered norms, typifying patriarchy in the new workplace. For example, a male participant in a reply to a question related to his opinion on women's empowerment stereotypically suggested that women "are good at details":

In my opinion, the increase in women's representation is good. Women tend to be organised at work. In the past, men tend to finish tasks only

without paying much attention to details. However, women tend to organise and look for the details, which benefited us a lot in our work. (P9, Male, AISF).

Similarly, P3 stated that women's work is "accurate and careful":

The work of women is characterized by accuracy and care, and this is reflected in the work culture and in the men among the employees, so they are trying to become like them, which creates a good competitive situation. (P3, Male, AISF).

Likewise, P5 pointed out that women could "ask good questions:

In teamwork, it is great. I think women's achievement is great. For example, the number of inspection cases that I receive from female employees is higher compared to male employees. Another example, I needed a technical support at work, which was hard to solve, and it was solved by women staff. In the meeting, I think, they ask excellent questions. I think, the integration contributes to the achievement of the Ministry goals as women tend to be focused and specific, which help us in our work. (P5, Male, AISF)

P11 on the other hand, a male inspector, took a strong position using stereotypical rhetoric implying that he was against increased numbers of women:

There are female inspectors, to be honest. In the geographical campaign, in distribution, there are difficulties in the fieldwork, and it requires a certain level of roughness because you come across different people from different groups in the labour market and women face difficulties dealing with them. But in office work, in administrative work, I see that women are better than men. They excel in office work. There is no doubt that women face many problems, but if the manager handles them well, he feels relieved because they are more disciplined than men. But their problems are too many. Jealousy among each other on clothing, and personal

matters. If the manager does not know how to handle them well, the work
will be affected. (P11, Male, AISF).

The above narrative confirms that there are gender-based stereotypes and well-constructed norms around women. In particular, statements pertaining to women not having the 'rough' attitudes needed to deal with difficult clients and to women being more suited to admin suggest the strength of the patriarchy in the workplace, particularly when the 'generic' manager referred to as being relieved when he 'handles them well' in the example is male.

When conducting the interviews and this theme started to appear in the responses, I became aware subjectively of feeling discomfort, and noted this in the margin of the notes I made during the interview. When transcribing and preparing to code, the discomfort was still on the periphery of my senses, so I took it to my reflexive diary, and made a note to search the literature to determine whether this was common for interviewers, and also to investigate any previous findings that revealed the patterns apparent in the dynamics between men and women in the workplace. In fact, a strong explanation for this dynamic was seen in the work of Pierre Bourdieu (2001) who identifies this as symbolic violence. This is the legitimating force whereby the views [in this case of the employees within the Ministry] of the 'dominant' and the 'dominated' adopt what becomes the taken for granted norms, views, and language of the dominant group. Consequently, the attitudes exercised towards and about [in this case] women fosters their complicity because those in the workforce (social actors) misrecognise what is expected within the social structure; the dominant group [men in this case] have legitimised male-dominated assumptions which have been made to appear self-evident over time (Burke, 2017). This misrecognition (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990) means that the women in the departments are

aware that the socially constructed norms are based on disadvantage but Bourdieu and Passeron suggest they accept it because they no longer recognise it is happening. This argument is understandable while women in this study hear themselves being addressed in colloquial terms (e.g. 'sisters') that are commonplace in Saudi Arabia but in other societies would not be accepted in a professional workplace; it may also be interpreted as reflecting the patriarchy that is constructed in the Saudi male-dominant society (see Archer and Kam, 2022) The whole language of this section of narrative read as one of misrecognition, albeit stemming from a place of ignorance as the workers find themselves in a de-segregated environment, having never interacted with female colleagues in a close environment before:

> *For example, men have a tendency towards completing work, while women have a tendency to examine and improve work, and this is very good and in the interest of work. It is a complementary role, for example, if I take a job, I send it to some of the sisters, they will check my mistakes and help me to avoid them. (P4, Male, DLMP)*

Similarly, P25 stated that they [the Government] increased the representation of women [in the workplace] because they "lack assertiveness and cannot be leaders and they have stubborn opinions" and P30 suggested men are "better suited" to certain tasks:

> *I believe there is no injustice in all government sectors. However, they have increased the number of women in positions because some women lack assertiveness. In general, women are not suitable for leadership positions. There is a lack of flexibility in dealing with them, and there is stubbornness in sticking to their own opinions. (P25, Male, AISF).*

However, it is necessary to consider the nature of women and their capacity to handle work, and it is also unacceptable to expect them to manage work and moods due to the pressure they may face.

Sometimes, the nature of the work and tasks may not align with the nature of women, and this should be taken into account. For example, tasks that require strenuous fieldwork. Women may not be able to perform these tasks, from my perspective. This doesn't mean they are incapable of doing them. On the contrary, they may have the ability, but I believe that men are better suited for such tasks.

Also, in some sensitive positions where it is feared that women may be affected emotionally, they are not placed in such positions. (P30, Male, BESF).

There is much to unpick in the narratives in this section, and it is clear that many of the participants were navigating their way through the organisation as new institutional norms related to gender were being socially constructed. In one sense, for Saudi women, the aims of Vision 2030 with regards to the status and representation of women in the workplace go beyond gender equality, which UNICEF (2017) defines as *"…gender equality refers to women and men having the same opportunities, conditions, and treatments to develop and participate in different activities"*. When participants such as P30 state *".. in some sensitive positions where it is feared that women may be affected emotionally, they are not placed in such positions..."* it is clear that the expectations of Vision 2030 do not yet align with the expectations of some employees.

Authors such as Welter, Brush, and De Bruin (2014) and Harrison, Leitch, and McAdam (2020) have evidenced that gender norms established in organisations,

particularly in business entrepreneurship, may limit the choice of opportunities available to women and indeed their working practice. Prior to Vision 2030 being launched, it was well documented that local cultural norms usually ascribe women to defined feminine roles (see Welter and Smallbone, 2010 and Zamberi Ahmad, 2011). Ten years after the work of Welter, Brush, and De Bruin (2014), as seen in P4's comment "..*men have a tendency towards completing work, while women have a tendency to examine and improve work..",* established gender norms appear to be still around, suggesting the impact of Vision 2030 is yet to be fully seen and operationalised.

P4, P25 and P30 were male members of the team and in the above examples, each has used language that Archer and Kam (2022) describe as 'sexist'. Their study affirmed that such language in the workplace, in particular masculinised titles such as 'Chairman' [instead of Chairperson], will affect the expectations of workers – whether they have or will ever have positions in higher grades / authority. They further argue that "… *masculine leadership titles represent an avenue through which gender stereotypes that disadvantage women can be reinforced*" (Archer and Kam, 2022, p. 2). Furthermore, Swim, Mallett, and Stangor (2004, p117), suggest that the use of sexist language as it is constructed in society (and in particular in this instance, the workplace) becomes a form of subtle sexism that "*reinforces and perpetuates gender stereotypes and status differences between women and men*".

Much of the previous literature relates to Western society and economies; one recommendation from this study is that this is explored further within Saudi Arabia and the wider Gulf region to determine the nature of gender-based stereotypes within this culture for a more nuanced comparison.

5.2.5. Women In Leadership Roles

P25 brings another important angle to the issues around women's leadership in this analysis. From the review of women's leadership literature, women in the United States and worldwide lag far behind men in terms of representation in leadership positions (Geiger and Kent, 2017, cited in Archer and Kam, 2022). This under-representation according to Geiger and Kent (2017) is found across almost all economic, social, political and religious contexts. The under-representation of women leaders has been investigated by many scholars in the context of Saudi Arabia (Al-Ahmadi, 2011; Alsubaie and Jones, 2017) and in the Middle Eastern context in general (see Abadi, Dirani and Rezaei, 2022). Whereas the first of the studies cited here cover the period prior to the launch of Vision 2030, Abadi, Dirani and Rezael included a 2019 study examining experiences of academic women in Saudi Arabia.

Viewing the discussion around women's suitability or otherwise for leadership roles and the gender-stereotypical language inherent within the discourse through an institutional theory lens brings into focus how inexorably linked the participant women's experience is with the cultural-cognitive and normative pillars (Scott, 2013). Indeed, Sidani, Konrad and Karam (2015) found that "*Middle Eastern women tie their invisibility in leadership roles to the culturally bound cognitions and stereotypes that fathers more than mothers are perceived as decision-makers and viewed as leaders*" (cited in Abadi, Dirani and Rezaei, 2019, p. 26). Authors such as Abadi, Dirani and Rezaei, (2019) have found that guardianship and women's limited legal right to travel has severely impacted women's ability to attain leadership positions. They suggest that lifting such restrictions (regulative pillar) begins the

wave of change and creates a new mindset (cultural-cognitive and normative pillars) that opens pathways to women attaining leadership positions.

P23 shared very strong evidence on this matter, where she faced many challenges in pursuing her leadership career starting from tensions with her male manager to male colleagues climbing on her shoulders to receive recognition:

> *…Personally, I have faced many difficulties in working with current leaders, some previous leaders did not empower me, despite my significant efforts. They had the belief that women work, and the product of their effort remains in the shadows, and we highlight a man to talk about the achievements and efforts…. (P23, female, CSP)*

> *… Regarding the issue of senior positions: realistically, they are mostly chosen by individuals at the top who select those they find similar in their thinking, and most often these individuals are men. The issue of empowering women is still in its early stages.*

> *This belief stems from a previous culture. While women have held positions, the situation will start to change negatively. These women do not appear or speak about their accomplishments; it is their male managers who speak on behalf of them to higher authorities. (P23, Female, CSP).*

In some respects, there is a sense of resignation in P23's input here. In saying [about senior positions] *"realistically, they are mostly chosen by individuals at the top who select those they find similar in their thinking, and most often these individuals are men"*, P23 appeared to be accepting the inevitable – that men will be chosen by men because they have similar views.

P24, a male manager illustrated some of P 23's narrative, stating that 'it is too early for women' to attain a leadership positions and men are deemed to be more experienced and ready.

These are some of the key points regarding women's empowerment that need attention. There is success in employment, but when it comes to comparing promotions for a specific position, you find that men are deemed more ready because women lack sufficient experience and capability. This is a significant challenge.

… women don't quickly climb to leadership positions. It takes time and experience to reach the level they aspire to. Some may currently hold the position of a project manager, but higher positions are still not easily attainable. [it is still too early].

It's just a matter of time for women's competencies to develop. In approximately 3-4 years, we will see a difference. (P24, Male, CSP)

Participant P7 (female) believed that the Saudi policymakers realised the extent of this underrepresentation of women leaders, which made them focus on empowering women in the Ministry as leaders and neglected women in other jobs:

Empowerment of women is now in all government sectors, but in my personal opinion, the Ministry only empowered female employees as leaders and neglected the rest of the jobs. (P7, Female, DLMP)

Participants 6 and 15's (both females) opinions confirmed that the empowerment seems to be in leadership positions only:

…I think Vision 2030 has a significant role in empowering women. Many rules encourage women's employment and empower them in different leadership roles. In the past, some essential employment opportunities were exclusively for men. (P6, Female, DLMP)

Yes, of course, there is a fundamental principle in the vision, which is increasing women's participation in government entities, not just the private sector. There is a committee in the Diwan (Royal Court of the King) specifically dedicated to increasing the employment rate of women, and it's not just about employment, but also about ensuring that the positions are of high quality and supporting them to become leaders. There has

been a great focus from the Human Resources department in every department and sector. I was responsible for the committee, so I know the details. There were monthly reports submitted to the Diwan by every ministry and government entity, stating the number of women employed and their progress. I believe this direction made ministries focus more on this matter. (P15, Female, CSP).

An opinion from a non-senior female employee confirmed that empowerment is seen in leadership positions only:

I cannot judge, but I see that there is support for female employees, and there are women in leadership positions. However, there isn't much interaction among female employees in our department, but I cannot guarantee that there is specific training for female employees. (P 31, Female, BESF).

P13 confirmed this as he perceived the focus of empowerment comes in leadership positions, mentioning high ranking positions only; P31 suggested that recruiting women 'at the top' empowers women aspiring to attain leadership roles:

Of course, the situation has changed, and there has been an increase in positions. We now have deputy ministers and ministry undersecretaries, and some agencies have female directors. (P13, Male, DLMP).

Of course, there is change. Now, there is an increase in employment and employment in good positions. There is a female Vice Minister, and there are female deputy ministers in all government organisations and the Ministry. For example, there is a deputy minister in the Ministry and general managers.

I see this as an advantage in terms of empowerment and leadership. I see it as empowering women for leadership positions. (P31, Female, BESF).

However, four of the participants were female senior grade managers in leadership positions, and they did not share P31's experience. None of the four were able to

state categorically that they felt empowered by the changes that have taken place. Each spoke positively about the movement towards increased representation of women in the workforce, but each shared the challenges they had personally faced, such as P23 "*Personally, I have faced many difficulties in working with current leaders, some previous leaders did not empower me, despite my significant efforts*". They each seemed to accept that it 'takes time' to bed in new procedures. This may also be explained by misrecognition, as discussed earlier (section 5.2.4), but it also resonated with the notion of a gendered organisation (Acker, 2010). Acker suggested women's underrepresentation in leadership positions is often due to women's lack of 'agency' (e.g., aspiration and skills of self-promotion, and having self-doubt), which is fostered by misrecognition and embedded patriarchal norms (Acker, 2010).

Development programmes seem to be for higher position holders only. P15 confirmed that and described some background:

> *There are two directions in the Vision, and one of them I supervise. This initiative is called Leadership Training, and it is in collaboration with one University and an Institute. This initiative focuses on leadership training in both the public and private sectors. I reserved a hall in which representatives from each ministry with specific qualifications were selected for higher positions. The human resources departments in the ministries work on this, and they nominate candidates to me, and I include them in the initiative. They undergo a complete course. As for other initiatives, they take them at the Government Management Institute. Each woman takes two or more courses, and the managers fill out the training needs at the beginning of each year, which are then divided among these courses. The participants attend the courses and then return to work. Many of them take the essential courses such as project management,*

ISO, performance evaluation, work errors, and there are specialized courses in technical work and inspection. (P15, Female, CSP)

The idea that empowerment and follow-up come from the 'Royal Court of the King of Saudi Arabia' is reflective of the neo-patrimonial society and seems to emphasise the coercive form of isomorphic development or 'power' underpinned in institutional theory (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983). This coercive power seems to have impelled subordinates to establish imbalance in applying the decisions or laws surrounding women's empowerment, resulting in empowering leadership positions only. According to the Saudi Arabian Basic Law of Governance (Gov.sa, 1992), the highest power in the country is an order from the King: this emphasises the priority Vision 2030 attaches to all aspects of the reforms.

Considering the leadership issue from a different angle, there seems to be less desirability among women to hold leadership positions. This can be attributed to what P15 described as the old norm 'mindset' of women:

We can say that it's more about laws than understanding this new culture. We can say that women's desire to be in leadership positions was not clear. There were many projects to develop this mindset. From my personal experience, I have sat with female employees [who] were happy their work was very simple, operational, without much thinking or problem-solving, and without autonomy in their work. We focused on empowerment and supported them to be present, participate in meetings, share their ideas and suggestions, and be project managers or program directors. I have seen individuals whose skills were not advanced, but gradually they started developing, specializing, becoming department heads, and they progressed. When they started working, they took courses, obtained KPI certification, and some even pursued their MBA. There was competition

among those who wanted to become project managers. This culture was not present at the beginning. It had a significant positive impact. (P15, Female, CSP)

This notion of leadership positions being initially less desirable to women suggested that the Ministry had been deep-rooted in some old norms that have held women back from becoming leaders. P15's experience as a woman in a leadership position and meeting women on a lower grade who did not want to aim for promotion enabled her to engage with them to challenge by experience the merit of aspiring to leadership, even with the challenges she herself had faced as shared earlier. There is no doubt that she was seen as a positive role model, which may have reduced some of the barriers holding the other women back.

The fact that the Ministry provided training to develop the mindsets and ability of women to develop and to be leaders confirmed that they were addressing this. The types of courses available to the women included the Women Leaders Programme from the French school, INSEAD (2023), and leadership training programmes from Mohammed bin Salman Foundation (MISK, 2023). Considering institutional theory, this initial 'less desirability' and then providing development projects confirms two things. First, there was an old deep-rooted norm preventing women from professionally developing even in the mindsets of women themselves because of the stereotype that women cannot be leaders. Secondly, changing an old norm takes time and efforts to be constructed in a society, especially when Saudi society was once dominated by men and remains largely patriarchal (Abalkhail, 2019).

The position that change takes time has been supported by previous authors, including Kelly and Breslin (2010) and Alfarran (2016). Indeed, Alfarran (2016)

studied the effect of Nitaqat on women's career opportunities in Saudi Arabia. Published immediately prior to the launch of Vision 2030, it is interesting to note the differences and similarities in the perception of the participants in her study when compared to this sample group some 7 years later. Nitaqat was a development plan that aimed to reduce unemployment among Saudis. The findings of Alfarran (2016) suggested that whereas Nitaqat / Saudisation policies opened up career opportunities for women, there were significant barriers and difficulties at that time. For instance, women experienced job opportunities being created that were of a lower status than men and were a mismatch to their training and education. Alfarran's analysis of this was stark:

> *This finding is unsurprising given the Saudi institutional context which is shaped by the country's cultural policies, practices and social structures that shape women's legal status and social position (Moghadam 2003). Clearly, the Saudi institutional context hinders women from access to employment, in particular by multinational corporations. (Alfarran, 2016: 186).*

Moving forward to the current study, P15 suggested things are changing when she said: "*I have seen individuals whose skills were not advanced, but gradually they started developing, specialising, becoming department heads, and they progressed.*" However, comments such as P26 "*The work environment is not ideal when you sit in one place with women colleagues for 8 hours*" highlight potential barriers with the new norms as they are being socially constructed. Alfarran (2016) suggested that the barriers her participants experienced were related to Nitaqat being applied unequally, and she evidenced that men were obtaining advantages from male-dominated government employment policies because of both legal

restrictions and cultural constraints on the work women were eligible for. When seen through an institutional theory lens, the participants in this study are faced with a 'new norm' compared to those in earlier studies – non-segregated workplaces, changes in guardianship laws and even cultural changes around driving and travel. The cultural-cognitive pillar of institutional theory is reflected in how national cultures and traditions are interpreted in organisations (Tlaiss, 2015). Scott (2008) suggests this pillar constitutes models of behaviour at the individual level in terms of language and culture; however, DiMaggio and Powell (1991) remind us that these behaviours are constructed 'subjectively and gradually'. This pillar is especially important in a Saudi setting in terms of how a Saudi culture that is patriarchal, highly collective, and with gender-specific roles (Al-Salem and Speece 2017) can promote new or changed values. A suggestion would be for management review of the progress of the new changes under Vision 2030 to ensure that the cultural context within the Ministries is adapting so that 'women in leadership' is accepted and practiced.

5.3 Chapter Summary

Analysing the participants' narrative through neo-institutional theory has helped to grasp the impact of 2030 Vision reforms on culture, inclusion and women's empowerment in the Saudi Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development. When analysing the coded transcripts and from then comparing with literature and discussing cultural, inclusion and women's empowerment issues with the participants, several interesting findings were revealed. Initial discussions reveal that the Saudi Arabian government seems to be taking new direction that has changed the old, constructed culture of the segregated workplace and is now creating inclusive workplaces that welcome everybody. Within these workplaces,

women and men are mandated through Vision 2030 to be equal in terms of tasks, responsibilities and rights. One consequence of increasing the representation of women in the inspectorate division is that there appears to have been an increase in reach and number of visits to female-only establishments.

However, this new workplace environment comes with consequences. Although the stated policy is to de-segregate the departments, the institutional norms that are being constructed allow for 'flexibility' leading to a lack of clarity about what is policy and leads leaders to implement the earlier segregated workplaces. In addition, because of the old, constructed norms and culture, women leaders in the Ministry do not feel empowered despite other participants believing empowerment is only possible for women in leadership. There is an issue with gendered language used between men and women employees based on old stereotypical norms and that reflects the patriarchal culture within the Ministry.

The following chapter will discuss the impact of the reforms from different angle to understand the NPM reforms and performance management, and what impact they have had.

Chapter 6: Results Analysis and Discussion – NPM reforms and Performance Management

Leading on from the results analysis and discussion around how the reform has affected gender issues and inclusion, this chapter now moves to analyse and discuss the themes that arose specifically about performance management and labour administration within the ministry. Here, there were differences that appeared in how the NPM reforms and performance management were being implemented and perceived within each department, and participants described in some detail the impact they felt from the new systems in terms of pressure. Since 2016, several new initiatives have begun, including what the participants termed working based on strategy [in other words, having a clearer policy direction with operational procedures that is across all sections], automation of services, KPIs, and the use of performance management. These changes are discussed in some detail within the following narrative to give context to the participants' experiences; this narrative is included as it also becomes an opportunity to understand the inner workings of the labour administration system that is otherwise unknown (ILO, 2014).

Participants shared different views and understanding of the changes that have happened to the organisation of their work since the reforms were implemented. Some of the differences were immediately seen in the participants' narratives. For instance, while the function department (A) was actively transforming their services online, the function department (B) was lagging behind in terms of online services. The policy division departments (C and D), on the other hand, were working on long-term transformation projects that are influenced by the 2030 Vision. Examples given

include the establishment of an "Awareness Fund", which is available for engaging with job-seekers and offers them training to increase their potential, giving more access to the job market. They all agreed that it is different to the past and that there is high use of automation, KPIs and performance management. This presented an ideal opportunity to discuss all of these concepts; because the impacts were department-specific, the information was organised based on each department in these next sections, comparing function department A with function department B and Policy department C with Policy department D. Certainly, the changes brought effects; those related to work intensification, performance management and KPIs and what became seen as competition and polarisation were discussed in the following sections.

6.1 Themes and codes related to Performance Management

During the analysis, significant categories emerged including the use of new management concepts and approaches such as Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), performance appraisal, and organisational KPIs, and other themes arose about work intensification, recruitment of private sector talents, governance, use of new technology, Wasta, and competition (in the workplace, between individuals / teams / departments). The key themes are presented in figure 6.1:

Figure 6.1: Themes and Codes related to Research Question 2:
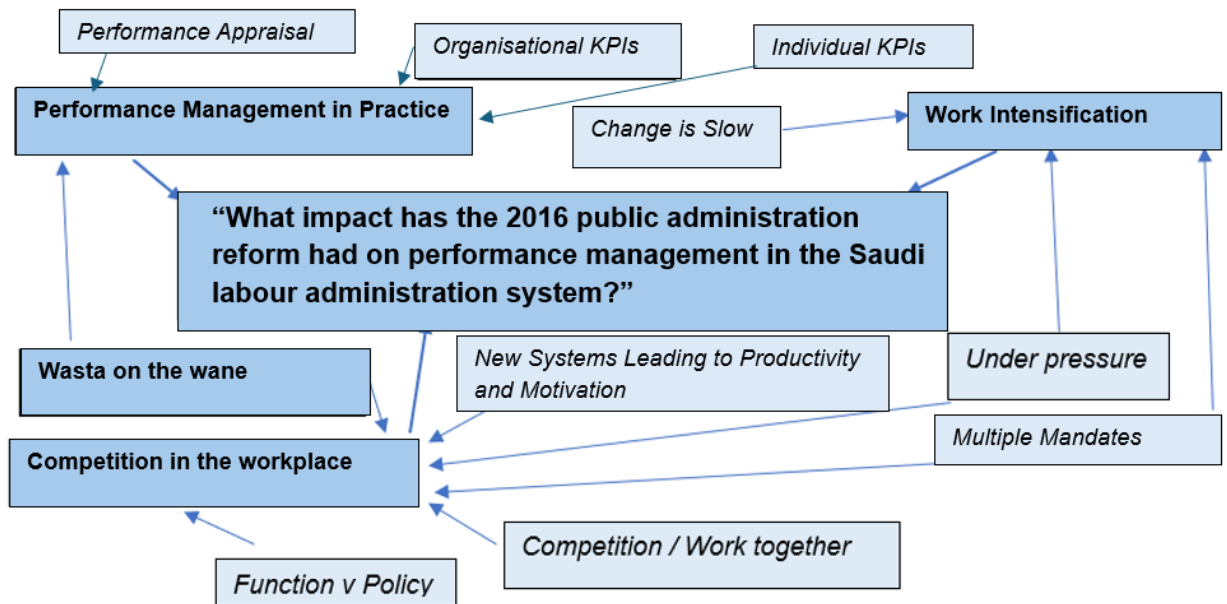
(Source: Author's own work)

6.1.1. Department A: New Systems Leading to Productivity and Motivation

According to several participants, one area of work that has been systemically reorganised is the structure and process of the inspection work. First, as some of the participants outline and discuss, there are two newly established platforms and mobile applications in use for the inspection work called TAMAM and Man' n Lil Rasad, which are described by the participants in the text. Second, unlike previously, the inspection work is now shaped by key performance indicators (KPIs) and the use of a forced ranking performance appraisal system, which, as described by the participants, are at times contentious.

Several of the participants described how the daily procedures of labour inspectors used to be performed manually without precise goals, and the inspectors described this as being ineffective. P3, P5 and P9 reported issues such as how in the past,

the inspection work used pen and paper with little usage of basic software such as emails and office computer programmes:

> *... employees before 2015 were accustomed to working every day using pen and paper. In the morning, they received their administrative paperwork. Then, they obtained administrative directions by pen and paper from managers, work on the cases of the labour inspection, and then directed them to the internal communication department. (P3, Male, AISF)*

> *Before Vision 2030 and the automation of all services, all this work was done in paper form, and this created a lot of trouble for the inspectors... (P5, Male, AISF)*

> *Previously, these technologies did not exist as we had many papers and transactions were lost, and some transactions may take two to three months to be completed. The client used to have to visit the Ministry many times until he made one transaction. In the past, there was no transparency, but now all the transactions are straightforward, and the procedures are clear. Even the customer can follow up on the employee's achievement, using the portal so that the customer can know the transaction's progress. (P9, male, AISF)*

At a practical level, the participants are describing what must have been a slow process for the clients. P3, P5 and P9 described how the inspection work was conducted in the office. Inspectors were accustomed to pen and papers with little use of software, which resulted in a lot of requests from clients being lost. Inspectors would then visit clients in the field based on the direction from their managers through the internal communication department in the Ministry, which made the process of inspection in the field very slow, resulting in clients having to visit the Ministry several times to follow up on their requests on for example a work violation or any other inspection related requests. This is due to the bureaucratic practices

that may be seen as part of the regulative pillar (Scott, 2013) as imposed by the Ministry, and which have since been simplified through the many business automation procedures in the inspection work under the reforms, as we will see in the next sections.

P11 began to open up about how these changes in structure and system have altered the workers' attitudes towards their work and colleagues:

> *There are many changes, to be honest. Previously, government work was somewhat routine and boring. For example, people had fixed roles regardless of their job titles, whether they were managers or regular employees. Their work was known, and they would come in from 7 am to 2 pm.*
>
> *However, in the era of the Vision, in the era of challenges, individuals want to prove themselves, whether they have aspirations to hold high positions or aspirations for financial returns. In our government employee image, through my experience and that of my colleagues, it means that I work as much as I want to achieve. Before it was just about receiving a salary and that's it. But now, creativity has become important, even if some colleagues are not familiar with this term or don't fully understand its implications. They try to show, "Look at me. I deserve more than what I currently have." In general, there is a sense of striving for creativity. (P11, Male, AISF)*

As P11 described, inspectors now are keen to achieve more and are keen for promotions due to the reforms in the public administration systems. For example, based on the performance management methods the Ministry is now applying, and to achieve a higher ranking in the forced ranking system (see section 3.4.4), inspectors are looking to achieve more inspection visits and to be creative in their work to give a competitive edge. P11 suggested employees are now looking for new ways to conduct their work, unlike previously where he said that inspection staff's

only focus was on attendance and not actual work if this will guarantee their salaries at the end of the month.

The main focus of this thesis is the institutional change that has been happening since the introduction of Vision 2030. As we saw in the above quotes, participants have observed significant changes in relation to the mentality of employees when they compare the new organisation of inspection work to how it was administered and facilitated in the past. Public service employees in Saudi Arabia had been criticised over the years because of their perceived lack of motivation and being unproductive (Nadrah *et al.*, 2021). Some of Nadrah *et al.*'s (2021) claims were supported by the participants in this study when they spoke about how prior to Vision 2030 and its reforms within their departments, colleagues lacked motivation and productivity and did not have the new software. P11 cited 'boring' and 'routine' aspects of the inspection work prior to the recent reforms. Similarly, in a much earlier study, Idris (2007) found examples where Saudi employees lack productivity and motivation and do not always show up for work. In addition, Idris (2007) also found that Saudis in his study were only motivated to apply for / attain high-ranking positions and status.

But P11 is clearly illustrating a new mentality within Department A, using descriptors such as 'creativity', although when pressed he was unable to clarify what that meant in practice. He did however allude to the incentives for those who strive hard, with KPIs becoming a clear motivation. This suggests that, as seen in the literature review chapter, the appraisal system and KPIs are working as motivators for some employees to work and achieve more. Indeed, Palthe (2012) described the desired outcomes of the process of organisational change as including increased productivity and employee engagement, which P11 described clearly in his

narrative. P9 also mentioned increased customer satisfaction, another of the desired outcomes (*ibid.*). Another angle that provides insight into these narratives is to view the automation of services in Department A as being a catalyst to change (Král and Králová, 2016, p. 2-3). Certainly P3 and P5 describe how the new automated systems are easier to follow for both employees and customers, and this has led to P11 suggesting employees in his department are now proactive.

Many of the participants have used the word "automation" to describe a variety of new systems, which were predominantly computerised. It is important at this juncture to emphasise the dynamic nature of their experiences of workplace systems that are now automated, particularly as many of the participants worked in the Ministry before the new systems were introduced thus their daily experience represents a new way of working in many circumstances. Business process automation (BPA) refers to using aspects of technology to automate processes throughout an entire organisation, not usually single departments (Cummins, 2017). Such processes are essentially activities that enable users to accomplish specific goals; examples in some organisations may include procurement activities, approving contracts, recruitment processes (often interactive with new recruits prior to start date, such as inputting references and academic awards to a portal) and some elements of training. Although each process follows a predefined order and workflow, they can become inefficient if workers have not been professionally trained, are unfamiliar, or even where steps are completed manually to bypass the system (Cummins, 2017).

Most of the inspection work is now delivered through one such system of automation - an online platform called 'Tamam'. Tamam is an Arabic colloquial term that means everything is fulfilled and completed. This new portal and associated application

control all labour market inspections and settlement visits between disputed workers and employers. A settlement visit is conducted on completion and at follow up to settle and solve work violation between workers and their employers. Inspectors have a minimum and maximum number of visits that must be completed every month. The required visits are posted as alerts on the employee portal Tamam for inspectors to start conducting them. The Labour Inspection Department deals with nearly 5 million companies per year. Now all these companies and the labour market parties can raise any request, or labour market violation through the Tamam and Man' n Lil Rasad platforms. Such online systems were not available prior to the Vision 2030 reforms, and appear to have facilitated operations:

> *… there was only one website [previously], which meant to show our attendance, and it was called an attendance portal. (P3. Male, AISF)*

> *...it was manual work, but the (TAMAM) program made this significant shift in our work. (P9, Male, AISF)*

In a question regarding 'Tamam', the following quote explained this new system thoroughly, and P16 explained the whole journey of an inspection visit using 'Tamam':

> *Inspection is currently governed by a control mechanism within the agency called the "Tamam" system. This system is used by all inspectors to monitor violations or warnings. When an inspector visits a specific facility, either based on a complaint or through a proactive visit, they identify the violation paragraph associated with the violation schedule using this system.*

> *If the violation is related to a worker or workers, the inspector adds their residency numbers (ID numbers). The system is linked to the Ministry's database, so as soon as the ID number is added, the worker's data appears, and the necessary procedures can be completed. For example,*

any required documents related to the facility, such as commercial registration or licenses, can be accessed through this portal.

The inspector completes the violation monitoring procedures and enters them into the system. The violation is then forwarded to the authorized approver or approvers, who are experienced inspectors familiar with the system and have extensive practical experience. They review the control procedures comprehensively. If the procedures are correct and lawful without any issues, the violation is approved.

However, if there is any incorrect procedure caused by the approved inspector, the visit is returned to the inspector with specific instructions that must be implemented for the violation to be considered complete. This applies when part of the violation is accurate. There is an incorrect procedure. If the violation is found to be inaccurate, the authorized approver rejects it.

The authorized approver has three options: accepting the violation, returning it to the inspector with some notes for implementation, or rejecting the violation. If the approver accepts the violation, it becomes an official violation, and the employer is notified accordingly. This results in a visit to the facility and the violation is assigned a number and a specified amount. The employer has the right to object to the violation within a 60-day period through the Ministry's electronic services.

If the employer objects, it goes to the authorized entity responsible for reviewing objections, which consists of experienced inspectors who have practical experience in inspection and legal expertise. They review the objection and decide whether to accept it, in which case the violation is lifted, or reject it, in which case the employer's objection is deemed invalid.

This is the journey of a visit and a violation, from the beginning, whether it's a warning or the initiation of a visit, to the acceptance or rejection of the violation. (P16, Male, AISF)

Participant 16 outlined the difference between how things were in the past and how they are now when dealing with inspection work:

> *The system, Tamam system, meaning with this mechanism, started in 2018. Previously, as far as I know, for example, objections were not submitted electronically. It used to be done by visiting the Ministry branches in the regions and submitting the documents that prove, for example, the objection of the employer. Then it was reviewed in a paper-based manner. We didn't have a clear governance. But now, the system has made it clear, even a mere delay, whether by the authorized person or any person with the authority, is known. For example, you, as an authorized person, now you know if a transaction or an objection has exceeded the required limit of time. However, previously, it used to be an objection submitted in a paper-based form, and the objection period used to be longer than what is supposed to be. So, it is clear that this monitoring mechanism (TAMAM) has significantly developed the inspector himself and the employer. They have clearer knowledge about the objection, for example, the explanation of a violation. The violation control reports have also become clearer using TAMAM. (P16, Male, AISF)*

The impact of this reorganisation of work within the labour inspection role is overall positive as perceived by participants, who described the new processes as fair practices. The automation of working practices using systems such as 'Tamam' has helped foster a productive working environment characterised by motivation, cost effectiveness, efficiency and with better service quality, all examples of NPM in practice (see Pollit, 2007). In terms of the attitude, inspectors are now willing to work more because of the automation of the inspection services making things easier. It would appear that these participants have embraced the new workplace systems,

suggesting that employees Department A is demonstrating change capacity, their ability to adapt, learn, and apply new innovations (Palthe, 2014).

In addition to Tamam, the inspection work is now shaped by another platform known as Man' n Lil Rasad. The difference between Tamam and Man' n Lil Rasad is that Man' n Lil Rasad is a portal and mobile application that gives accessibility for citizens to request an inspection visit. Through Man' n Lil Rasad, any employee in the private sector or any citizen who witnesses a violation at work or related to workers can submit a complaint. The complaint is then sent to the central administration at the Ministry. Based on the details of the complaint, the relevant employee is notified until it reaches the concerned employees:

> *There is also the "Man' n Lil Rasad" monitoring programme, which receives reports from both citizens and employees themselves. (P9 Male, AISF)*

> *Inspectors perform the same tasks, whether in the field or in the office. The reception of complaints is done electronically through the application Man' n Lil Rasad," (P1, Male, AISF)*

Considering institutional theory, Saudi Arabian government entities have endured what previous authors have suggested are long lasting poor management methods including excessive and restrictive bureaucratic practices (see for instance, Asquer and Alzahrani, 2020, and Abdul Rahman, Jarrar, and Omira, 2014), and under-use or even non-existence of technology (El-Sofany *et al.,* 2012). The finding here from the participants' experience demonstrates a change as a direct impact of the introduction of reforms. The Saudi government seems to be changing the old rules and embracing new rules by following an edict from the highest form of authority in

the county — the King. There seems to be a high level of coordination between government entities to develop the labour market and facilitate the work of private sector companies, as seen in the development of the computerised systems. Scott (2013) describes the regulative pillar of institutional theory as characterising governmental legislation that controls the function of an institution. In fact, Saudi Arabia can be said to have a strong tradition of government legislation that directly controls the functions of Saudi institutions, since it has over the years released incremental developmental plans that have to a large extent done just that. Nitaqat, for instance, directly controlled how institutions recruited its workforce by mandating 205 categories of quotas to increase Saudi nationals' representation in the workforce (Ministry of Economy and Planning, 2010; Sfakianakis, 2011; Alfarran, 2017).

Turning to this case study, it would appear there has been constant pressure from the government to transfer all of its services online; as we saw, P9 mentioned the supreme order from the King to transfer the government services to digital, including the labour market inspection services. The Digital Government Policy is part of the 2030 Vision plan that urges government entities to assertively transfer the government services online (Vision 2030, 2017; see also DGA, 2023). This can be seen as a form of coercive pressure (Latif *et al.*, 2020) by the dominant power of the Digital Government Policy that has made the change to electronic inspection possible. Such coercive pressure has been seen in other settings to shape legislative mandates in organisations, and in many settings, there are sanctions for non-compliance (see Deephouse, 1996; Berrone *et al.*, 2013). Although 'sanctions' themselves were not overtly mentioned by participants, they discussed forced ranking and the need to achieve performance appraisal goals (see also section

- 196 -

3.4.4). The tensions around meeting those standards are clear in narratives seen in later sections here, such as when P4 states the system creates injustice (section 6.1.10); it is difficult to argue that such tensions do not shape the dynamics that are being socially constructed within the departments around reforms.

P9, an inspector, illustrates how the regulative institution (Scott, 2013) of the Digital Government Authority (DGA, 2023) has made the online inspection services effective when he was describing how most of the inspection visits are now conducted:

> *Tamam is also linked with the Ministry of Finance to settle any labour market violation. There is high coordination between ministries to facilitate the work of private sector companies, as there was a supreme order under the direction of the King to unify all the transactions of these companies with one electronic portal called the National Platform. For example, regarding work violations, this portal collects all violations of these companies, and all of this is linked with the Ministry of Finance. Each company has an ID number through which it can identify the company's status and if there are any violations or objections by any government agency. (P9. Male)*

> *There is support, both logistical and financial. Dealing with government entities has become easier; you don't need to send letters to obtain specific things, and you don't need months of coordination to access certain information. Communication among us is very high, as if we are all one entity. For example, the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Education communicate through WhatsApp to handle everything. This has greatly facilitated communication and logistical coordination. Overcoming obstacles has become easy. If there is any support needed from the Ministry of Finance, it doesn't take us a long time. Financial support is readily available for any initiative we propose that supports market organization and employment. (P15, Female)*

6.1.2. Department A: Performance Management in Practice

Since implementing the 2030 Vision, every employee has specific performance goals that are meant to be set with consultation with each employee and their supervisor and then electronically approved by the line manager. In the end of every year, managers sit with their subordinates and discuss their performance and then consult with them on the targets for next year and revisit them quarterly. Hence, the evaluation of employees is now different, and the forced ranking performance appraisal has introduced more rigour in the inspection work. As seen in section 3.4.4, the system of performance appraisal was created by the Ministry and is based on points plotted on a curve that are distributed among subordinates to determine the highest 'rank' and hence reward (such as promotion). Prior to the reforms, there was no rigour in the performance appraisal, which was ad hoc and every employee would be appraised locally by their managers. Previous authors have investigated the use of performance appraisal in recent years in Saudi Arabia (e.g., Alharbi, Thursfield, and Bright, 2016). The Saudi have adopted a performance appraisal system that in essence was adopted by organisations worldwide which generates objectives that employees are expected to achieve and provides information on training and education that individuals may need to achieve them (Decramer, Van derstraeten and Christiaens 2012). However, the introduction of what is described by participants as the forced ranking system has created a sense of distress among employees in the four departments, which will be discussed in separate sections.

> Since 2016, the labour inspection work is based on a quarter system, and it is evaluated quarterly to ensure that they provide excellent services to citizens and the labour market. Furthermore, the Inspection Department do employees' evaluation every quarter of the year to examine the achievement of the employees. For example, an employee is supposed to

achieve ten thousand friendly settlements in the labour market. They review his productivity in the first quarter of the year. If he or she does not reach two thousand five hundred settlements, they issue a warning to him/ her and discuss how to raise his/her productivity and avoid his mistakes through a personal interview. The personal interviews are documented so that the employee feels responsible. Correspondence is carried out via e-mail and is stimulated until the employee's achievement is raised in the second quarter. Then, at the end of the year, the employee is evaluated on how his goals have been achieved. If the employee is warned three times, it may reach the point that the employee is dismissed. (P9, Male, AISF)

The employees' annual goals in this department were set prior to the reforms based on the judgments of the direct manager without necessarily consulting the employees, in other words, not following the guidance explained earlier. Consequently, participants suggested the evaluation of the employee was either not accurate or did not happen. The evaluation is now linked to promotions, so an employee's evaluation must be satisfactory in order to get a promotion; the employee's evaluation must attain a minimum score of 4 out of 5. The assessment also includes how the employee develops himself and obtains training courses. For example, the attainment targets for the year could be targeted at 50 per cent on work, 30 per cent on training and 20 per cent on volunteer work.

Since 2016, there is more efficiency and productivity. We also study the productivity of our employees. The customer also has the right to object to violations via this application in an electronic form, and he can put justifications against this violation. If the client raises such objections, these transactions come to us and are studied by a specialised committee, and the case is either confirmed or cancelled. (P9, Male, AISF)

As part of the employee evaluation and new management methods, Department A now has specific key performance indicators for each labour inspector which are initiated at the beginning of each year after consulting with the direct manager. The direct manager follows up with subordinates in achieving the department goals in which he or she works. The employees' objectives are aligned with the deputy ministry's goals in general. These goals are passed to the employees via an electronic link through the Ministry's portal. Each employee enters their goals through this site, and then the line manager approves them:

> *Performance indicators are used in the agency. Performance indicators are generally present because there is a model, and the evaluation is done through the model. The extent to which these indicators are achieved represents the employee's rating in the evaluation. (P11, Male, AISF)*

> *Of course, there are clear KPIs. In my opinion, the situation becomes catastrophic if there are no KPIs. No one can evaluate your work. Are you working correctly or not? But if we agree that there will be KPIs, for example, it will be measured, starting from the project governance itself. It will be measured monthly or weekly, and thus the inspectors work will be evaluated. (P16, Male, AISF)*

From the literature, the only recent published paper on the Saudi labour inspection system was in 2014, published by the International Labour Organization (ILO, 2014). In addition, the ILO has published other Saudi profile papers online, including some ratification of ILO conventions and audits, which include information regarding the status of the country's labour inspection (ILO, 2013). The 2014 publication, pre-Vision 2030 release, found that the daily activity of inspection was not fully computerised, and labour inspectors did not have access to technology in the field.

In contrast, evidence from the participants in this case study reveals that the labour inspection department has now fully digitised its services using Tamam and Man' n Lil Rasad. The ILO publication also found that there were no evaluation or performance appraisals for the inspectors; however, as seen in the participants' accounts, this study has now shown that the Saudi inspection work is now subject to strict performance appraisal.

6.1.3. Department B: Change is slow

As stated earlier, this study investigates two function departments in the Ministry. The second function department is department B, the department that is responsible for the employment services function. This department is responsible for preparing and helping job seekers find jobs in the market by guiding and directing them to the best possible positions. These participants described the department's remit:

> *Department B offers eight programs for citizens. The goal is to support the private sector and citizens in their job search, job sustainability, career development, and employment. (P26, Male, BESF)*

> *… we receive job seekers and provide them with guidance, sometimes even helping them determine their career paths. Then we assist them in quickly obtaining jobs, whether they are male or female. (P32, Female, BESF)*

As seen here, the employment and career advisors are responsible for providing assistance, guidance and advice for job seekers to employ them in the private sector; services include planning programmes for employment alongside a career advisory role. It also includes communicating with employers and private sector companies to assist in employing job seekers. This is directly related to Vision

2030's stated aim of reducing reliance of overseas workers, particularly in the private sector (Vision 2030, 2017, 2022). However, according to several of the participants, in contrast to Department A, Department B seems to be experiencing a less direct impact of Vision 2030 on the organisation of work:

> *There is no direct effect of Vision 2030 on the organisation of work in Department B (P26, Male, BESF)*

> *I do not see a difference in terms of the daily activities that I perform. I do not think that the Vision 2030 reforms have a direct effect on my work. (P30, Male, BESF)*

> *There hasn't been a major change, but the opportunities for employment have expanded to some extent... (P35, Male, BESF)*

When the participants disclosed this 'lack of effect', the interviewer asked probing questions to determine the nature of this perceived lack of progress or effect. Some participants stated that the change is being implemented in many stages and that they are in a transitional phase, which suggested that no direct impact of the Vision 2030 reforms is yet being experienced. However, they also described some of the 'old' concerns:

> *Change always occurs in multiple stages… Still, there are negative bureaucratic routines. (P27, Male, BESF)*

> *In Department B, it is seeming that there is change, but it is slow … However, as a government entity, we are in a transitional phase, so the negatives still exist. Bureaucracy still exists in the department. There is resistance from old employees which prevent us from change and working effectively and lack of flexibility. Processes are now long [to approve budget] ... may reduce the efficiency of our work. (P26, Male, BESF)*

> *They are technological improvements; however, improvements are ongoing and never-ending. There is support for improvement and*

acceptance of development, but there is slowness in implementation or
technical problems that occur and cause everything to halt. (P31, Female,
BESF)

Turning to the previous literature and the theoretical model for this study for possible explanations, it became apparent that there is some resistance to the changes within the department, such as the technological changes discussed here. As stated previously, the coercive forces inherent in institutional isomorphism (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983) offer one interpretation for institutional pressure to conform to change. As a result of legislative demands, managerial accountability demands exert considerable influence on departments and teams (Rana *et al.,* 2022). In direct contrast with the gender de-segregation initiatives discussed in Chapter Five, where catalysts to change included providing employees with the necessary skills and knowledge through training and development programs to effect required change (Král and Králová, 2016), it would appear there are inhibitors [to change] present in Department B. Král and Králová (2016) describe two such inhibitor as rigid organisational hierarchy and resistance from employees; these are directly cited by P26 "*Bureaucracy still exists in the department… resistance from old employees*"

There was some suggestion that things are gradually improving. In fact, P32 confirmed this and stated that the Vision impact is expected to change in 2024 and P27 implied that issues will be resolved in the future*:*

There is also a new vision and programs for 2024, but I cannot speak
about them officially as they have not been announced yet. These
programs will be announced at the beginning of 2024. There are existing
programs that will be modified, and new programs will be introduced. (P32,
Female, BESF)

Unfortunately, I don't have that information. But what I know is that development is ongoing, both in terms of human resources and government departments, and the care for customers has improved continuously. Now have full confidence that any issues will be resolved in the future. (P27, Male, BESF)

From the literature, the management of Saudi government sector entities has been characterised in the past by individualistic initiative, lack of employee evaluation and negative bureaucratic routines (Abdul Rahman, Jarrar, and Omira, 2014; Asquer and Alzahrani, 2020), and a general lack of use of technology (El-Sofany *et al.,* 2012). The above evidence from participants in Department B seems to be confirming what has been written in the literature, in contrast to what was reported in Department A.

Institutional theory has been used previously to study whether organisations are likely to adapt to new organisational norms and practices (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983, 1991; Scott, 2013). These literatures suggest that some organisations adapt to change faster than others, which seems the case for Department B compared to Department A. Various explanations have been given, including the preparation needed for change being essential to its success. Judson (1991) argued that time to adapt should be factored into organisational change in order to allow employees to process it. This time would allow new institutional norms and behaviours to establish alongside the change and support employees to accept it; van Knippenberg, Martin, and Tyler, (2006) argue that when employees identify with the 'new organisation', it helps workers move to a position of engaging with processes of change implementation. However, DiMaggio and Powell (1991) remind us these behaviours are constructed 'subjectively and gradually'.

A finding from this study is emerging that the reforms remain transitional, 7 years since their inception in 2106. Therefore, Department B seem to be lagging behind in terms of adapting to reforms. The reason for this is not directly stated by participants in Department B, but it may rest in the excessive bureaucratic routines that can be traced back to the origin of Saudi Arabia (Asquer and Alzahrani, 2020), which Alfarran (2016) suggests are often influenced by negative cultural norms. Certainly the participants in Department B report a different set of norms that have been constructed within the workplace ("*resistance, lack of flexibility*" P26) when compared to those in Department A ("*striving for creativity*" P11). Participants also observed that their employment services are directly linked to delivering the aims of Vision 2030, which is aiming to reduce unemployment to 7 per cent by 2030 through different schemes, such as opening up new industries and expanding on manufacturing (Vision 2030, 2022). These objectives are still in process; the slow adaption to change of Department B, the department that is responsible for increasing the number of Saudi citizens in employment thereby decreasing unemployment, is likely to be consistent with the efficiency of the application of 2030 Vision reforms in other schemes.

Another feature of the experiences and observations of the participants in Department B seems to be less consistency in both using technology or electronic portals to deliver services or on their daily work activities and their efficacy even when in place:

> *The services have been electronic for a while, but we also have branches where citizens come in person and do not rely on technology. (P26, Male, BESF)*

I feel that there is a gap in communication, or it takes a long time to fix technical issues. The problems are numerous, and they occur on a monthly basis. It feels like the system is new, but it's not. (P31, Female, BESF)

…We only have "Taqat" The job seeker focuses only on finding work. When searching on "Taqat," two or more domains or websites may appear, and the client may doubt if one of them is fake. Work is currently underway to gradually transfer the programs to a unified portal, with only one program remaining, so that all programs will be on the new portal. (P32, Female, BESF)

In fact, P35 and P26 mentioned that Taqat also has physical offices to provide employment services for job seekers. Although it started as a website, they opened some physical locations for job seekers to receive face-to-face support to overcome the demand and technical issues:

However, Taqat is considered a support program, and it originally started as a website and then expanded to become an employment centre. (P35, Male, BESF)

… there are centres called "Taqat" Centers, which also handle employment. When a person comes to us to search for work, they come to our office and do not go to the "Taqat" Centre. It is enough for them to register at one centre, either with us or with the "Taqat" Centers. (P35, Male, BESF)

Although Department B seem to be slow in adopting the reforms, some positive improvements in terms of adoption of technology, reorganisation of work and focusing on improving services were shared. There does seem to be progress with technology, which may in part relate to the support from the Digital Government Authority as P28 explained. Accompanying Vision 2030, the Saudi government established the Digital Government Authority, introduced to increase the online

services of the government sector and expand automation in its government bodies. This authority helps government organisation to implement methods for delivering digital services to stakeholders around the country (Vision 2030, 2023; DGA, 2023).

The Digital Government's head is at the top of the hierarchy. The goals and tasks at work are clear, and the challenges we will face are discovered early on. Honestly, there are no drawbacks. On the contrary, work has become more organized. The tasks are clear, and I sit with the departments to discuss our progress in digitization. We have quarterly meetings. (P28, Male, BESF)

After the vision was announced, we established direct communication with the Digital Government Authority, which has specific goals for digital transformation. Based on these goals, we started building applications.

There is also the automation of procedures, where we document and consolidate all the procedures and policies within the organization, related to employees and various aspects. Workshops are conducted to identify the procedures and extract the policies, which we call procedural guides for each department. The system is then communicated to each department based on these procedural guides. (P28, Male, BESF)

Department B seem to be starting to focus on projects that transform its services:

The work is organised based on projects. A project with a start and end dates. The project starts with an initiation, planning and development, monitoring and controlling, and closing. They make sure that there is no issues in terms of time, scope, and quality.

The definition of a project is any work that has inputs and unique outputs, not a traditional output, but a product that brings about change. Most of the projects we work on are information technology, with a few being transformative and transitional projects. Previously, the majority of projects focused on IT projects. The vision necessitated a transformation, including managerial challenges and strategic changes. The focus shifted

from being project cycles for products to becoming change projects that span 4-5 years, with ongoing initiatives continuing until the end of 2030.

Projects follow a series that starts with project initiation, management, monitoring, control, and ends with project closure. Project management begins with initiation but focuses on direction and monitoring, all of which are aligned with the updated strategies.

The project manager depends on standards and is usually responsible for the tasks within the project, communication, and managing the deliverables, all of which are scheduled. They also ensure that the plan is implemented as intended, with no deviations in budget, expenses, quality, objectives, or timeline. (P27, Male, BESF)

6.1.4. Department B: Performance appraisal

As with the other three departments, each employee is subject to the new performance appraisal system. In Department B, the participants discussed a range of issues with the processes and procedures associated with the appraisals:

As a government entity, we are still in an early stage when it comes to evaluation. Employees do not receive copies of their evaluations, so I, for example, as a manager, I don't know how much I was rated, even though it has been some time since the evaluation was supposed to take place. Am I supposed to continue with the tasks I'm currently performing, or should I make changes? My manager has informally told me about the evaluation, but I haven't received any official information yet. In general, we consider ourselves to be lagging behind in terms of evaluations.

It is true that there are performance indicators, but there is no follow-up on these indicators, nor is there a retrospective study on the implementation of the vision or the indicators (P26, Male, BESF)

I measure the performance of the employees under my supervision based on their random productivity. Because this system, according to more than one person, has challenges in the evaluation. Some projects are

> *complicated, so I know that there will be a failure, so I tend to be lean with them if they fail. (P27, Male, BESF)*

Both of these participants have a managerial remit yet describe a situation where the appraisal system is not fully understood or consistently operationalised or even evaluated. In fact, P27 seems to be saying that due to the challenges within the process he is not using official templates but assesses staff in a random way and does not mark his appraisees down if they do not attain required competency because of the complicated projects and procedures.

Some of the basic grade employees without a managerial remit confirmed the above quotes of the managers:

> *Honestly, there are some challenges with it. Evaluation in a specific manner [using the new templates] presents a challenge. (P28, Male, BESF)*

> *I honestly don't know about this matter. Personally, I focus on the work and accomplishments regardless of the evaluation results. (P30, Male, BESF)*

Two women employees from the same department seem to have a slightly different experience, in that they recognise the current focus on performance indicators and acknowledge the training input needed for their operation:

> *I have seen many developmental changes in Department B related to the work itself, such as quality, follow-up and performance indicators. There is great interest in them. (P31, Female, BESF)*

> *The performance indicators have been given significant attention. They have focused on it and provided many employees with training courses to learn how to use performance indicators. (P32, Female, BESF)*

Each of these four participants is a basic grade employee with no managerial remit, so they are not in the position of conducting appraisals, but it is of interest to note that the women focused on the interest in performance management and the accompanying training, whereas the men focused on the challenges; this may reflect a changing dynamic with increased opportunities for women preparing for leadership roles (see section 5.2.5).

From the above discussion, three managerial issues appear to be embedded in practice that prevent them from adapting to reforms: the adoption of change is slow, there is inconsistent performance appraisal and minimal use of technology. The fact that some participants shared opinions such as '*bureaucracy still exits*', '*there is resistance from old employees*' '*there is slowness in implementation or technical problems*' reveals these signs of Vision 2030 having less impact on the reorganisation of work in this department. In addition, some participants suggested that the change 'will happen in the future' and observed no actual performance appraisal, for example, P23: *'There is also a new Vision and programs [being released in] 2024*' and P28 '*Honestly, there are some challenges with it. Evaluation in a specific manner [using the new templates] presents a challenge'.*

As seen, Department A has adapted to the 2030 Vision Reforms more smoothly than Department B in terms of the daily activities such as work technologies and software. Department B in particular has used less technologies and automation in its daily activities as services remain in physical locations away from their offices, although they have introduced some online websites. In relation to performance management methods, participants in Department A revealed they have adopted several performance mechanisms such as the use of KPIs and performance

appraisal. In Department B, however, performance management is revealed as not taking place effectively.

Although, both departments were subject to the same public administration reforms agenda (rooted in the regulative pillar, Scott 2013), Department B seem to be less affected and adapted. As previously discussed, institutional theory posits the construct of institutional isomorphism, whereby organisations move to adopt similar practices, often to confirm their legitimacy in the field (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983; Sakib, 2020). And yet at the time the interviews for this study were conducted, there appeared to be some divergence between these two departments.

This action is perhaps understood using the work of Beckert (2010), who revisited institutional isomorphism and suggested scholars have failed to explain divergence to institutional change, which occurs under disparate social structural and informational conditions. A likely explanation for this difference in adopting the reforms between these departments rests in their different social structures and cultural norms, as seen in the participants' responses (e.g. *'resistance' v 'creativity'*) and also in disparate informational conditions (e.g. '*less use of technology'*).

6.1.5. Department C: Organisational KPIs

The second division under investigation in this study is the policy division. Two departments represent this division, departments C and D. Department C is responsible for the Saudization policy, as discussed in section 4.3. The main goal of this policy is to reduce unemployment amongst Saudi Arabian citizens by replacing expatriates in the labour market (Alotaibi, 2014; Alhammami, 2022). Other aspects of the initiative include human capacity development and aligning supply and demand in the labour market. There are different projects to "Saudise" jobs in

various sectors of the labour market such as marketing and human resources jobs, with policies and regulations to apply reforms and empowerment for youth in general and women in particular. P15, a female manager stated that the core work of the department is to ensure all workers have access to "decent employment opportunities" by ensuring an inclusive job-market. She was clear that there is no attainment target associated with the role, in other words, they are not looking to fill, say, 50% of jobs with Saudi nationals, but they are mandated to ensure the support of the department is to address securing employment for Saudis in the overall workforce as a priority. It was explained that each sector determines the ratio of Saudis to support in its projects based on local demographics. P15 identified some initiatives, including the Awareness Fund, designed to engage with job-seekers and offer training; she also outlined some of the challenges in achieving this:

> *However, there are challenges. The issue of unemployment has underlying causes that require certain strategic adjustments in the labour market, in addition to skills development and recalibration. For example, I might have a graduate with a master's degree in the English language but no work experience at all, and they want to be employed as a manager. They want to work directly as supervisors and managers. None of us entered the job market in this way. (P15, female, CSP)*

Prior to the reforms being introduced, according to several participants the work of department C around Saudisation was manual and bureaucratic and was not driven by a strategy. However, Department C's Saudisation work is now shaped by project management, governance procedures, robust employee evaluation and key performance indicators. For this particular department, the type of organisational KPI includes different policy projects aimed at localising various economic sectors. These include initiatives to support the localisation of these sectors, including

empowering youth and empowering women through legislative empowerment measures. To be specific, this department's ultimate goal is to ensure that all job seekers have access to decent employment opportunities through establishing labour market policies. They then transfer this ultimate goal into a KPI. The KPI would be the creation of a decent labour market policy that ensured employment and inclusion of unemployed Saudis in the targeted labour market, with tools to measure and monitor them.

For example, if there are a million expatriates and a hundred thousand Saudis, the priority is to ensure that these 100,000 Saudis are given opportunities and to replace the expatriates with Saudis first. Each sector has its own ratio to achieve based on the available Saudi and expatriate workforce. They then have KPIs to measure their policies to look at how much progress they make each year in localising the jobs in each given sector. Then, they make adjustments and aim to increase the localisation ratio by one or two percentage points each year (see Vision 2030, 2022).

The participants described a 'before and after' picture of this, which gave some insight into the impact of the reform on organisational strategies, objectives and performance indicators:

> … *manual and bureaucratic work has now been transformed into automated work. This transition has made it easier for stakeholders and streamlined operational processes within the government work. It has reduced the problem of losing documents, enhanced transparency for beneficiaries, accelerated and simplified transactions. Technology has been the driving force behind the development of organizational work. (P24, Male, CSP)*

…before the Vision, working hours were measured, and lateness was a red line. Being a bad employee doesn't matter even if the one who arrives late lags behind more than the one who arrives early. The focus was on time management. However, modern approaches applied to employees. The focus on attendance and lateness has diminished.

According to the Kingdom's Vision, there are strategic goals for developing human capabilities. There are now intensive courses for the workforce and employees, with an increased focus on training. Professional certifications are now available. In the past, these courses were not part of the Civil Service. This is in terms of development and training, which is the change that occurred after the Vision. (P17, Male, CSP)

Regarding strategies, they are now formulated at a higher level. Previously, each department would develop its own plans and strategies. However, now the strategic direction is set at a high level in the government and disseminated to ministries and departments. The objectives of one ministry align with the objectives of other ministries. Similarly, projects are aligned with the project targets of others. In the past, objectives were decentralized, but now they have become centralized. This step has facilitated many things, reduced inconsistencies, and minimized gaps and deviations in work. (P24, Male, CSP)

Technically, I report to the Strategy deputy ministry, which falls under the Ministry's higher management. Administratively, I report to the concerned deputy ministry. Therefore, I must maintain the governance that was implemented with the start of the strategy when evaluating it. There are certain criteria that I must adhere to. Operational tasks within the agency must be aligned with the strategy to achieve performance indicators. (P23, Female, CSP)

As can be seen in these participants' narratives, the rhetoric around procedures has changed. There is a clear narrative around NPM principles of enhanced management, outputs orientation, behaviour adjusting, private sector management methods including working based on strategy (Hood, 1991). These have been

practised by Department C, based on the participants' perspectives. They moved from the manual, bureaucratic working procedures that the Saudi government sector is known for (see Asquer and Alzahrani, 2020) to more automated work. They moved from focusing only on the attendance of employees (time management) to a more sophisticated performance management using KPIs and performance appraisal. They moved from working without a plan to working based on long run strategy that is monitored by KPIs. In comparison, this change has also happened in Department A and D.

These participants have expressed little, if any, resistance to change. Král and Králová (2016) identify catalysts to change which include effective leadership and providing employees with the necessary skills and knowledge through training and development programs. Certainly P 17 evidences this (…*there are now intensive courses for the workforce and employees; … modern approaches [are] applied to employees. The focus on attendance and lateness has diminished*). It would seem that the employees from Department C, in working together to achieve the organisational KPIs, are demonstrating change capacity: they had adapted readily and have learned new systems (Palthe, 2014). This may be seen through a normative lens, where the immediate environment is helping to drive change; P24 describes cultural integration which has occurred because strategic direction is disseminated, facilitating change processes, and expectations that come with newly-introduced change have been commuted throughout the hierarchy (Fallon, 2007; Latta, 2009).

In relation to the work procedures, several participants from Department C discussed the changes directly, including computerised and automated processes, clarity in governance such as standardised operational procedures, audit /

evaluation and in particular clearer guidance around expectations of staff via KPIs but also project specifics:

> *Vision 2030 has brought a good change. The Vision brought about a substantial positive change to our work. Most of our work procedures are now automated. As a result, the current and future projects we work on are more specific than before. (P15, Female, CSP)*

> *We develop the governance system in the Ministry. Now, everything is straightforward and clear. We turned into a ministry that automated all the services. Ninety per cent of the services are now automated. (P10, Male, CSP)*

> *There is now closer follow-up, and decision-making procedures. Tasks are accomplished, reports are escalated, and goals are achieved. There was a significant role played by the Vision in ensuring that each individual knows where they are headed and what they should do. When there is clear leadership follow-up, challenges are addressed and resolved more quickly. If there are any challenges, obstacles, or the need for support, it is provided promptly. (P15 Female, CSP)*

P23, a woman who had joined the Ministry from the private sector, commented that the organisational changes under Vision 2030 represent a roadmap toward creating a new workplace performance culture:

> *When I joined the Ministry, I had only been here for 6 months, and then the Vision and its implementation on a national level began. Prior to that, I worked in the private sector, specifically in banking. Afterwards, I joined the Ministry. To be honest, the first 6 months in the Ministry, I had to depend on colleagues because the ministries' operations were not well-defined. Each official would set their own points, and the next official would cancel them. Through the Vision, the picture and direction became clear, and we began working on a roadmap. and all officials would come to work based on this roadmap. (P23, Female, CSP).*

P23 clarified her description of a roadmap as being the new policies and procedures that guided the workplace systems and operations. It appeared from her description that when she started working at the Ministry, there was little in the way of an induction for her or even standard operational procedures to guide her through the day-to-day minutiae of the work she was expected to do, but the new routines imposed as a result of the Vision being implemented appeared to offer clarity. Upon further questioning, the roadmap appeared to be guidance on expectations of the department under the new reforms, cascaded through team briefings, supervision and some workshops.

After Vision 2030, there seems to be a much-increased use of software in Department C, and an emphasis on project management. For example:

> *Many transactions have become electronic. Part of the Vision is based on streamlining procedures and transactions, and a significant amount of automation has been implemented in the work environment. As for decision-makers, technology has facilitated access to information and accuracy (P24, Male, CSP)*

> *Everything has become electronic, online, on computers, laptops, or hard drives. There's hardly anything on paper anymore; it has become outdated and rare. With change and the vision implementation, everything changed, and it became the opposite. (P12, Female, CSP)*

> *… when the vision was introduced, there was a significant shift in terms of PM (Project Management) in the office. Project management impact is very positive because they have worked on developing the skills of government sector employees in general. (P15, Female, CSP)*

> *… In the past two years at the Ministry, we have developed a clear strategy derived from the Vision… project management has made changes and advancements in our organization... (P23, Female, CSP)*

> *There was a significant impact in terms of organising efforts and aligning with other relevant entities associated with the Ministry. The vision had an extended influence on every aspect. It established several programs, each with its own Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and specific objectives to work on. These KPIs, in my opinion, helped in focusing on each field. (P15, Female, CSP)*

These excerpts illustrate the changes that the participants are experiencing in Department C since the reorganisation under Vision 2030, particularly with regard to project management as a strategic tool. From the literature, modern management methods are widely used to achieve effectiveness both in daily work activities and future planning (Maneva *et al.,* 2017). Project management is a method in which employees divide an operation (project) into small parts to be completed by a specific date (Akhmetshin *et al.,* 2019). Project management often includes the use of advanced technology, and it is essential to have clear procedures. The regulative pillar of Vison 2030 has changed the government sector using project management and has facilitated this by providing this department and other departments with advanced software to apply project management techniques. The Saudi government sector was known as discussed for the existence of historic negative bureaucratic work routines such as lack of objectivity and little if any performance appraisal. However, the introduction of project management has certainly changed the practice of daily activities and the organisation of work in Department C, as these participants discussed.

6.1.6. Department C: Individual performance evaluation

Department C also seems to be using individual key performance indicators effectively, which is shaping the work and the culture of the department:

Currently, every employee is assigned KPIs and will be held accountable for achieving them. (P10, Male, CSP)

Some aspects of the work can be measured using KPIs. (P17, Male, CSP)

my work is divided into two aspects: projects and key performance indicators (P23, Female, CSP)

Performance indicators have also evolved and improved our work. The quality department within our project management team is part of the Ministry itself. When we communicate with them, they have a dedicated quality department that oversees and monitors our projects. This used to be rare or limited in the past, but it has improved recently. The quality department now provides better monitoring, meaning they closely follow up on our projects. (P23, Female, CSP)

The indicators make the individuals who work on the projects and those who monitor them feel a sense of accomplishment. Instead of giving someone a task, they work on it without knowing the percentage of achievement. But these projects have brought a developmental aspect that we didn't used to hear about in the government sector. All of this came after the vision. For example, in the case of recruitment, they say, "I have an indicator target of 70 successful job applicants this year, and the statistics show that there were only 50, which means that 20 positions are still vacant." There are other guidelines regarding their awareness and satisfaction in the places they are employed. Multiple indicators are used to assess goal achievement. (P21, Male, CSP)

In discussion with the participants and with the directors prior to commencing the interviews, the KPIs were described as having goals that are measurable, achievable and time bounded; the definition of KPIs and wider discussion of their benefits has been given in Chapter 2.

Along with the key performance indicators, the work of Department C is now shaped by a performance evaluation system which the participants were able to explain in some detail:

> *However, things have improved. Performance evaluation has become a prevailing culture, and delegating tasks to others is no longer an issue because everyone has their own tasks. Regular, monthly, and quarterly monitoring is seen as an effective tool that shapes the work. (P17, Male, CSP)*

> *This performance evaluation system varies each year from the previous year, meaning it evolves continuously. This is something I notice and feel as an employee. In our department, we start by setting our initial objectives at the beginning of each year. (P23, Female, CSP)*

> *Yes, at the beginning of each year, during the employee evaluation time, the manager follows up with the employee. They assess whether the assigned objectives have been achieved or not, not only in terms of completing the tasks but also in terms of successfully accomplishing them with a 100% success rate. In the next year, the goals may change. The manager sets new objectives and pushes themselves to achieve their second set of goals. It is also possible to retain the same goals while further developing oneself. I find the performance evaluation system to be very beneficial, and contrary to the past where it was merely a paper-based process, it has now become much better. This is because the system helps in identifying individuals who are outstanding, good, satisfactory, and those who unsatisfactory. (P15, Female, CSP).*

> *For any project undertaken by the department or employees, specific individuals are assigned to work on it, and certain indicators are proposed to assess whether the project is being executed correctly or not. If the indicator is achieved at a rate of 70%, it is considered green. If it is below 60%, it is considered yellow, gradually progressing to red, indicating a lower level of achievement. The project managers always strive to achieve these indicators. (P21, Male, CSP)*

Some participants referred to how the Government is now adopting private sector practices:

> *The people at the top of the hierarchy used to be government employees with less motivation. Now, experienced individuals with contracts from the private sector have come in with a different mindset than before. In the private sector, the focus is on profitability, productivity, and speed of work. Now, the government sector also has these characteristics. (P21, Male, CSP)*

> *In addition to the methods that we have been talking about such as the KPIs, we use delegation of authority for the second level of employee. The best internationally applied methods have been practised; management officials were subjected to intensive courses to develop them. We have also recruited people from the private sector. Almost all top-level employees are from the private sector who have transferred the culture of professionalism and excellence in work. These management techniques have been effective in achieving the goals of the Ministry and transforming it into a better government body. Also, the Ministry through different bodies provides us with different training and development opportunities, which is a great management method. (P10, Male, CSP)*

As part of the enhanced management practices of Hood (1991), the impact of these reforms on Department C employees seem to be very effective. The principle component of NPM according to Hood (1991) is professional management in the public sector, in which top leaders are actively and invisibly managing their organisations and leading the subordinates. Participants have talked about the professional attitudes of their leaders, suggesting the top leaders in government sector used to have 'less motivation' as P21 described. Likewise, the Saudi government has demonstrated the regulative pillar of institutional change again by

recruiting leaders from the private sector. This act is perceived by participants as effective because they now can see productivity, and speed of work in their department.

Despite these positive experiences, some participants from this department did identify some challenges such as within human resources management activities (such as understanding and adopting KPIs and training in new procedures) and difficulty adapting to change:

> *In the beginning, the questions were very high-level, and there were inquiries about a program like KPIs. Now, everyone knows what programs and tools we use to achieve the Vision. (P15, Female, CSP)*

> *The challenge in the first two years was that the concepts were new, not only to us as a government sector, but also to me personally coming from the private sector. I was unfamiliar with the terminologies. I came from a reputable bank that didn't know anything called a strategy. So, these were new concepts. Even in the private sector, which prides itself on progress, there are still colleagues in major companies who are now starting to mention strategies based on the Vision.*

> *Efforts were made to provide training courses for employees in project management at an accelerated pace, to understand what had happened and keep up with the developments that occurred. However, there was significant pressure because some people had never heard of performance indicators, didn't know about quarterly or semi-annual reports. It's important to note that the vision wasn't delayed for people to be trained; rather, the implementation of the vision began, and then employees started receiving training.*

> *At the beginning, it was a major challenge. When the Vision started, there were huge projects and difficult targets. The team, or many teams, couldn't quickly adapt to them. There was a stumbling block at the beginning of the Vision due to the lack of foundational knowledge in management,*

understanding the owner, new work, new procedures, a new government, many new things happened. It was a challenge, and then it became a transitional phase. (P24, Male, CSP)

Using the institutional theory lens, the regulative power of Vision 2030 seems to be changing the work organisation in Department C. As we saw, Department C, like other departments, is now implementing performance appraisal and technology, but they also describe recruitment of professionals with a different mindset from the private sector and delegation of authority. This appears to be a clear shift in culture. The cultural-cognitive pillar of institutional theory may inform an interpretation of how the patriarchal Saudi culture (Al-Salem and Speece 2017) can promote new or changed values. Douglas (1982) described this pillar as being concerned with shared meaning-making; furthermore, institutions develop a collective consciousness, as shared norms, values and behaviours form. The regulative pillar by comparison comprises the influences that shape rule-setting and monitoring activities (Scott, 2014). When individuals within institutions (organisations) comply with the cultural-cognitive pillar, the validity is seen in activities [related to change] being understandable and familiar. By comparison, compliance with the regulative pillar is associated with avoiding the prospect of experiencing fear or guilt, or even sanction [poor review scores] (Bunnell, Fertig, and James, 2016).

Vision 2030 is an edict issued by the government, and as a neo-patrimonial culture, compliance is expected from all. It would seem that the management style operational in Department C, as evidenced by processes such as delegation of authority, reflects leadership behaviours that may be explained by the cultural-cognitive pillar, in contrast to those experienced in Department B. It must be noted

that the perception of the act of delegation of authority differs between Departments B and C. Whereas participants were critical of the motivation for delegation in Department B (e.g. "*But in the government sector ... there is a relinquishment of responsibilities and tasks, and someone may be chosen to manage a project, and he will delegate any of his colleagues to do it [rather than take responsibility themselves]". (P26, Male, BESF)*) a different narrative is shared in Department C. That narrative, as seen in this section, appears to reflect the leadership being closely aligned to the aims of Vision 2030, and may reflect the outcome of specific leadership training that some of the participants identified.

6.1.7. Department D: Multiple mandates

The second policy department is Department D, which differs from Department C as it is not focussing on Saudisation but is responsible for the overall labour market policies. The participants described how the mandates of this department come from three government officials, the King or the Council of Ministers, the Minister, and the deputy Ministry of Strategy and Vision Realisation:

> *Our work is carried out based on three directions or orders. The first is a work or order that comes from the King who is the prime minster, the Council of Ministers, and the Shura Council. The second is work that is carried based on a direction from the Minister. The third type of work comes from the Strategic Department in the Ministry. These directions come into our deputy either to solve a problem, or as a goal that we must achieve. (P4, Male, DLMP)*

> *Well, it is organized according to the policies and procedures of the General Administration as well as the systems and regulations mandated by the senior management of the Ministry. These regulations are an extension of the government legislation, such as royal orders and decrees,*

and so on. Of course, there are also external legislators. The agency operates in a specific manner. (P14, Male, DLMP)

In relation to the workings of the department and the Deputy Ministry of Strategy and Vision Realisation, participants were able to provide some detail around the procedures within the department:

Regarding the 2030 Vision, there is an office associated with the deputy. It is a special office created by the government in every Ministry to realise the 2030 Vision. The office of realising the Vision has goals that differ from the purposes of the Ministry. The goals are specific, and it is derived from the Kingdom 2030 Vision and is based on the national transformation plan and the development of human resources capabilities. (P7, Female, DLMP)

Yes, it belongs to the Strategic Agency (Deputy Ministry of Strategy and Vision Realisation) precisely the one responsible for achieving the Vision. yes, we have weekly meetings for the internal unit. We also have weekly meetings with the Vision Realization Office, which is a consistent practice. Each project has its own specific meetings and follow-ups. The frequency of these meetings depends on the nature of each project. Sometimes they are done once a week, and other times they may be done twice. Additionally, traditional direct monitoring within the office is also carried out. (P13, Male, DLMP)

First, we try to gather the concerned authorities and stakeholders. For example, an order comes, and the designated authorities let's say the State Security Department, the Anti-corruption Organisation (Nazaha), or any third party related to the implementation of the order. Second, we meet with these authorities and then define their goals if we were able from the first meeting to define the goals, then we work on them directly. If we are not able to turn the matter into a project, then we meet with the concerned parties more often until we turn these meetings into a project. (P4, Male, DLMP)

6.1.8. Department D: KPIs and individual performance evaluation

Previously, the participants observed that this department experienced various managerial issues relating to, for example, an over-focus on attendance and employees historically offering minimal enthusiasm and participation:

> *In the past, we only cared about attendance and leaving at the end of the day. (P2, Male, DLMP)*

> *In the beginning, there was resistance from employees as employees were accustomed to manual work conditions. People used to care only about attendance, and there was no employee performance evaluation. (P6, Female, DLMP)*

> *Previously, the government employee was an employee who performed routine tasks and signed the attendance in the morning and the afternoon signed the exit. In my opinion, this is the only responsibility that the employee care about attendance and departure Government work was only on daily transactions, attendance, and leaving. In the past, I can summarise, the previous government work with these three terms. (P8, Female, DLMP)*

> *In the past, the work was routine tasks, the tasks of a regular ministry. Now, the work has changed. There are precise procedures, and there are straightforward tasks and responsibilities. (P7, Female, DLMP)*

> *Previously, there was no link between the employee and the leadership. So the employee was in a particular area, and the leaders were in a whole different area physically and culturally. The former government employee was not interested in the development. His work was routine; he did not look for professional certificates or specific training courses, and there was no focus on performance evaluation or the skills the employee needs. (P8, Female, DLMP)*

> *Previously, work was going according to five-year plans. There was a plan for every 5 years for government ministries. In the past, there was no*

governance. Even employees were not aware or able to know the objectives of the Ministry. The work was randomly done on daily routine tasks, and there was no goal. (P7, Female, DLMP)

In the past, there was a lack of productivity at work (P7, Female, DLMP).

The participants were then asked how things had changed in terms of the reorganisation to start to determine the impact of Vision 2030 on the organisation of work in this department; participants stated that different aspects are emerging such as organising work based on the Vision agenda, improved governance, the use of performance appraisals and better accountability:

We organise our work based on the 2030 Vision agenda. Each department studies what agendas they are responsible for and appoints employees to follow up the workflow of the relevant initiatives to achieve the Vision agenda and ambitions. The management reforms accompanying Vision 2030 changed the working patterns, and the Vision Realisation Office was established in the Ministry to follow up on achieving the goals of the Vision. The work has been reorganised to become more explicit regarding the procedures and the day-to-day activities. We used to work using manual processes, but everything related to work is now online and automated. We currently work long hours, unlike in the past. We now focus on productivity, and our managers care about the achievements of KPIs. We apply governance and transparency in all the transactions we do. The Ministry has introduced the system of key performance indicators to follow up with us quickly and assess our performance. (P2, Male, DLMP)

However, after establishing the Vision Realisation Office and after the launch of the 2030 Vision agenda, there is governance. Work has developed. We work based on projects, and every project has an owner. Every plan has an owner, and they are responsible for this goal; when it has to be achieved, You are responsible for the goal's initiatives and indicators and will be asked about this goal. Under these goals, there is a set of initiatives, and each initiative has an owner, and you are responsible

for it. Here the work has become governed, and there is now a specific and known way to measure the accomplished work. Performance reports must be issued every quarter and explain all the initiatives, indicators, and extent of their progress. And if there is a delay, the reasons for this delay must be raised, meaning there is accountability so that we can know the challenges and the possibility of development and set goals for this development. (P7, Female, DLMP)

Of course, those who worked in government agencies have seen the radical change if it occurs in the government work system, whether at the level of work itself or the group of employees. However, after implementing the vision programs, the employee does not become involved in projects where there is a new thought and culture that the employee has an awareness of new things such as the existence of a goal, project, initiative, indicator, or target. These terms did not previously exist. After implementing the vision programs, there are new concepts: goals and initiatives, portfolio, projects, targets, baseline, plans, risks, challenges, treatment plans, and improvement plans. This culture has already been built with the vision in government agencies, specifically in the Ministry of Human Resources. Currently, the development has become very high among government employees. Previously, all employees were at the same level in skills due to the lack of actual work. But after the Vision, the differences between the employees became apparent, as there are distinguished employees who are recruited from a ministry to a ministry, or there may be an outstanding employee within the Ministry who is preserved and given benefits and health insurance and is given a reward to keep them in the Ministry. So all of these things are the effects of the vision and movement that happened. (P8, Female, DLMP)

Similar to what was described by those working in Department C and A, there has been a high use of project management in this department. Projects have a plan, a timeline, a budget and an owner. The 'owner' of projects delegates tasks to the managers who are responsible for delivering a project; the owner has the sole

authority to outsource some of the goals to private companies, whilst the manager is responsible for the follow-up of the projects and meeting the goals, and escalating any challenges to higher officials.

> *We have a project management programme to manage all the projects we do as PMP (Project Management Professional). We have trained many employees to achieve the PMP certificate (P6, Female, DLMP)*

> *We depend on different management methods that need new software, such as the project management programme. (P2, Male, DLMP)*

> *I manage many projects in an administrative way, not technically. If I have a project that I work on, I am called the owner of the project. We have a plan at the beginning of the project, and it has a timeline, where I follow up with periodic reports. I have administrative responsibilities, powers such as spending budgets for companies, where I have external projects that I work on. I work on internal projects as well. (P4, Male, DLMP)*

> *We have a system called Project management It's specifically used within the Ministry for projects. (P13, Male, DLMP)*

The participants differentiated between three types of projects, Internal projects, Vision projects, external projects:

> *Certainly, the projects that are associated with the Vision have open support from the government. The projects we work on are either internal projects, vision projects, or external projects. (P4, Male, DLMP)*

> *Always the projects that relate directly to the goals of Vision 2030 are handled differently. We deal with them seriously and therefore the amount of work has to be doubled. The percentage of acceptable wrong is less than any other projects. The Vision project has placed more work pressure on us. We also receive support triple the amount of any other projects. (P4, Male, DLMP)*

Projects are organized under two departments: the Project Management Office and the Institutional Project Management Office. Technically, there is internal supervision as well as external supervision. Of course, The projects are divided into Vision Projects and internal Strategic Projects. The Vision Projects are to achieve the Vision goals, which is supervised by the Crown Prince. As for the Strategic Projects, they are internal projects directly linked to the minister, who has full authority over them. (P13, Male, DLMP)

Of note, participants in Department D noticed recruitment based on qualifications across the range of grades and not based on how long they have worked in the Ministry, and they stated the performance appraisal goals were linked to the Vision's aims. Department D participants seemed to be describing a similar working environment to Department C in terms of applying a robust performance appraisal system, unlike pre-Vision 2030 changes. For example, they mentioned issues relating to performance management regulations, recruitment of skilled professionals and applying changes based on governance and measurement:

However, now everything is different. We currently deliver almost all services online to citizens. We automated every transaction needed from the citizens. Services are now faster, and you can review employees' performance. Work procedures are straightforward and clear for everyone, the employee and the customers. Now, there is governance in all the work we do, and we are also monitored by employee performance. (P6)

Governance gives clarity to the work we do and to the evaluation of work; it gives transparency of our performance in the procedures and daily tasks. There is clarity as to what we want in the future. The goals of the employees are linked to the purposes of the departments, the goals of the deputies, and then the goals of the Ministry. Therefore, the change is fundamental to the existing governance and procedures. (P7, Female, DLMP)

The first part is job performance management Regulations pertain to the employee's job performance, responsibilities, and so on. The other part Regulations for job performance management, relates to performance evaluation and the philosophy of measuring the performance of government employees, which has undergone a complete change. Thus, government employees today are no different from private sector employees. They have goals set at the beginning of the year, along with indicators, strengths, and weaknesses that are evaluated at the end of the year. They are given specific targets based on this evaluation. This reflects the performance of this aspect and the development of job performance. The other part, which includes improvements, has brought about external changes to the general system and the concept of the government sector in the country. (P14, Male, DLMP)

In terms of employment, the Ministry recruited people who have high skills and are specialised in the market and are aware of the labour issues. A lot of expatriates have been dismissed and replaced by locals who better understand the Saudi context. Our department attracts experienced employees from the private sector to professionalise the work culture. The department has also applied the overtime system so employees can be satisfied if they work for longer hours. (P2, Male, DLMP)

For example, in terms of employment, now, we attract talents directly from the private sector without advertising, and we pay them high salaries just to achieve productivity in our work (P4, Male, DLMP).

There has clearly been a culture norming (Caprar and Neville, 2012) process within Department D as new changes have been adopted and are now considered routine, as evidenced by several participants' narratives. When they form, cultural norms and values will ensure the repetition of behaviours, thus they have influence in organisational change processes (Palthe, 2012). This can be seen as part of the normative pillar, with appropriateness as the basis of logic (such as workers now

focusing more appropriately on tasks and not on just 'turning up for work' P7). The normative pillar emphasises the moral basis for assessing legitimacy (Scott, 2013).

In relation to the Key performance indicators, Department D seemed to be similar to Department C in terms of applying the key performance indicators, For example, there were similarities in relation to the monitoring and evaluation of KPIs, usage of project management and continuous evaluation of employee performance based on KPIs as the following participants described:

> *We have the Strategy Department, we must raise KPIs to them every month. We collect these indicators from all the projects we work on. An example of the projects that I worked on is called the National Dialogue, where we gather all the three parties that are concerned with the labour market, the government, companies, and workers. We discuss problems and obstacles in the labour market and try to solve them. (P4, Male, DLMP)*

> *KPIs measure project work. For example, we have seven goals in our deputy ministry and two strategic goals that must be achieved. Each of these goals has an indicator to measure. From these seven goals, we come up with initiatives. The initiative is a program consists of a group of projects, and these projects help to achieve the seven goals. For example, I have a project called Indexing Data and Policies. This is considered a goal, and we have worked on an initiative called Continuous Evaluation and Development, from which two projects emerge, the first is the Policy Bank and the second is the Continuous Evaluation and Development of Policies. These two projects help achieve the initiative and the goal. If these two projects are achieved and their goals are achieved in a timely manner, this will be reflected in the initiative and KPIs. They are a chain interconnected with each other and this is also reflected in the strategic objectives of the Ministry. The KPI measures the initiative's performance. Every three months we give full and comprehensive reports to the strategy department. (P4, Male, DLMP)*

My role as a manager has changed as well. I have more significant responsibilities now, and I have KPIs that I must achieve at the end of the year. (P6, Female, DLMP)

…by key performance indicators KPIs. For example, distribution of a budget for a project. Another example is establishing committees to accomplish an objective or an initiative. Almost all the work we do or organise has key performance indicators that align with the Vision's objectives. Therefore, the Vision's influence and impact are everywhere in the Ministry. (P2, Male, DLMP)

Now, when an employee submits his annual goals, the goals he submits must be aligned and linked with the goals of the Ministry. It is not acceptable for an employee to come and say my goal is to work on sixty services for the citizens for example. This is not considered a goal. Instead, the goal must be related to the Vision. The goal must be to achieve the goals of the agency you work in or the goal of the departments in which you work. (P7, Female, DLMP)

However, now the situation is entirely different. Directly, the result is measured in numbers, and the employee knows that he will be held accountable for his performance indicators at the end of the year and that there will be a performance evaluation. Therefore, the work has become entirely different. (P7, Female, DLMP)

It's a project monitoring system that includes recording the project's name and continuously adding the latest updates. It's the same system used for KPIs and their implementation. Yes, the KPIs clarify any updates or delays. Initially, you enter the project, and then you continuously add project plans. Any delay in any phase or update is indicated. The system alerts the project management office. It's a means of achieving the vision. It appears for you, for them, and for your internal management within the same portfolio. The section turns yellow to indicate a slight delay and red for a significant delay. Green indicates that the project is on track. As for the KPIs, there is also weekly monitoring with the office responsible for

achieving the vision regarding the KPIs, separate from the website monitoring." (P13, Male, DLMP)

The above evidence from Departments C and D seems to be in contrast with what has been written in the literature in relation to the Saudi government sector of being based on individualistic initiative, lack of employee evaluation and negative bureaucratic routines. In addition, the Saudi government sector as the participants described had many features that are negative according to NPM and the enhanced management literature (Hood, 1991, Pollitt, 2007). The participants talked about features such as caring only about attendance, no performance management, manual work, routine tasks, no link between employees and leaders, and no governance prior to the reforms. However, the organisation of work and the daily activities in Department D and C are now the opposite. Participants shared that they use performance management, KPIs and the enhancement of the overall management. In addition, the Saudi government through Vision 2030 has applied governance procedures throughout their work process.

6.1.8.1 Cross-departmental comments on performance management

P8 explained that promotion now was linked to employee performance:

Currently, skills development has become very high among government employees. Previously, all employees were at the same level in skills due to the lack of actual work. But after the vision, the differences between the employees became apparent, as there are distinguished employees who are recruited from a ministry to a ministry, or there may be an outstanding employee within the Ministry who is preserved and given benefits and health insurance and is given a reward to keep them in the Ministry. So, all of these things are the effects of the vision and movement that

happened. The environment has become a positive high competition. For example, promotions are linked to the quality of job performance. They are tied to achievements and related skills. This created competition among employees, which created a good work environment. This was reflected in changing the organisation's culture to be positive and productive. In the past, the employee had no ambition. Everyone would receive the same evaluation and appreciation and annual bonuses at the end of the year, regardless of productivity. Currently, no, there is a culture of excellence. There is a culture in which every employee wants his name to be among the distinguished employees of the month or the ideal employee every quarter. For example, the best project manager or the best target owner, of these things create a motivating work and a motivating work culture. (P8, DLMP, Female)

In relation to linking promotion to employees' performance, many participants emphasised that the situation today is unlike how it was prior to the reforms, where every employee would be promoted regardless of their performance. This change will likely raise the quality of services in the Ministry. P8 stated '*promotions are linked to the quality of job performance. They are tied to achievements*'. Similarly, P9 from the Inspection Function Dept stated that '*of course, evaluation is now linked to promotions, so your evaluation must be satisfied to get a promotion*'. P9 [a Senior member of staff with management responsibilities] discussed his experience when moving from the private sector:

I was previously a private sector employee, I joined the government sector in the past, and I was shocked that this was not the job I wanted. But now, I feel that I work in the private sector, and even the leaders have simulated the private sector mentality of providing better services. I removed all the functional hierarchies to simulate the private sector model of management (P9, AISF, Male)

P9 was a senior manager in the department and is in his second term of employment with the government sector. From his description, his previous experience was clearly a disappointment to him, yet this time round he describes a remarkable difference. P9's narrative comes from a position of authority, as he was able to "remove… the functional hierarchies" which suggests an element of autonomy in his role perhaps unseen previously within the public sector in Saudi Arabia (Asquer and Alhrazani, 2020). A participant from Department B commented in his interview that:

> *most of the leaders are recruited from the private sector and have the passion to change and develop. There is change in the mind-set of the employees from being a government agency employee to private sector mentality. In other words, to employee with passion and desire to develop and improve. They change from the bureaucratic management model to more efficient management model (P26, Male, BESF).*

Although in a different department to P9, P26 was also a Senior Manager and their experience seemed similar. This suggests that under Vision 2030 there is more autonomy within the remit of the senior managers to deliver effective governance.

> *New methodologies such as the use of KPIs have greatly affected quality. For example, this year, we worked every quarter and evaluated our work quarterly to ensure that we provide excellent services to citizens and the labour market. We were studying, for example, the first quarter and looking at the employee's evaluation of whether he had achieved or not achieved his goals. We are closely linked to citizens and labour market institutions, as we care to choose the most efficient employees.*

> *We also study the productivity of our employees. For example, an employee is supposed to achieve ten thousand friendly settlements. We review his productivity in the first quarter. If he does not reach 2500 settlements, we issue a warning to him and discuss how to raise his level*

and avoid his mistakes through a personal interview. These meetings are documented so that the employee feels responsible. Correspondence is carried out via e-mail and is stimulated until the employee's level is adjusted in the second quarter. Then, at the end of the year, the employee is evaluated on how his goals have been achieved. A punishment will be applied later if the employee is warned three times, which may reach the point that the employee is dismissed. Of course, the evaluation is now linked to promotions, so your evaluation must be satisfied to get a promotion. The employee's evaluation must be 5 or 4 out of 5. The assessment also includes how the employee develops himself and obtains training courses. For example, the assessment could be 50 per cent on work and 30 per cent on training and 20 per cent on volunteer work. (P9, AISF, Male)

The goal is that the service provided in the government sector is provided at the same level as the private sector, and we have indicators that measure the service provided to citizens. For example, there is an indicator to measure the closure of the service within 24 hours. For example, in the indicator of raising the level of satisfaction among citizens, the Minister requests that it be at a rate of 90 per cent. (P8, Female, DLMP)

Managers through Tamam are able to access information about the progress of an inspection visit and can direct the employee and follow up, moment by moment. It tracks employees' progress and can feed into ongoing evaluation.

Our mangers use the portal as well to comment or review our work. (P3, AISF)

They need to adapt to the concept of having assigned tasks and responsibilities that must be fulfilled, as they are now part of a service-oriented environment. These concepts require training and awareness.

That's one aspect. Another aspect is that the expectations for employees have increased. The managers now believe that employees should deliver

twice or thrice as much work to achieve the desired goals. This philosophy is challenging for the employees, especially those who have been working in the government sector for 5-10 years, relying on paper-based processes. It's a bit difficult for them to adjust (P14, Male, DLMP).

The second predominant issue discussed by labour inspectors was the high caseloads and fewer employees and resources to deal with them. P20 discussed the disproportionate distribution of the workload in some provinces of the country where there are fewer labour market companies:

There was dissatisfaction among employees when they realized that an employee in a province with fewer establishments, let's say 50, is being asked to issue 40 violations, whereas an employee in Riyadh, which has 3 million establishments, has the same target. We are currently working on resolving this issue by distributing violations based on geographical regions: A, B, and C. Team A is expected to issue at least 40 violations per month, Team B issues 20 to 30 violations, and Team C issues 5 to 15 violations monthly. This matter has been discussed in multiple sessions with the esteemed deputy minister. (P20, AISF, male)

Another issue discussed was the possibility of inspectors targeting facilities for inspection such as retail outlets that were easier to access to reach high level of inspection visits. For instance, retail units or business parks would have several units and are all relatively easy to access with good parking, meaning several visits can be conducted in one day, thus increasing targets for performance appraisal. The downside would be that some harder to reach sites might not be inspected. In relation to this point, P34 explained:

We set the standards and targets, and we know that these individuals are capable of achieving them. We sit with them and explain that the equation is built based on certain factors and divisions. We clarify the procedures. The latest equation was approved two months ago, and it includes targets

> *and all the strategic matters that are part of the Ministry's goals. We incorporated them into the equation to achieve them. The most prominent one is closing complaints and resolving them quickly and with the highest quality. There is a difference when you visit a major facility and charge an extra fee, compared to visiting a facility it has only one worker. Obviously, you won't receive the same level of bonus in both cases. (P34, Male, AISF)*

Similarly, P3 and P29 believed that the key performance indicators had helped to establish standards in relation to inspectors work and targets. The key performance indicators worked as a set plan.

> *It does not represent pressure. I see that an employee knows what he does, how he works and why he works. These performance indicators provide an answer to these questions, and therefore this employee knows that there is a measurement of his work and how it was done and if the method of working is appropriate or not. (P3, AISF, Male)*

> *… there are specific goals set at the beginning of the year that are clear to me as an employee and to my supervisor. He doesn't assign me additional tasks beyond the nine set goals. No, there is a monthly plan that the inspector follows. Apart from complaints, which are a separate task, the system allows me to specify an activity, and they concentrate on that activity. I may change the activity after two days, and they shift their focus to another activity. The reference point is the set plan. (P29, Male, AISF)*

In an earlier study, Ribas and Bermudez, (2022), found that despite the resources available for the inspectors, not being able to monitor and inspect everything in workplaces remains an issue. However, the Saudi inspectors in this study discussed various solutions in regard to this, and as P29 mentioned, the work was based on a plan that is set at the beginning of each year help to overcome the issue of targeting

easy markets. Similarly, P34 stated that using equations and targets (KPIs) helped inspectors achieve quality of services and reach much-needed markets.

The institutional theory lens has helped to understand the regulative power of Vision 2030 in changing the work organisation in Department C and D. The next sections will look at the consequences of this reorganisation.

6.1.9 Work Intensification

One theme that came out very clearly from the participants was coded 'not enough time' and related directly to work intensification and pressure. It is clear from the participants that as a consequence of the reforms, along with the reorganisation of work in the department, there has been work intensification in all four departments. However, the work intensification issue seems to be less prevalent in the function divisions and more in the policy division due to the fact that the latter divisions work directly on projects that are directly important to the 2030 Vision implementation. The analysis presents respondents' points of view on these issues from all departments, then formulates an overall analysis.

From the transcripts, work intensification seems to be an issue in Department A according to many participants:

> *From 2016 till now, there has been indeed an intensification of work. For example, if there is a large volume of work in some departments. (P9, Male, AISF)*

> *… sometimes, it can be intense. There are occasions when the agency sends me to follow up on a specific Saudization issue, and we are required to complete it and notify the establishment representative to rectify their situation within ten days. These ten days refer to working days, excluding holidays. This creates a certain level of pressure. Furthermore, dealing*

with 100 or 110 establishments in a short period, whether through communication or visits, adds to the quantity of work. (P1, Male, AISF)

Specially after 2016, we have employees who work from 8am to 7 in the evening, intensive work, especially customer service employees and front-line staff and the people who work on big projects. (P3, Male, AISF)

That's true. Sometimes we are forced to work beyond 2:30 PM [the normal finish time]. (P18, Male, AISF)

Due to work pressure, I couldn't finish my work at the workplace. I would leave at 4 PM and continue working from home. I would reply to emails and if there were any office work, I would handle them from home. Since, the Vision started in 2017 the pressure suddenly increases. This workload is due to the development and changes that occurred.

In the beginning of my career, I didn't even have an email, and there was no work pressure. It was all paper-based work, and once the paper-based work was done, the workday would end.

Now, work is both paper-based and electronic. We submit paper-based documents electronically, then the work is sent to the Ministry, and they respond to us. If there are any errors, we correct them after receiving their response. All of this has added to the workload due to the electronic and digital transformations. Transactions have become electronic, some time we work on case that has a 24-hour response time. (P25, Male, AISF)

The above narratives are from five of the department A participants, three of whom held managerial responsibilities (P3, P9, P18). The fact that these narratives came from managers as well as subordinates in relation to the work intensification, clearly evidenced the claim that there is a work intensification issue. P16 elaborated on the issue and brought a comparison with previous work in the private sector:

Working hours have significantly increased. Initially, there was a perception that government work was comfortable and lacked productivity. Personally, after joining the government in 2020, the work I currently

perform is much more extensive and demanding than what I used to do before. I was previously in the private sector, and although there was some work intensity in the private sector, the workload now is much higher in my government work. As you mentioned, working hours are longer, and sometimes you may need to work on weekends or at certain times. In general, the workload has increased for everyone, although it varies from employee to employee depending on their tasks, responsibilities, and positions. After I started working, I discovered that both the number of tasks and the depth of work required significant focus and effort from the beginning. I expected the work in the government to be less demanding than this. The perception completely changed when I joined the government. (P16, Male, AISF)

Some participants viewed things differently, either in terms of the nature of pressures or even in solutions they saw being practiced:

The nature of work has changed, but not significantly. There is an increase in tasks and sometimes the quality of tasks. Regarding the volume: I'm talking about the topic of inspection operations. The number of employees was small because the work was paper-based and primitive. The procedures involved in control operations, from the start of the control process with a visit to the employer until an administrative decision with penalties, used to take a long time. Through the observer to the supervising authority to approve the violation, it took a long way.

Now, with automation, work is done in a short period, which has led to an increase in targets. Moreover, the job market is promising and growing, with a significant increase in employees joining the market and in employers and establishments. As a result, inspectors, monitoring operations, and monitoring departments have to expand and increase their workload, which has increased the procedures and workload. (P33, Male, AISF)

There may be an intensity of work, that is true. However, the Ministry is giving us a financial incentive in return to the additional hours we work.

Another way to deal with the intensity of work is to increase the staff, which something we do here. Yes, the majority welcome the idea of an increase in work and overtime hours in return for a certain wage. If, there is a motivating factor, there is no problem with the increase in the work. (P3, Male, AISF)

.. the system of overtime is applied. This system motivates employees because the overtime hours are paid, and I think the employees become more productive. We also do the exchange system. For example, if there is an increase in work, we attract employees from other departments to control the volume of work intensity (P9, Male, AISF)

For example, we have 1,000 establishments in the market, and I cannot cover all of them. As I mentioned earlier, we create an equation for inspectors and determine the number of visits. They also do not have complete freedom in their work; they have specific goals and other matters that need to be monitored on a weekly or monthly basis.

However, P34, a manager, did not see any effect on workers' personal lives:

But I haven't noticed that it affects their personal lives because we have set the indicators, and we know they are measurable, and the employee's ability to accomplish them during work hours. Of course, we have overtime work with a specific budget, and it is not significant. Those who work overtime receive their rights. (P34, Male, AISF)

Work intensification refers to the increased efforts employees must put in during their working day to meet certain outcomes or deadlines due to change or reforms (Green and McIntosh, 2001). Kubicek *et al.* (2014) regard work intensification as completing more than one task at the same time, performing different tasks and at high speed. Work intensification has been discussed in the literature as a negative aspect to the safety of employees (Green and McIntosh, 2001; Green, 2004; Kubicek *et al.,* 2014), occurring when employees are asked to meet high

quantitative workload. This has been experienced by the participants in this study. From Department A, for example, P9 shared a direct quote on the impact of Vision 2030 on their workload. '*From 2016 till now, there has been indeed an intensity of work, for example, if there is a large volume of work in some departments'*.

Similar codes and excerpts emerged from Department B participants as well the policy departments C and D. Some of the participants from Department B were able to link work intensification directly to the way the Vision reforms were being introduced:

> *In November 2021, the Work Assistance program was launched, and its period had a lot of workloads. I received 100 cases in a day due to the intensity of the pressure. So, when a new program or a new vision is launched, there may be problems Around 2022, there was pressure. I would sit for extra hours every day, even though they are against overtime, and I wouldn't get compensated. The work never ends. For example, before leaving work, I might not finish everything. But before taking a vacation, I would have completed all the accumulated work required of me. And when I returned after a week of vacation, I realized that the work never ends, and that work should only be done during working hours. There is a personal life for my family and myself. (P32, Female, BESF)*

> *Some pressure is necessary at the beginning of the transformation to organize things and coordinate between government entities. You feel that the required effort is significant. After things become clearer, the pressure becomes lighter. However, at the beginning, there was an imbalance. (P28, Male, BESF)*

> *Yes, that's true. The workload has increased, and I expect this to be a temporary phase of transformation. However, with some hiring, recruitment, and organization, work has become less stressful. (P28, Male, BESF)*

Yes, the workload has increased because there is an annual target of the Vision that keeps increasing. Among the goals of the Vision is to reduce the unemployment rate in the Kingdom to 6 or 7 percent. After the Vision, efforts have been made to reduce unemployment, and there is significant effort exerted in the department as well. We have documented numbers between us. We have a connection and follow up with monthly or annual reports. For example, there are regions like Riyadh, Mecca, and the Northern region where employment targeting is high, reaching 20,000 to 30,000. jobseekers (P35, Male, BESF)

Furthermore, some of the participants used the word 'burnout' to describe the impact the workplace reforms have had on them:

For example, [with the] reforms…. requests come at the end of the workday or in the evening. For instance, we have a presentation for the general director, and they bring all the options, all the costs, and then they put it aside without making a decision. Why should I do this task 3-4 times? This causes anxiety for me. Yes, each manager has their way of dealing with employees. For me, there was a period where I reached a point of job burnout. The pressure here and the negativity in the nature of work, in dealing with the manager, in the pressure you face when you arrive late at work, the excessive workload on the employee, and the occasional staff shortage. I may have a shortage of employees, but on the other hand, the existing employees are competent. (P26, Male, BESF)

Since the application of the Vision, although my working time did not increase, there is work pressure and a lot of projects we work on at the same time'. Sometimes, we receive order from the top leaders such as the minister at the end of the working day and with a direction that we must work on it immediately. This is a pressure. I have felt that I am burnout' 'There is overload (P27, Male, BESF)

The following quotes are form Department C employees who shared strong evidence of work intensification in their department:

We experienced some pressure at work; the workload increased when Vision 2030 started, the pressure initially increased. We used to work for a relatively long time, not just an hour or two. We were working from home, but we were still working. We tried our best to be productive and facilitate things. During COVID-19, we aimed to meet the required objectives without burdening the person or exhausting them. The focus was on benefiting the individuals more. To be honest, there was pressure at work during that time. On the contrary, those who claim that work was light during COVID-19 are mistaken. We were actually working a lot (P12, Female, CSP).

The appointed working hours are 7 hours, but sometimes we work more than that. Occasionally, we add three hours a day and sometimes more than that. (P1, Female, CSP)

P21 and P22 agreed with P1 and said:

That's correct. Previously, we used to finish work at 2:15, but now we finish at 5:00 or 5:30. (P2, Male, CSP)

Moreover, as an employee, I do not leave work to home until 5 PM, and I start my work at 8 AM. (P22, Female, CSP)

P15 agreed with the above participants and attributed this to the high rate of employment in the country and to the huge projects of the Vision 2030. She stated that working intensity in the government sector is higher than the private sector:

Let me tell you that most employees, including myself, do not stay to sunset time forcefully or under compulsion. However, the magnitude of the problem we are currently addressing, particularly in our agency, is related to the challenges of unemployment. We feel the impact of this issue in every household, with a significant number of people affected. We cannot afford to delay, and we must work tirelessly day and night to achieve this goal. The work must continue until it is accomplished. These efforts, even when working to late time, have yielded results. There has been a

significant increase in employment and a reduction in unemployment rates. As I mentioned earlier, if we request financial support for employment or additional staff to increase the recruitment rate, it is because we need these resources to work on these projects. Each project relies on the people involved in its execution. … Yes, honestly, after the implementation of the Vision, it has had an impact on us. There are more facilitations[4] compared to the private sector. However, the workload is greater than the private sector because some supervisors come and collapse during work. The work now is more challenging than the private sector because the projects are extremely huge. (P15, Female, CSP)

Department D on the other hand was affected by an increase in workload. For example, in a question related to the work organisation after the reforms, P13 said this:

… internally, there is work intensification. We are supposed to leave at 2 pm but, we stay until 4 or 5, partially, of course. Some departments bring in additional employees who have more experience in project management. This is one of the alternatives to reduce the pressure. (P13, Male, DLMP)

Many other participants from department D stated clearly that there is work intensification:

However, nowadays, work is intense. The volume of work these days is very high. (P2, Male, DLMP)

Always the projects that related directly to the goals of Vision 2030 are handled differently. We deal with them seriously and therefore the amount of work has to be doubled. The percentage of acceptable wrong is less

---

[4] This refers to formal support offered to employees to maintain attendance and job-performance at work following periods of ill health or other difficulties

than any other projects. The Vision project has more work pressure on us. We also receive support triple the amount of any other projects.

After the application of Vision 2030 agenda. I work from eight in the morning until seven in the evening, as I am responsible for 7 to 10 projects at once that must be immediately updated and must keep track of them.

Work is continuous, and this method of work and projects consumes energy. For example, you are working on a project. You must be fully aware of the plan that's followed, and the plan sometimes reaches 40 objectives, and you must follow up on all of them and review whether they have been achieved or not before moving on to the next project. Then comes the updating of projects and the submission of reports. We have ongoing projects, and we must repeat again if the project is not finished in a satisfactory way

In all, some work needs 5 to 6 people to finish it, but only one person works on them. This constitutes a challenge, because it is difficult to bring five people who are familiar with all the information, so one person is assigned to it. In addition to this, there are obstacles to teamwork. The spirit of the team must be present. For example, I am now on vacation, but my colleagues are in contact with me on some topics, even though I did not leave for vacation, until I have provided all the updates they need. (P4, Male, DLMP)

P6 and P14 agreed with P4 on the idea that working on Vision projects increases the workload:

…work through projects, I think there is a high work volume. Also, work intensity is high because we are at the beginning of the change wave. However, direct managers in every department have helped reduce the amount of work by applying an overtime system or recruiting employees from less busy departments. To a great extent, implementing a private sector management style has helped the Ministry achieve its goals [but]

> *because of managing work through projects, I think there is a high work volume. (P6, Female, DLMP)*

As we saw in earlier sections, work in the four departments has shifted gradually since the 2016 reforms. The Saudi rulers have introduced a series of work-related reforms in the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development (regulative pillar) (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983, 1990). The Ministry's administration's approach went from traditional public administration to a more private sector-based management approach where they use performance appraisal and KPIs. It can be argued from the participants' experience that this new form of work organisation has created work intensification in the Ministry.

The participants reported that at the beginning of the reforms, there was a significant challenge in terms of the complication of new processes and procedures that form the work organisation. When the reforms started, there were significant and complicated projects. Monthly or quarterly reports follow these projects. Moreover, this idea of following up reports is considered new in the Ministry. Along with this, as seen in this chapter and according to participants, the Ministry automated work procedures, which has intensified employees' work. For example, Participant 24 stated, "*since the reforms, the Ministry invested heavily in transforming all work procedures to be automated. This added extra work on me and my subordinates".* Similarly, Participant 10 stated, "*Work procedures in the past were unclear, and the Ministry needed to move to automation due to the reforms, and automation needs extra work from us.*" Another factor for work intensification in the Ministry is the ambiguity and the ongoing nature of the reforms. The reforms started in 2016; however, it has undergone much revision, which has intensified work in the Ministry. According to Participant 23, a female general manager, "*We started to understand*

the new work organisation and the management approaches in mid-2019, although the reforms started in 2016". Similarly, Participant 6 stated that "*work intensity is high because we are at the beginning of the change wave*".

From the institutional theory and organisational change perspective, significant workplace change can bring negative aspects to work (Scott, 2008); in the case of the four departments, there seems to be work intensification in all the departments. It may be that the coercive forces inherent in institutional isomorphism (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983) and which are deemed to have a political impact / influence rather than a technical influence to change (Scott, 1987) are now being experienced directly in the workplace. Employees are expected to meet new targets using new systems, therefore what is a political impact higher up the hierarchy has become a technical impact lower down.

Sifting through the participants' accounts, it was clear the work intensification after the reforms affected several employees' work-life balance. Some employees were asked to work for long periods due to the extensive and ambitious projects that the Ministry was now working on. Respondents cited working extra long hours, starting early in the day and working later, dealing with emails at home etc. Due to the use of remote work software and the Ministry's advanced technologies, employees were now able to work from anywhere. Therefore, some participants stated that they had to work from their homes to finish job tasks, which affected their working-life balance.

> *The work pressure was also impacting other areas of their performance, such as preventing staff from attending training.*

> *Most of us, we cannot afford attending the elective courses due to the high work pressure, but some of us are overworked and take these courses as*

> *a kind of relief from work pressure. Sometimes I attend the course and my mind goes through the progress of the project assigned to me. (P4, Male, DLMP)*

Work pressure is the negative force felt by employees to complete a work task to standard and to an acceptable level, and pressure can come from different sources such as from managers, from high demand and short staffing, from deadlines and consistent performance expectations (Gallie, 2005). Participants from all departments had experienced negative work pressure. For example, P17 observed that there was work pressure from the minister in delivering Vision 2030 programmes. P24 who was a deputy minister experienced work pressure and described the pressure he received as a multiple by ten to that of any other employee. P4 shared his opinion on the shortage of employees and the high demand from the Vision 2030 projects as the cause of the pressure.

6.1.10 Competition within the workplace

A clear theme that emerged was 'competition' between workers and teams, which had been encouraged by the reforms, yet seems anathema to the concept of organisational culture described by Alotaibi and Campbell (2022, p. 564) in which "*an organisation's employees unite to achieve an assigned task or goal, an unfolding of group processes takes place that integrates the group and establishes effective relations within the organisation*". For instance, in one opinion about the Ministry's new work organisation, P3 stated that it was creating a positive new workplace culture where men and women were 'competing' with each other:

> *I think integrating women and no-gender segregation culture has created a situation of men and women are competing each other in a good way, which will reflect positively on the work performance. (P3 Male, AISF)*

Others had this to say:

> *There is competition in the workplace itself. The competition is no longer limited to female employees competing with each other or male employees competing with each other. It has become a competition between employees, regardless of gender. The challenge has increased further, and individuals strive to prove themselves more. They no longer say, "We are better." Instead, it has become about groups, groups of young men and women competing against each other. Who will be more productive? Competition becomes a reality during certain periods. There is even an "Employee of the Week" title, whether it's a man or a woman. It has become normal for one of them to be the best employee of the week, so we compete to see who the best will be this week. (P12, female, CSP)*

> *The work culture has changed not because of evaluation or rewards but rather because of personalisation and creating a spirit of competition among employees. (P7, female, DLMP)*

> *The environment has become a positive high competition. For example, promotions are linked to the quality of job performance. They are tied to achievements and related skills. This created competition among employees, which created a good work environment. This was reflected in changing the organisation's culture to be positive and productive. In the past, the employee had no ambition. Everyone would receive the same evaluation and appreciation and annual bonuses at the end of the year, regardless of productivity. Currently, no, there is a culture of excellence. There is a culture in which every employee wants his name to be among the distinguished employees of the month or the ideal employee every quarter. For example, the best project manager or the best target owner, of these things create a motivating work and a motivating work culture.*

One of the reasons for competition appeared to be due to the different contracts issued to permanent civil service employees and temporary contract workers from the private sector. After applying the Vision 2030 agenda, the Ministry has recruited

employees from the private sector to develop its work. This recruitment process has effectively created two groups of people, contract employees and government employees. The Ministry provides contract employees with high salaries and incentives. According to some participants, the government employees work the same as the contract employees, but the contract employees receive higher salaries because they are recruited from the private sector and are deemed to be "highly skilled". Some government employee participants said this was unfair and created a situation where government employees were quitting their jobs.

In revealing this issue, two distinct findings were found in the transcripts among employees from the policy division and function division. In the policy division, the contract employees, mainly project managers, received high benefits and were not subject to performance evaluation; unsurprisingly, they were said to be satisfied with their situation in the Ministry.

> *Employees recruited from the private sector on the contracts take ten times the salary of those within the Ministry for their whole working life. This creates dissatisfaction but also a kind of hope that the deputy ministry we work with will be privatised. Also, the kind of work we carry out here in the Ministry satisfies us with the amount of experience we take from working there, as I can Then work elsewhere. However, people recruited from the private sector work on annual contracts renewed yearly, which has much instability. Still, we work for the government, and let's say it is like a lifelong contract (P4).*

Others had similar thoughts to share:

To be honest, as government employees, we have encountered issues due to contract employees. I don't see the recruited individuals as more competent than myself. They come with high incentives and additional benefits like medical insurance, while government employees can perform these tasks. Another problem with contract employees is that they have a limited view of government employees. They consider them as ordinary people who know nothing. (P11, Male, AISF)

Initially, it is true that the contracted employee had the upper hand and controlled the workplace or possessed a better understanding. However, in the past couple of years, the government employee has become more knowledgeable, informed, and has a deeper background than expected. Some government employees have reached a level where they are sought after by external private companies, and some of them choose to remain in their positions while benefiting from their expertise as consultants. This has happened frequently. In contrast, although it was true in the beginning that the contracted employee was considered better, now it is the government employee who is considered superior. (P12, female, CSP)

In our ministry, we have two levels: contract employees and civil service employees. Very few civil service employees can perform at the same level as contract employees. We have an employee who refused to accept a new job title with new responsibilities, and her supervisor criticized her for delaying work completion. The culture is different between these two levels (contract employees and civil service employees. (P17, Male, DLMP)

Unfortunately, this concept is not widely understood. Contract employees are always afraid, while civil service employees have nothing to fear. A contract employee does not have the same security as a government employee. However, civil service employees differ honestly. The type and nature of the contract determine this, but there are civil service employees who are sincere, although they are a minority... (P17, Male, DLMP)

P17 appears to be making a value judgement about how civil service employees are less capable, yet their contracts remain more secure with better terms than their contract counterparts. In contrast, in the function division, especially department B, contract employees were not satisfied and said they received less benefits than government employees. In the function division, contract employees belonged to private companies that outsourced, for example, the work of employment and career advisory services in department B. To elaborate, Department B assigned some of its programme to a private sector company and appointed a direct manager from Department B itself.

Participant 30 from department B, a male employee, perceived this as 'discrimination' and 'resistance' as they worked the same jobs, but with lower benefits and less job security. This had created two groups, the contract employees and the Department B employees:

> *There is resistance* between contractors and the department B employees. Sometimes. We face discrimination in term of the pay and rewards, promotion, and career development even though we work in the same jobs. We can be laid off very easily. This can be done to make *contractors fear their managers from the Department B. (P30, Male, BESF)*

One extract from the transcript illustrated this:

> Interviewer: "Is there a difference in terms and conditions between contract employees and government staff?
>
> Interviewee: Personally, I don't know. Ultimately, when the decision was made to have operating companies, there must have been a vision behind it that I don't see. Personally, I perform the same tasks as another person;

it feels like duplication…. If it were competition with another entity, it would be possible, but I don't compete with myself.

Interviewer: So – do the contract staff receive higher salaries?

No, we receive higher benefits.

Interviewer: Do you think that is fair?

Maybe they have other advantages, I don't know, but they carry out the same tasks and work that we do, and they may have more powers, so what I see is something positive, not negative. (P 32, female)

The introduction of contract employees as part of the reforms from the Saudi government may have created polarisation between old employees and the new contract employees. In a European context, Pratschke and Morlicchio (2012) argued that any change in labour markets and occupational structure may result in a lack of social cohesion within a workforce; this may well be what these participants are experiencing. Part of the reason may also be directly attributed to performance management. The forced ranking system was creating two groups of people, where contract employees were not subject to being evaluated while government employees had to be evaluated using staff appraisals: many participants — both managers and non-managerial employees — reported this as unfair. In this system, a manager must choose only a tiny percentage of employees to receive an "excellent" ranking as it is on a stated ratio, even though all may deserve "excellent". In addition, this forced ranking system was creating two groups of people - satisfied and not satisfied. This system, from the point of view of most participants, was not fair because of its nature. In addition, some participants stated that managers felt that the system of appraising employees was unfair because it created resistance

from the employees and sensitivity among them. Some participants noted that the forced ranking system created dissatisfaction among employees:

> *Unfortunately, there is a bit of dissatisfaction among employees from the compulsory evaluation system, where some deserve high ratings. However, because it is limited to a small percentage of the employees, the manager can only give it to selected employees. However, there are always rewards and recognition through the Employee of the Month scheme. (P6, female, DLMP)*

> *I think we have changed the performance appraisal system as the manager can only give a rating of 5 out of 5 to one employee. For example, my manager has three employees, me and two female colleagues. The manager said that all of you have achieved your evaluation criteria and deserve a 5 of 5 rating. Still, I can only evaluate excellence to one person, so you choose among yourselves. This may create some injustice. (P4, Male, DLMP)*

One of the participants, a deputy minister and a director, stated this regarding the forced ranking performance appraisal:

> *As for the compulsory performance system, I think it is unfair, primarily because some deputies or departments work more than others. In some cases, I heard that some managers have come to file a complaint and object to the evaluation system to the Ministry, which indicates a flaw in the appraisal system.*

> *… Let me tell you, in the government sector in general, there are two types of contracts: civil service employees and contracted employees' contracts. I personally, being a contracted employee, am not deeply involved in the topic of performance appraisal that is implemented for civil service employees. I have heard about it but not from my colleagues who are in the civil service. There are many complaints or injustices. (P15, Female, CSP)*

No, I don't find it fair. I complained about it last year. It is very illogical for me to evaluate one of them as excellent, very good, and acceptable, while all the colleagues in the other department, despite there being 70 of them, are rated as excellent. There is an unfairness between different departments. (P17, Male, CSP)

Yes, it does create such feelings, and the evaluation is distributed among departments. Some departments consist entirely of government employees, and we experience this every day. In another department within the same agency, there are three contracted employees and one government employee. Imagine that the government employee does not work or exert one-third of the required effort in comparison to another department. However, because they have contracted employees, they receive an excellent rating because the department manager has no other employee besides them (P23, Female, CSP)

The fact that the deputy minister and a director stated that forced ranking performance appraisal system is unfair clearly shows that there was an issue regarding the performance appraisal in the Ministry. Returning to the discussion in earlier chapters and the definition of appraisal systems, the evidence given by several participants was that in fact the operationalisation of such systems had been experienced by the participants in each department differently, and in many respects, the appraisals had not been commensurate with their stated aims. Latta (2009) highlights the importance of cultural integration as a stage in organisational change. Along with cultural sustainment, there has to be an element of modelling behaviours, particularly from leaders who play a key role applying the new behaviour consistently to reinforce the new norms. Where there is dissonance, as evidenced by these narratives 'staff appraisal is good, it's necessary, it's unfair' in applying the new performance appraisal, there is likely to be resistance when norming the new culture (Kavanagh, and Ashkanasy, 2006).

In turning to the theoretical model underpinning this study, one explanation for the perceived unfairness in this study may relate to the relationships that are constructed within the departments between appraiser and appraisee. The cultural-cognitive pillar of Institutional Theory represents how 'actors' — i.e. employees and their employers — interpret the traditions within a department (Tlaiss 2015). The current perceptions of relationships and traditions within the departments remain firmly rooted in pre-Vision norms; in other words, where the power balance is weighted heavily in the favour of managers and decision making [about the operationalisation of the new appraisal system] is an authoritarian process. Alharbi, Thursfield and Bright (2016, p. 22) suggest there is a need to "construct less personal and power infused social exchange relationships between managers and subordinates which … link contribution and performance to outcomes". This appraisal system has created dissatisfaction and job insecurity issues and is discussed further in the concluding chapter.

6.1.11 Wasta on the wane

As discussed particularly in Section 3.5, there are several cultural aspects that shape the government sector. Wasta was discussed with participants to investigate whether it has diminished with the reforms. Participants used the terms 'wasta' and 'nepotism' interchangeably, therefore returning to the concept as outlined in Section 1.2 is timely; whereas in Western society, nepotism is usually referred to as using power or influence to obtain advantage, (Cambridge Online Dictionary, 2024), wasta is often referred to the advantage one gains from being part of a family or tribe but it extends to things such as discrete deals that further the wider tribal and family units as well as the individual (Hooker, 2023). Several participants stated that 'Wasta is on the Wane', however, others stated that Wasta still exists:

Nepotism never ends, even in the most prestigious, established, and largest countries or government entities. Nepotism doesn't end. However, I have to say that it has significantly decreased. Let's say it has significantly decreased. Why? Because now the officials are being monitored. They are being pursued by integrity in their work, at home, in the office, and everywhere. There is now a great emphasis on promoting transparency and accountability. Previously, we didn't have the principle of accountability. But now we do. Integrity is present. Most employees in government entities fear this matter. (P14, Male, DLMP)

There may be entrances to Wasta in the past, but now this is impossible and has been wholly rejected in the performance evaluation. Every employee now has his achievements preserved in the technical programs we work on daily. The question of proving efficiency is not difficult. Previously it was difficult to ascertain and differentiate between the employees' true efforts [or the benefit they got from wasta]. The indicators have now contributed to measuring performance and goals in knowing who accomplished objectives and who did not. However, in my opinion, Wasta may occur when hiring contracts. Most hiring on contracts is done through social networks and through nomination, where when a leader moves to another administration, he may bring his former colleagues with him. In my opinion, a kind of favouritism and Wasta may occur. (P8, Female, DLMP)

There is no Wasta. There is Article No. 7, that prevent any intermediary in employment or performance appraisal. Me personally, I do not accept any Wasta, and our work does not need an intermediary. There is also integrity, that we try to maintain. For example, we have very strong online recruitment procedures that prevent any Wasta. I remember an example Customer Service agent, the Ministry detected a violation, and a severe penalty was imposed on him. Everything counts now. (P5, Male, AISF)

It has been eliminated in recruitment, promotion and evaluation because there is clarity in the work procedures and rules. We can know who the achievers are, and the employees who have achieved their goals are

known. There is no longer any way for the mediation at all. Wasta has ended because there is transparency in transactions, and work is going according to clear goals specific to each employee. In the past, the work procedures were ambiguous. Wasta may intervene, but now there is transparency and strictness, as regulatory bodies such as (NAZAHA) deal strictly with issues such as Wasta and apply the most severe penalties. As an employee, I can file a complaint against an employee in the Ministry, regardless of his rank. (P9, Male, AISF)

However, P11 believed that Wasta continued to exist, and he observed Wasta in many aspects such as overlooking workers' poor timekeeping or lack of commitment that might work as a hindrance to providing better services:

Wasta still exists because it is a cultural phenomenon. Can you provide me with any society that does not care about Whom you know? In my opinion, nepotism is an integral part of any society, not just Saudi or Arab societies, but in general. Wasta is found in tolerance for lateness or commitment in the workplace, and task assignments. In financial benefits, overtime, and workload distribution. For example, a workshop that has more benefits may be given to one employee over another based-on nepotism. (P11, AISF, Male)

So far, the situation is the same regarding nepotism, I mean internally. (Internally, in recruitment, promotion and performance). Yes, yes, there is no difference. For example, the deputy of an agency suddenly comes with a complete team. This still happens. When did the recruitment happen? That is an important question. (Whether we attribute it to nepotism or consider them productive individuals whom we trust). If they produce excellent, but some of them do not produce or interact with you in work related to your management, here the issue is different. (P18, male, AISF)

As discussed in previous sections, Saudi Arabia is considered a neo-patrimonial regime, in which theorists such as Bratton and van de Walle (1997) and Asquer and

Alzahrani, (2020) suggest informal norms exist beside formal ones as a result of traditional and modern forms of domination.

Most participants believed that Wasta continued to exist, even though the government has worked hard to eliminate it, suggesting that the norms that are being constructed under Vision 2030 are still accommodating traditional forms of practice. However, some of the participants believed that although still prevalent, Wasta had been reduced. They suggested four distinct reasons for this. First is the current nature of the work in the department requires highly skilled employees. They also believed that the automation of most work procedures and day-to-day activities have made the work more streamlined, thus the potential for Wasta is reduced. The third reason is the rise of transparency in the Ministry as a result of the reforms. Finally, the anti-corruption centre has had a major role in reducing / eliminating Wasta.

As discussed in section 3.4.3, the government has invested comprehensively in changing the work nature in the Ministry to become more in line with private sector practices. This has created a professional work environment in the Ministry that needed highly skilled employees. Therefore, some participants suggested that their work now required the type of qualification and experience that is not seen in employees previously recruited using Wasta. For example, participant 4 said: "*This thing [Wasta] does not exist completely. I have not seen that since my work in the deputy ministry because our field is difficult and requires high competencies*".

Participant 16 discussed the role that automating business systems has played in reducing Wasta:

> *After applying Vision 2030 reforms, the Ministry worked on automation of most work processes, which reduces many of the Wasta use, and all of our work is monitored and controlled. So, it is hard to pass a thing that is illegal or against work regulations. (P16, Male, AISF)*

Participate 3 agreed with participant 16 on this point, suggesting that "*Automation of electronic services and automation of work in the Ministry reduce the use of Wasta*".

In terms of increased transparency, most participants agreed that Wasta was reduced because after the reforms, the government applied new governance aimed at promoting complete transparency in the workplace. Concerning this point, the Vision 2030 documents state that the ministries will use international standards to reach the highest level of transparency and governance in all sectors, including the Ministry (Vision 2030, 2017), as emphasised by Participant 14. This increased transparency is part of the solution to addressing Dafaa's (2019) assertion that lack of transparency is a key reason for corruption and Wasta in Saudi Arabia. Kim, Kim, and Lee (2009) frame the role of transparency as a mechanism of the cultural-cognitive and regulative pillars of institutional theory (Scott, 2013). The following excerpts from the transcripts discussing the hidden presence of Wasta also form part of the cultural-cognitive pillar (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983, 1991; Scott, 2008):

> *Wasta still exists because this is our culture. We cannot find a community in the entire world that is perfect. People will always ask who you know, not if you are qualified. I think Wasta is part of any community. I think it exists in promotion, employment, and appraisal (P11, Male, AISF).*

> *It has been reduced after Vision 2030, but it still exists. Our work is now electronic, this might help to reduce Wasta, but I think it has not been ended. (P13, Male, DLMP)*

Of course, Wasta will never end, even in very developed countries. However, it has been reduced dramatically since the implementation of Vision 2030 because employees are now monitored, and 'Nazaha' follows every employee on every transaction they make. There was no accountability in the past, but today every employee is responsible for any actions they take (P14, Male, DLMP)

Informal connection and networking, while not illegal, are seen as an integral part of Wasta in many cultures worldwide. According to Smith *et al.,* (2012), this relationship can be seen in China, Brazil, the Arab region and Western countries. The practices of Wasta (or its equivalent in other countries) take many forms, but they all share the same idea of having an intermediary to obtain something illegal or impermissible – an 'introduction' of a potential new recruit to a manager, for instance. An institutional theory insight into finding the persistence of Wasta in the departments may rest within the normative pillar (Scott, 2013). The participants appear to be suggesting that Wasta is almost a social obligation in some quarters, which is the basis of compliance within the normative pillar (Scott, 2013, chapter 3). Though the bulk of the reforms within the department are regulative, it would appear that the binding expectations expressed through Wasta provide a strong basis of order that remains a challenge.

6.2 Chapter Summary

This chapter has discussed NPM reforms and performance appraisal and their impact on the Ministry. The first sections compared the four departments, two function and two policy departments. It found contrasts; in particular Department B has not made the same level of progress at adapting to the changes as the other departments. Other contrasts were seen, around issues such as how KPIs and

individual performance appraisal are implemented across the sites and how they are perceived by employees of all grades.

Work intensification is a clear consequence of the reforms; there were catalysts to change (Král and Králová, 2016) that had the potential to ease the intensification, including introduction of automation in Department A. There were also inhibitors to change (Král and Králová, 2016) such as bureaucracy and resistance from employees in Department B. Other potential inhibitors were seen, such as the employment services experienced technological and managerial issues around use of technology, the contradictions between physical services and online platforms, and not knowing jobseekers' needs. Despite the efforts the Vision 2030 has made in eliminating Wasta, Wasta remains an issue.

The following chapter presents the conclusion of this thesis. It summarises the findings, identifies the contributions to the field and makes some recommendations for further study.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

7.1 Introduction

This case study research aimed to understand the impact of the 2016 public administration reforms on human resources management and employment relations in the Saudi labour administration system. With an overall focus on the Saudi Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development, the study was conducted at a time of great development within the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, which as seen throughout this thesis is undergoing significant change. The research provides a deeper understanding of the nature of the public administration reforms that were introduced as part of the Vision 2030 agenda, and which have had a myriad of effects on the nature of work and employment and a change of workplace culture in the ministry.

This chapter concludes this thesis by evaluating the overall findings associated with the two research questions:

Research Question 1: What impact has the 2016 public administration reform had on gender issues in the workplace in the Saudi labour administration system?

Research Question 2: What impact has the 2016 public administration reform had on performance management in the Saudi labour administration system?

In addition, this chapter draws together the process and outcomes of the 4-year research project. It provides a summary of the completed study, along with a reflection on the process of gathering the findings. Importantly, this chapter also summarises the contribution this study has made to the field and recommendations to both academics and policymakers for further study and taking the work forward; it also discusses the study's limitations.

7.2 Summary of findings

7.2.1 Gender issues in the workplace

Despite the Vision 2030 'promise', this study has revealed that social norms in some departments reflected the acceptance of ongoing gender inequality within the Ministry. Emerging from the iterative / inductive process of this study was a clear view of the institutionally and socially constructed norms under the new system – the integrated workspace – as typified by sexist language and masculine culture.

On paper the country seems to be moving forward in terms of constructing new cultural workplaces in which inclusivity is playing a significant role and women are becoming empowered, and old practices such as segregation are being phased out. However, this new direction was not accepted by all, and the views and behaviours of some male employees continued to reflect norms constructed in, and inherited, from the past. For instance, some of the male participants felt that de-segregation of the workplace had left them feeling uncomfortable and had created misunderstanding between men and women.

The difficulty some staff members have had in accepting newly-constructed norms in the non-segregated workplace needs to be acknowledged; without this, a lack of

understanding of each gender's needs and feelings of discomfort will continue. This appeared to be a cultural barrier for many of the male participants, a new way of relating with women from outside their immediate family and social circle. Ongoing segregation was also preferable to some women due to the privacy inherent with that well-established construct in the Saudi society. However, not applying the mandated de-segregation in full in the new workplace has entailed managers introducing a flexibility that is not yet written into legislation under Vision 2030.

Women seem to be affected by imbalance in applying empowerment practices, in which empowerment reforms within the Ministry are experienced as being directed to women leaders only. However, the old constructed patriarchal and masculine culture play an integral role in the challenges that women in leadership face. In addition, the new workplace has created a newly constructed norm that women and men are alike in terms of work tasks, responsibilities and compensations. However, this was not seen routinely, as male participants suggested that some jobs were 'too rough' for women. Also, discussion about direct interaction between staff revealed sexist language and stereotypical masculine behaviours such as suggesting "… *women face many problems, but if the manager handles them well, he feels relieved because they are more disciplined than men. But their problems are too many. Jealousy among each other on clothing, and personal matters. If the manager does not know how to handle them well, the work will be affected*". This implies patriarchy in the new workplace.

7.2.2 Changes in performance management since public administration reforms under Vision 2030

In relation to the second research question of this study, this thesis revealed key information about important aspects of the Saudi labour administration and performance management that is not available elsewhere. This study examined four departments within the Labour Ministry of Saudi Arabia that are responsible for administering labour policy, broadly categorised under 2 functions (Inspection and Employment Services) and 2 policies (Saudisation Policy and general labour policies). The thesis discussed performance management within these departments. Three departments (A, C and D) have converted under the changes accompanying Vision 2030 into departments that apply enhanced management practices. These three departments were practicing performance management, business automation, and key performance indicators, which have completely reorganised their work. The inspection department, for instance, used two online platforms (Tamam and Man' n Lil Rasad) to transform all its services online for customers.

Of note, this study found that participants from Department B expressed a different scenario, where change is slow, they have not fully adopted the technology that other department employees describe mostly as improving the work undertaken, performance appraisal is inconsistent and bureaucracy is impeding progress. The introduction of change has been legislative (regulative pillar) and the coercive forces form pressure to change; the paradox is that not meeting such demands infers sanctions are likely, yet fear of this was not mentioned by the participants. What was seen may be explained through the normative frame of reference. As seen in section 2.2.2 and 2.3.2, where norms are deeply engrained, there is tension and

division when new systems that are not part of 'the way things are done' are introduced, in other words, there develops a misalignment between the old and the new.

This study has also found that the new performance management system was accompanied by work intensification and negative work pressure. These consequences of the impact of the reforms were experienced by the majority of participants across all grades as a feeling of burnout due to the workload. An element of competition, almost rivalry has crept into the workplace dynamics with regards to reward and appraisal. Staff have experienced what they perceived as unfair forced ranking performance appraisal; staff in general felt the power balance with forced ranking was weighted towards higher grades, another 'us *v* them'.

In addition, the theoretical framework from the study has facilitated the understanding of how performance appraisal has been adopted within the departments. For instance, in Department C, cultural integration was seen whereby the new strategic direction had been disseminated and staff supported with training about new procedures and processes. Seen through a normative lens, it would appear that the institutional environment was contributing to the momentum behind new change.

7.3 Methodological contribution to the field

In terms of methodological contribution, this study adopted an interpretive design, which involved sifting and re-sifting the data gathered from interviews until meaning started to emerge. That meaning was constructed into new knowledge about working life in the Ministry by constant comparison with the core interactions between the participant and the researcher whilst reflecting on the culture and the

context that the participants were living and working in and, as a group, had constructed around them. Although many others have taken an interpretivist approach to their research, the insight gained from the approach within this study context may guide others to consider its utility in similar settings: neo-patrimonial societies where access to government documentation is limited, but the meaning embedded in the participants' rich experience may be actualised using an interpretivist approach. Vision 2030 is a topic of great interest for Saudi men and women, who are witnessing significant change in society. Using this approach helped the researcher to engage more with the participants and gain knowledge of their experiences of the reality of the reforms, and in fact, women's voices in this study was a significant addition to this process, as interacting with unaccompanied women in the workplace was almost impossible before the Vision 2030 reforms.

The impacts of the reforms are not yet fully known, and evidence is still emerging as the impact of Vision 2030 continues to grow; in this study, the researcher using qualitative methodology has provided a functional, informed understanding of the concepts under study, and great insights into the impact of the reforms in the departments through the participants' voices.

When coupled with the interpretive stance of this study, concurrent analysis and comparison with literature has provided a meaningful contribution to the fields of Public Administration and Labour Administration. It brought insights into the Saudi labour administration system and public administration that are not available elsewhere; the four departments within the Saudi labour administration system that were examined inductively are an important area of study for academics. Also, providing such insight into the inner workings under the reforms has yielded an opportunity for United Nation Organisations, in particular the International Labour

Organisation, to gather information about the changing working life of Saudis under the reforms.

7.4 Theoretical contribution to the field

Turning to neo-institutional theory, its use in this study offers insights into the impact of the reforms. In particular, the regulative, normative and cultural-cognitive pillars of the theory contributed to exploring and understanding the impact on issues such as acceptance or otherwise of KPIs, forced ranking and business automation. However, two other factors stand out in this study that may benefit others considering this approach in similar settings. Firstly, this study has demonstrated the merit in considering cultural context through the normative pillars. For instance, evidence that some families had requested for cultural reasons that their women relatives working in the Ministry were placed in another office that was fully segregated illustrated the social obligation as basis of compliance and affective elements of the normative pillar.

Secondly, examining the dynamics of organisational change using constructs such as culture norming as presented by Caprar and Neville, (2012), and the concept of inhibitors and catalysts to change as presented by Král and Králová's (2016) have both widened the theoretical lens and complemented neo-institutional theory as used in this thesis.

This study also offers contributions to understanding how NPM interfaces with HRM activities in the unique cultural setting of Saudi Arabia post-Vision 2030 launch. This study has evidenced that although Wasta is still present, it is diminishing within the sector, as discussed by participants; it was also clear from their narrative that recruitment and promotion is based on 'skills not years in service'. Performance

management was seen throughout the departments. This supports the NPM principles of accountability and emphasis on performance, and demonstrates a commitment to a more modern approach to HRM; in the Ministry, this is seen in performance appraisal, staff training in the change processes and de-segregation of the workplace to promote inclusion. This shift in the human resources management practice may be directly attributed to the NPM reforms in the public sector.

7.5 Recommendations for changes to policy and practice

Two phrases that emerged from the study's findings have influenced this study's recommendations. 'Change takes time' was a phrase that was repeated many times by the participants, and this study recommends policymakers consider this at every stage of implementation, as the overall impact of Vision 2030 will take full shape when the whole period of the reforms is completed. However, consistent legislation to support reforms is also needed, which would prevent managers from interpreting the new rules their own way, as was seen in Chapter Five in relation to the segregation and desegregation of the workplace.

'Change always come with consequences' was another phrase that many participants used. It is recommended that policymakers and top leaders in the Ministry acknowledge that change is uncomfortable, and the central government of Saudi Arabia need to support staff through it. Ways to consider moving forward should include timely information and training when any new practice is introduced.

Furthermore, tackling gendered language in the workplace — especially in the newly de-segregated environment — is an issue for management as well as academia to address. Means should include incorporating the issue into both

management training and academic courses as it has possibly been seen previously as a 'Western' problem. There is a need for further study on women's experiences in the newly de-segregated workplace within Saudi Arabia to build on the growing body of literature around subjects such as women in leadership and gendered space. There is a particular gap in research using feminist epistemology in the new landscape of Vision 2030 and women's empowerment. Certainly, the discomfort felt by the male author of this study during some of the interviews was a point of consideration, and led to the suggestion that additional study be conducted by women.

Moreover, it is recommended that the Ministry look to examples cited in the ILO General Survey 2024 (ILO 2024b, paragraphs 219, 220) of best practice in mainstreaming a gender perspective in the Ministry of Labour. This would recognise the central role that the Ministry has in terms of promoting gender equality and non-discrimination at work in the workplace in the newly de-segregated departments.

It is also recommended that government should revisit and evaluate the use of forced ranking performance appraisal, as participants' experience of what they described as the inconsistent use of fair performance appraisal in some departments merit government audit and consultation on its use.

Department B seemed to be slower to adopt the Vision 2030 reforms and as mentioned in 7.2.2, there is a misalignment between 'the old and the new'. Consistent help for this department would help it match the other departments' performance and provide better services to the public. This study has shown that established norms have evolved in other departments with leadership strategies and staff training to learn about and embrace new systems. A recommendation for

policy makers would be to deliver initiatives that consider the workplace culture and how it is to adapt and evolve to support the employees in Department B at all levels to adopt change.

7.6 Study Limitations

The Saudi public administration reforms are still under way, as Saudi Vision 2030 is aiming for completion by the year 2030. The public administration sector's organisational culture including gender issues and performance management are likely to change over the next few years until the end of the programme in 2030. This study, through interacting with participants, has captured a period from the beginning of the reforms in 2016 up to the data collection periods in 2022 and 2023 to reflect on the areas of inquiry. This can be seen as a limitation of the study.

This study took the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development as a case study, which is not generalisable to other public organisations or ministries. The Ministry itself is vast, consisting of four sectors, Labour sector, Civil services sector, Social Development sector, and Shared Services sector. Each of these sectors comprises different departments. For the purpose of focus, in this study four departments from the labour sector were chosen for in-depth analysis. This is the second limitation of the study, as the reforms may well have affected the other three sectors in ways that are not captured in this study.

At the practical level, this study met challenges that have created some limitations. First, in relation to the translation of transcripts, the fieldwork generated over a hundred thousand words in English. This translation was carried out by the researcher and this may have resulted in some nuances of meaning lost in the translation. Second, while performance appraisal is being practiced by the ministry,

however, it was not possible to get access to blank copies of the staff appraisal forms as these are classified and considered confidential official forms. It meant that I was not able to compare those in use, which participants were critical of, with others for comparison, thus preventing an in-depth evaluation and comparison of performance appraisal and thus leading to a limitation of this study. Thirdly, not being able to recruit women participants directly in department A was a challenge that created limitations to this study, as their voice was absent from the analysis. Lastly, it was intended to conduct the semi-structured interviews face to face, however, because the travel restrictions during Covid-19, this was not possible and some of the potential benefits of conducting in-person interviews, such as the ability to observe body language, were therefore missed.

7.7 Recommendations for further research

As Vision 2030 is still in process, with new developments emerging, further longitudinal study that covers the whole period of the public administration reforms is suggested to capture the whole impact of the public administration reforms. Also, a more comprehensive study of the impact on all sectors of the ministry could be conducted in the future.

As discussed in Chapters One and Two, Vision 2030 is overarching, covering many different aspects of society. Some of the economic or societal aspects of Vision 2030 may have impacted on the nature of the new public administration in the Ministry. As this study only considered the public administration reforms, further study that captures other aspects of Vision 2030, such as the vibrant society and thriving economy pillars is needed.

Chapter Five discovered aspects of men's and women's interactions in the new workplace. These aspects may be better studied and understood from different epistemic angles such as through the application of feminist social theory, which places gender relations at the centre of analysis. It may also benefit the field if a female researcher was part of a future study team, as it was clear from the study that some areas of the Ministry were not yet fully de-segregated, and there were no female respondents in one Ministry. Similarly, Chapter Six studied two services of the Ministry, whereas the ministry provides more than two services to the public; other services could be considered by other researchers.

7.8 Concluding comments

Clearly Saudi Vision 2030 and its associated public administration reforms represent an important initiative from the government of Saudi Arabia. This study offers a glimpse into the complex nature of the historic Vision 2030 and its impact on work and employment in one of its important components, The Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development. This research showed how the Saudis have implemented the public administration reforms, which is a contribution to the field of Public Administration research. It offered detailed information about the Saudi Arabian labour administration system, which is an addition to the field of Labour Administration research.

This study provided important insights into the Vision 2030 reforms and their impact on two important and different areas. De-segregation and integration of women and men in the same workplace represents a historic new movement in the Saudi government workplaces; this thesis has delivered important insights into the interactions of women and men within this new, diverse Saudi public sector setting.

Saudi government workplaces have been known for negative bureaucratic work process and procedures, and this thesis has illustrated the reorganised work processes and procedures and some of the performance management consequences of introducing them. This thesis is, to our knowledge, the first to examine these issues in any depth. Through this examination, the thesis has provided important insights into the organisational culture of a vital public organisation that interact with citizens and other stakeholders in almost all areas of Saudi society.

References

Abadi, M., Dirani K.M. and Rezaei F.D (2022) Women in leadership: a systematic literature review of Middle Eastern women managers' careers from NHRD and Institutional Theory perspectives, *Human Resource Development International*, 25(1), p. 19-39.

Abalkhail, J. M. (2019) Women's Career Development in an Arab Middle Eastern Context. *Human Resource Development International* 22(2) pp. 177–199.

Abdeldayem, M. M. and Al Dulaimi, S. (2022) Public Sector Reform in Emerging Economies: Does Privatisation Matter? *Human Systems Management* 41(4) pp. 73 – 85.

Abdul Rahman, H., Jarrar, M.T. and Omira, O.D., (2014). Leadership styles and performance of public sector organizations: the case of Saudi Arabia. *Journal of Business Management and Accounting*, 4(2014) pp. 55-62.

Achoui, M.M. (2009) Human Resource Development in Gulf Countries: an analysis of the trends and challenges facing Saudi Arabia. *Human Resource Development International*, 12(1), pp. 35-46, DOI: 10.1080/13678860802638826.

Acker, J. (2010). *Doing comparable worth: Gender, class, and pay equity*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Acker, J. (2012). Gendered organizations and intersectionality: Problems and possibilities. *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion an International Journal*, 31(3), 214–224. https://doi.org/10. 1108/02610151211209072

ADAA (2020). *The National Center for Performance Measurement. Saudi Arabia [Online]*. Available at: https://www.adaa.gov.sa/en/About%20Adaa [Last Accessed 21/05/2023].

Adcock, R., Bevir, M. and Stimson, S. (eds.) (2007) *Modern Political Science: Anglo-American Exchanges since 1880*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Agangiba, W. A., & Agangiba, M. A. (2013). E-governance justified. *International Journal of Advanced Computer Science and Applications, 4(2)* pp. 223-225.

Agarwal, P. (2018). *Here is why organizations need to be conscious of unconscious bias*. [Online] Available at: https://www.forbes.com/sites/pragyaag arwaleurope/2018/08/26/here-is-why-organisations-need-to-beconscious-of-unconscious-bias/ [Accessed 01/04/2024]

Ahmad, A. B., Butt, A. S., Chen, D., and Liu, B. (2023). A mediated model of the effect of organizational culture on the intentions to engage in change-supportive behaviors: insights from the theory of planned behavior. *Journal of Management & Organization,* 29(2), 345–365. https://doi.org/10.1017/jmo.2020.41

Akhmetshin, E. M., Romanov, P. Y., Zakieva, R. R., Zhminko, A. E., Aleshko, R. A., and Makarov, A. L. (2019). Modern approaches to innovative project management in entrepreneurship education: A review of methods and applications in education. *Journal of Entrepreneurship Education*, 22, pp.1-15.

Aksom, H and Tymchenko, I (2020) How Institutional Theories explain and fail to explain organisations. In *Journal of Organizational Change Management* 33(7) pp. 1223-1252.

Al-Ahmadi, H. (2011) Challenges facing women leaders in Saudi Arabia, *Human Resource Development International*, 14(2), pp. 149-166, DOI: 10.1080/13678868.2011.558311.

Al-Asfour, A., Tlaiss, H. A., Khan, S. A., and Rajasekar, J. (2017). Saudi women's work challenges and barriers to career advancement. *Career Development International*, *22*(2), 184-199.

Alasmari, S., Williams, S., Rich, N. and Rea, D. (2021) Sustainability of Quality Improvement Initiatives within the Saudi Ministry of Health Hospitals: An Institutional Overview. *Saudi Journal of Health System Research* 1(1) pp. 3–10.

Al-Awaji, I. (1971) *Bureaucracy and Society in Saudi Arabia*. PhD Thesis. Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Repositoire.

Al-bakr, F., Bruce, E. R., Davidson, P. M., Schlaffer, E., and Kropiunigg, U. (2017). Empowered but not Equal: Challenging the Traditional Gender Roles as Seen by

University Students in Saudi Arabia. *FIRE: Forum for International Research in Education*, 4(1) p. 3 http://preserve.lehigh.edu/fire/vol4/iss1/3.

Albihany, N.A., and Aljarodi, A.M. (2024) The role of personal connections Wasta on early-stage entrepreneurial orientations: empirical evidence from Saudi Arabia. *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications* 11(36). https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-023-02486-0

Aldossari, M. and Calvard, T., (2022). The Politics and Ethics of Resistance, Feminism and Gender Equality in Saudi Arabian Organizations. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 181, pp. 873–890

Aldoubi, S.H. (2014). *Road to Leadership: Experiences of Saudi Women in Higher Education.* PhD thesis, Colorado State University. UMI No. 3624247.

Al Fahad, A. (2004) 'The 'Imama vs, the 'Iqal: Hadari Bedouin conflict and the formation of the Saudi State'. In Madawi Al-Rasheed, M. and Vitalis, R. (eds.) *Counter-Narratives: History, Contemporary Society, and Politics in Saudi Arabia and Yemen,* New York: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 35–75.

Alfarran, A. (2016). *Increasing women's labour market participation in Saudi Arabia: the role of government employment policy and multinational corporations*. (Doctoral dissertation, Victoria University). Melbourne, Au: University of Victoria Repositary.

Alfarran, A., Pyke, J., & Stanton, P. (2018). Institutional barriers to women's employment in Saudi Arabia. *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion: An International Journal, 37*(7), 713-727.

Alfalih, A. (2016) *Religion, Culture and Management: A Comparative Study of the Impact of Islam and Saudi Culture on HRM Practices of Indigenous and Foreign Owned and Managed Corporations in Saudi Arabia (Unpublished PhD)* Wolverhampton, UK: University of Wolverhampton University Library Thesis Repositary

Al Ghamdi, S. (1990) *Tribe structure: Saudi Arabia 5th ed*. Alexandria: Al Makteb Publisher.

Alghamedi, A. (2016) *Enhancing employment opportunities in the Saudi Arabian private sector [online]*. Malibu, Fl: Pepperdine University Repository. Available at: *https://digitalcommons.pepperdine.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1751&context=etd* [Accessed 11 June 2023].

Alghamdi, B., Khadawardi, H., Alghamdi, B., Almathami, K., Alshimai, A., Alqahtani, M., Alanazi, H., Alfawaz, F., Alodhaibi, S., & Talukder, M. (2022). Key Performance Indicators for Measuring Sustainable Performance: A Case Study of Implementing Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 Strategy. *Performance Improvement Quarterly*, 34(4), 491–519. https://doi.org/10.1002/piq.21359

Alhammami, N. (2022) *Investigating the Likely Impact of New Public Management on Human Resource Managers and Academic Lecturers in the Saudi Arabian Higher Education Sector. PhD thesis*. Wolverhampton, UK: University of Wolverhampton Repositary.

Alharbi, S., Thursfield, D. and Bright, D. (2016) Culture, Wasta and perceptions of performance appraisal in Saudi Arabia. In *The International Journal of Human Resource Management,* 28(19), pp. 1-19.

Alharbi, S. (2018) Criteria for Performance Appraisal in Saudi Arabia, and Employees Interpretation of These Criteria. *International Journal of Business and Management* 13(9).

Alharbi, M. M. H. (2022) Kingdom Vision 2030 and the Women's Empowerment in Saudi Arabia: An Empirical Investigation. *International Journal of Islamic Thought*, *21* pp. 62-73.

Al Harbi, S., Halikias, G., Yamin, M. *et al.* (2020) An overview of M-government services in Saudi Arabia. *International Journal of Information Technology* 12(1) pp. 237–1241. https://doi.org/10.1007/s41870-020-00433-9

Alhassan, A. and Németh, J. (2023) The non-sexist public space in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, *Planning Practice & Research*, 38(2), pp. 274-291. DOI: 10.1080/02697459.2023.2172098.

Alhawsawi, S. and Jawhar, S.S. (2023) Education, employment, and empowerment among Saudi women, Gender and Education, 35(4), pp, 401-419, DOI: 10.1080/09540253.2023.2189917.

Alhazmi A.A., (2022). Sahwa Has Fallen: How Saudi Academics See the Ramifications of Sex Segregation, Politics, *Religion & Ideology*, 23(3), pp. 349-363, DOI: 10.1080/21567689.2022.2115484.

AlHussainan O, Guo Y, Rammal HG, Tang RW, Golgeci I (2023) Favor reciprocity, innovation and inefficiency: the double-edged sword of business-to-business wasta relations. *Journal of Business and Industrial Marketing* 38(5):1203–1214

Alkhanbshi, A. S. and Al-Khandi, I. G. (2014) The Religious Values and Kob Attitudes among Female Saudi Bank Employees: A Qualitative Study. *Journal of WEI Business and Economics,* **3**(1), pp. 28-35.

Allmark, P., Boote, J., Chambers, E. *et al.* (2009) Ethical issues in the use of in-depth interviews: literature review and discussion. *Research Ethics Review,* 5(2) pp. 48-54.

Allmnakrah, A. and Evers, C. (2020) The need for a fundamental shift in the Saudi education system: Implementing the Saudi Arabian economic Vision 2030 *Research in Education* 106(1) pp. 22–40.

Almathami, R., Khoo-Lattimore, C., and Yang, E. C. L. (2022). Exploring the challenges for women working in the event and festival sector in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. *Tourism Recreation Research*, 47(1), pp. 47-61.

Alotaibi, M. (2014). *Opportunities and barriers to collaboration in addressing unemployment in Saudi Arabia. PhD thesis*, La Verne, CA: University of La Verne Repositary.

Aloudah, N.M (2022) Qualitative research in the Arabic language. When should translations to English occur? A literature review. In *Exploratory Research in Clinical and Social Pharmacy* 6: pp. 100153.

Alreshoodi, S. A., and Andrews, R. (2015). 'Public service motivation in Saudi public sector organisations: Does wasta makes a difference'. In *British Academy*

of Management: 29th Annual Conference of BAM: The Value of Pluralism in Advancing Management Research, Education and Practice. 08-10 September 2015, The University of Portsmouth, England, UK.

Al-Salem, A., and Speece, M. (2017) *Women in Research in Kuwait: A Leadership Agenda.* Kuwait: AUK Repositary.

Alshanbri, N.; Khalfan, M.; Maqsood, T. (2014) Nitaqat program in Saudi Arabia. *International Journal of Innovation, Research and Advances in Engineering 1*, 357–366.

Alshanbri, N., Khalfan, M., Noor, M.A., Dutta, D., Zhang, K. and Maqsood, T. (2015) Employees' turnover, knowledge management and human recourse management: a case of Nitaqat program. *International Journal of Social Science and Humanity* [online]**, 5**(8), pp. 701-706.

Alshareef, S. (2022) Does location matter? Unpacking the dynamic relationship between the spatial context and embeddedness in women's entrepreneurship. *Entrepreneurship and regional development.* 34(3-4), pp. 294–318.

Alsheikh, H.M. (2015) *Current Progress in the Nationalization Programmes in Saudi Arabia*; Jeddah, KSA: European University Institute and Gulf Research Center.

Alsubaie, A., and Jones, K. (2017). An overview of the current state of women's leadership in higher education in Saudi Arabia and a proposal for future research directions. *Administrative Sciences*, 7(4), p. 36.

Alsharari, N. M. (2022). Risk management practices and trade facilitation as influenced by public sector reforms: institutional isomorphism. *Journal of Accounting & Organizational Change,* 18(2), 192–216. https://doi.org/10.1108/JAOC-11-2018-0117

Alyaum, (2015) *Ending the Kafãla: Advantages and Disadvantages* [Online} Available at http://www.alyaum.com/article/3136286 [accessed 9 September 2023].

Amany A. and El Anshay, (2011) 'Oil Windfall Shocks, Government Spending, and the Resource Curse,' *Journal of Applied Business and Economics* 12(4).

Andrews, R. (2014). *Performance Management and Public Service Improvement. Evidence Review Prepared for the Commission on Public Service Governance and Delivery. January 2014 PPIW Report No.3.* Cardiff: PPIW Publication. Available online at: https://www.wcpp.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/PPIW-Performance-management-and-Public-Service-Improvement.pdf

Andrews, T. (2012). What is Social Constructionism? *Grounded Theory Review*, 11(1), pp. 39-46.

Anfara, V. A., & Mertz, N. T. (2015). *Theoretical frameworks in qualitative research (2nd ed.).* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Archer, A. M., and Kam, C. D. (2022). She is the chair (man): Gender, language, and leadership. *The Leadership Quarterly*, *33*(6), p.101610.

Armstrong, M., (2006). *A Handbook of Human Resource Management Practice.* London; Kogan Page.

Ashworth, R., Boyne, G., and Delbridge, R. (2009). Escape from the iron cage? Organizational change and isomorphic pressures in the public sector. *Journal of public administration research and theory*, *19*(1), 165-187.

Askeland, H. (2020). 'Values—reviewing the construct and drawing implications for values work in organisation and leadership'. In Askeland, H., Espedal, G., Jelstad Løvaas, B. & Sirris S. (ed.s) *Understanding values work: Institutional perspectives in organizations and leadership*, London: Palgrave Macmillan pp 15-34.

Asquer, A and Alzahrani, A. (2020). Public services reforms in Neo- Patrimonial systems: the commercialization of healthcare and education in Saudi Arabia, *Public Management Review,* 22(2), pp. 255-277.

Assad, S. (2002). Sociological analysis of the administrative system in Saudi Arabia: In search of a culturally compatible model for reform. *International Journal of Commerce and Management*, 12(3-4), pp. 51-82.

At-Twaijri, M., and Al-Muhaiza, I. (1996) Hofstede's cultural dimensions in the GCC countries: An empirical investigation. *International Journal of Value-Based Management*, **9**, pp. 121-131.

Auzair, S.M. and Langfield-Smith, K. (2005), The effect of service process type, business strategy and life cycle stage on bureaucratic MCS in service organizations, *Management Accounting Research*, Vol. 16 (4), pp. 399-421.

Azhari, A. (2017) The Kafãla 'sponsorship' system in Saudi Arabia: A critical analysis from the perspective of international human rights and Islamic law. *The SOAS Journal of Postgraduate Research*, 10 (2016-17) pp. 61-80.

Babšek, M., Tomaževič, N., & Kovač, P. (2020). Administrative Reforms and the Rule of Law: Case Law Analysis as an Inspiration for the Slovene Reorganisation of Social Work Centres. *Hrvatska i komparativna javna uprava: časopis za teoriju i praksu javne uprave*, 20(4), pp. 595-622.

Badawy, M., Abd El-Aziz, A. A., Idress, A. M., Hefny, H., & Hossam, S. (2016). A survey on exploring key performance indicators. *Future Computing and Informatics Journal*, 1(1-2), pp. 47-52.

Baekgaard, M., Moynihan, D.P. and Thomsen, M.K. (2021) Why Do Policymakers Support Administrative Burdens? The Roles of Deservingness, Political Ideology, and Personal Experience, *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 31(1), pp184–200

Bahout, J. and Cammack, P. (2018) *Arab Political Economy: Pathways for Equitable Growth* [Online] Carnegie Endowment paper, available at https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2018/10/arab-political-economy-pathways-for-equitable-growth?lang=en [Accessed 22/06/2024].

Bailey, D. (2012) Women and Wasta: The Use of Focus Groups for Understanding Social Capital and Middle Eastern Women. In *The Qualitative Report* 17, Article 65, pp. 1-18.

Balcer, J. (2014). *Controlling influence: The development and function of labor law in Saudi Arabia. Doctoral Dissertation*. Talahassee, Fl: Florida State University Dissertation and Thesis Repositary, Paper 9134.

Balogun, M.J. (1983), *Principles of Public Administration*, Ibadan: Malt House.

Baragach, J. (1964) *Orphans of Islam: Family, Abandonment, and Secret Adoption in Marocco,* London, UK: Rowman and Little Field.

Barbieri, M., Micacchi, L., Vidè, F., & Valotti, G. (2023). The Performance of Performance Appraisal Systems: A Theoretical Framework for Public Organizations. *Review of Public Personnel Administration*, 43(1), pp. 104-129.

Basahel, A., and Yamin, M. (2017). Measuring success of e-government of Saudi Arabia. *International Journal of Information Technology*, 9, pp. 287-293.

Baumann, H (2019). The transformation of Saudi Arabia's rentier state and 'the international', *Globalizations*, 16(7), pp. 1165-1183.

Beblawi, H. and Luciani, G. (1987). *The Rentier State.* Abingdon, UK: Routledge.

Beckert, J. (2010). Institutional Isomorphism Revisited: Convergence and Divergence in Institutional Change. *Sociological Theory, 28(2),* pp. 150-166. *https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9558.2010.01369.x*

Beer, M., P. Boselie, and C. Brewster. 2015. Back to the Future: Implications for the Field of HRM of the Multistakeholder Perspective Proposed 30 Years Ago. *Human Resource Management* 54 (3), 427–438. doi:10.1002/hrm.2015.54.issue-3.

Beidas, M. (2009) *Can Adherence To Religious Teachings, Principles, Values, And Traditions Affect HRM Practices? (HRM Practices in Saudi Arabia as a Case Study).* Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Leicester.

Bell, E. Bryman, A. and Harley, E. (2019) *Business Research Methods. (5th ed.).* Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

Bell, E., Bryman, A. and Harley, B. (2022) *Business Research Methods. Sixth edition.* Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

Berger, P. & Luckmann, T. (1991). *The social construction of reality*. London: Penguin Books.

Berrone, P., Fosfuri, A., Gelabert, L., and Gomez-Mejia, L. (2013) Necessity as the mother of 'green' inventions: Institutional pressures and environmental innovations. *Strategic Management Journal*. 34, pp. 891–909.

Bevir, M. (2009). *Key Concepts in Governance*. London: SAGE Publications Ltd.

Bhaskar R. (2008) *A Realist Theory of Science.* New York: Routledge.

Bless, B. (2023) Democratic centralism: The root cause of poor municipal performance in South Africa In *European Conference on Research Methodology for Business and Management Studies* 22(1)

Boon, C., Paauwe, J., Boselie, P., and Den Hartog, D. (2009). Institutional pressures and HRM: developing institutional fit. *Personnel Review, 38*(5), 492-508.

Borghi, V., and Van Berkel, R. (2007). Individualised service provision in an era of activation and new governance. *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy*, 27(9/10), pp. 413-424.

Börner, T., and Verstegen, B. (2013). Change within institutional theory: towards a framework of coping with change. *Journal of Accounting & Organizational Change*, 9(3), 304-321.

Boselie, P., Van Harten J. and Veld, M. (2019): A human resource management review on public management and public administration research: stop right there…before we go any further…, *Public Management Review 23*(4), 483-500.

Bouckaert G., Peters B.G., Verhoest K. (2010) Coordination: What Is It and Why Should We Have It? In: *The Coordination of Public Sector Organizations. Shifting patterns of public management.* Palgrave Macmillan, London.

Bourdieu, P. (2001). *Masculine Domination*. Stanford University Press.

Bourdieu, P., and Passeron, J.C. (1990). *Reproduction in education, society and culture (Vol. 4).* New York: Sage.

Boyne, G.A.. (2010) 'Performance management: Does it work?', In: Boyne, G.A. Brewer G.A. and Walker R.M. (eds), *Public Management Performance: Research Directions, pp. 207-226.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Branine, M., & Pollard, D. (2010). Human resource management with Islamic management principles: A dialectic for a reverse diffusion in management. *Personnel Review*, 39(6), pp. 712-727.

Braun, V., and Clarke, V. (2022). *Thematic Analysis: A practical guide.* London: Sage.

Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2023) Toward good practice in thematic analysis: Avoiding common problems and be(com)ing a *knowing* researcher, *International Journal of Transgender Health*, 24(1), pp. 1-6.

Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia (2024, May 23). *Wahhābī.* [Encyclopedia Britannica]. https://www.britannica.com/topic/Wahhabi

Brown, K., N. Ryan, and R. Parker, (2000). New modes of service delivery in the public sector commercialising government services. *International Journal of Public Sector Management* 13(3), pp. 206–221.

Brown, K. (2007). Human resource management in the public sector, *Public Management Review*, 6(3), pp. 303-30.

Brown, T., Potoski, M., and Van Slyke, D. (2016). Managing complex contracts: A theoretical approach. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, **26**, 294–308.

Bruton, G. D., Ahlstrom, D., and Li, H. L. (2010). Institutional Theory and Entrepreneurship: Where Are We Now and Where Do We Need to Move in the Future? *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice*, 34, pp. 421-440.

Bryman, A., and Bell, E. (2007). *Business Research Methods (2nd ed.).* Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

Bryman, A., and Bell, E. (2015). *Business Research Methods (4th ed.).* Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

Bryman, A. (2016). *Social Research Methods. 5th ed.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Buallay, A., Hamdan, A., and Zureigat, Q. (2017). Corporate governance and firm performance: evidence from Saudi Arabia. *Australasian Accounting, Business and Finance Journal*, 11(1), pp. 78-98.

Budhwar, P., & Mellahi, K. (2007). Introduction: human resource management in the Middle East. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 18(1), pp. 2-10.

Buertow S. (2019) Apophenia, unconscious bias and reflexivity in nursing qualitative research. *International Journal of Nursing Studies* 89, pp. 8-13.

Bunnell, T, Fertig, M & James, C (2016), *Bringing institutionalisation to the fore in educational organisational theory: Analysing International Schools as institutions,* Paper presented at American Educational Research Association Annual Meeting, Washington, USA United States, 8/04/16 - 12/04/16.

Bureau of Experts at the Council of Ministers. (2015). *Law of the Council of Ministers.* Available online from: https://www.boe.gov.sa/ar/Translation/Puplications/Documents/Law%20of%20the%20Council%20of%20Ministers_Ar.pdf [Last accessed 02/06/2023].

Burchill, S, Linklater, A, Donnelly, J, Nardin, T, Paterson, M, Reus-Smit, C, Saramago, A, Haastrup, T, and Sajed, A. (2022), *Theories of International Relations*, London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc.

Burke, C. (2017), Graduate Blues: Considering the Effects of Inverted Symbolic Violence on Underemployed Middle-Class Graduates, *Sociology*, 51(2), pp. 393–409.

Burckhardt, T, (2021) *Linguistic diversity and equality within the public administration: Issues and challenges* Belfast, UK: Ulster University Publication.

Burr, V. (2003). *Social Constructionism (2nd Ed)*. London: Routledge.

Cambridge Online Dictionary (Editors) (2024) *Nepotism* Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press Publication. Available at:

https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/nepotism [Accessed 04/07/2024]

Cameron, E., and Green, M. (2019). *Making sense of change management: A complete guide to the models, tools and techniques of organizational change*. New York: Kogan Page Publishers.

Campbell, J. L. (2004). *Institutional change and globalization*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Cao, L., West, B., Ramesh, B., Mohan, K., and Sarkar, S. (2023). A platform-based approach to ambidexterity for innovation: An empirical investigation in the public sector. *International Journal of Information Management*, *68*, 102570. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijinfomgt.2022.102570

Cappelli, P., and Conyon, M. J. (2018). What Do Performance Appraisals Do? *ILR Review*, 71(1).

Caprar, D.V. and Neville, B.A., 2012. "Norming" and "conforming": Integrating cultural and institutional explanations for sustainability adoption in business. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 110, pp231-245.

Carbone, V. (2019). 'The Sociological Branch of Neo-Institutional Theory'. In Milliot, E. and Nivoix, S. (ed.s) *Economic Transition and International Business: Managing Through Change and Crises in the Global Economy*. New York: Routledge.

Cardona, L., Pardo, M. and Dasi, A. (2020). The institutional isomorphism in the context of organizational changes in higher education institutions. *International Journal of Research in Education and Science (IJRES),* 6(1), pp. 61-73.

Carlson, J.A. (2010). Avoiding Traps in Member Checking. *The Qualitative Report,* 15 (5), 1102-1113.

Casale, G. and Fasani, M., (2012). *International labour standards and guiding principles on labour administration and labour inspection.* Geneva, CH: ILO Publication.

Casale, G and Sivananthiran, A. (2015). *Labour Administration and Labour Inspection in Asian Countries: Strategic Approaches*. Geneva, Ch: ILO Publication.

Casson, M.C., Della Giusta, M. and Kambhampati, U.S., (2010). Formal and informal institutions and development. *World Development*, 38(2), pp.137-141.

Chen H.Y, & Boore, J.R.P. (2009) Translation and back-translation in qualitative nursing research: methodological review. *Journal of Clinical Nursing*. 19, pp. 234-239.

Christensen, T. and Lægreid, P. (2004). Public Administration Research in Norway: Organization theory, institutionalism and empirical studies in a democratic context, *Public Administration*, 82(3), pp.679–690.

Christensen, T. (2012). Organization Theory and Public Administration. In: Peters, BG, & Pierre, J (eds) 2012, *The SAGE Handbook of Public Administration*, SAGE Publications, London.

Christensen, T., & Lægreid, P. (2022). Taking stock: New Public Management (NPM) and post-NPM reforms-trends and challenges. Handbook on the politics of public administration, 38-49

Clemens, B. W., and Douglas, T. J. (2005). Understanding strategic responses to institutional pressures. *Journal of Business Research*, *58*(9), 1205-1213.

Collard, D. (1995). The Mainspring of Institutional Change? *International Journal of the Economics of Business*. 2(3), pp. 497-500.

Collins, C. S., & Stockton, C. M. (2018). The Central Role of Theory in Qualitative Research. I*nternational Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 17(1), pp. 1-10. https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406918797475

Common, R. (2008) Administrative change in the Gulf: modernization in Bahrain and Oman. *International Review of Administrative Sciences* [online]**. 74**(2), pp. 177-193. [Accessed 05 June 2017]. Available at:<**https://journals.sagepub.com/**>.

Cordesman, A. H., (2009) *Saudi Arabia: National Security in a Troubled Region*. Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO.

Coates, A. (2021). The prevalence of philosophical assumptions described in mixed methods research in education. *Journal of Mixed Methods Research*, 15(2), pp. 171-18.

Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design: Choosing among Five Approaches (3rd ed.).* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Creswell, J. W. and Poth, C. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches (4th ed).* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Crystal, J. (1995) *Oil and Politics in the Gulf: Rulers and Merchants in Kuwait and Qatar* New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995.

Cummins, F. (2017) *Building the agile enterprise.* Hong Kong: MK/OMG Press.

Dafaa, R. (2019) Saudi Arabia's 'super wasta' paves a path for big businesses. *Arab News.* October 15, 2019. [Online] Available at: https://www.arabnews.com/node/1569471 [Last Accessed 22/07/2023].

D'Agostino, M., Levine, H., Sabharwal, M., & Johnson-Manning, A. C. (2022). Organizational Practices and Second-Generation Gender Bias: A Qualitative Inquiry into the Career Progression of U.S. State-Level Managers. *American Review of Public Administration*, *52*(5), 335–350. https://doi.org/10.1177/02750740221086605

Data Protection Act (2018). Available at: https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2018/12/contents/enacted [Accessed 01/08/2023].

David, R. J., Tolbert, P. S., & Boghossian, J. (2019). Institutional theory in organization studies. In *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Business and Management* [Online] Available at: https://oxfordre.com/business.

De Bel Air, F. (2018) *Demography, Migration and Labour Market in Saudi Arabia [Online]* Cambridge: Gulf Research Centre Publication. Available at:

https://gulfmigration.grc.net/media/pubs/exno/GLMM_EN_2018_05.pdf [Accessed 04/-7/2024]

De Waal, A. A. (2010). Performance-driven behavior as the key to improved organizational performance. Measuring Business Excellence, 14(1), 79-95

Decramer, C.M., Van derstraeten. A., and Christiaens, J. (2012), The Impact of Institutional Pressures on Employee Performance Management Systems in Higher Education in the Low Countries, *British Journal of Management*, 23(1), pp. 88-103.

Deephouse, D. (1996) Does isomorphism legitimate? *Academy of Management Journal*, 39(4), pp. 1024–1039

Denhardt, R. B. & Denhardt, J. V. (2007) *'I've got rhythm:' the dance routine of leaders. Vol. 64.* Arlington: American Association of School Administrators.

Denzin, N.K, & Lincoln, Y.S (2000) (eds). *Handbook of Qualitative Research 2nd ed.* London: Sage

Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (Eds.) (2011). *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*. Thousand Oaks, Ca: Sage.

Dessler, G. (2013). *Human Resource Management: Global Edition. (*13th ed.). London, UK: Pearson.

DGA (2023) *Innovating Beyond the Horizon* [Online]. Available at: Home | Digital Government Authority (dga.gov.sa) [Accessed 29/08/2023].

Dibben, P. and Wood, G. (2024a). 'Institutional Theory-comparative'. In Hutchings, K., Michailova S. and Wilkinson A. (ed.s) *A Guide to Key Theories for Human Resource Management Research*. Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing.

Dibben, P. and Wood, G. (2024b). 'Institutional Theory-Organisational'. In Hutchings, K., Michailova S. and Wilkinson A. (ed.s) *A Guide to Key Theories for Human Resource Management Research*. Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing, pp113-118.

DiMaggio, P.J. and Powell, W.W. (1983) The Iron Cage Revisited: Institutional Isomorphism and Collective Rationality in Organizational Fields. In *American Sociological Review,* 48(2), pp. 147-160.

Dingwall, J. and Chippindale, N. (2001). Labour Administration in Canada (Ontario). Geneva: ILO.

Dipura, S., & Soediantono, D. (2022). Benefits of Key Performance Indicators (KPI) and Proposed Applications in the Defense Industry: A Literature Review. *International Journal of Social and Management Studies*, *3*(4), pp. 23–33.

Dixon, J., Kouzmin, A. and Korac-Kakabadse, N. (1996). The commercialization of the Australian public service and the accountability of government: A question of boundaries. *International Journal of Public Sector Management,* 9(5/6), pp. 23-36.

Dobusch L., Hock L., Muhr S.L. (2021) The im-/possibility of hybrid inclusion: Disrupting the 'happy inclusion' story with the case of the Greenlandic Police Force. *Organization* 28(2): 311-333.

Doughan, Y. (2017). *Corruption in the Middle East and the Limits of Conventional Approaches*. Hamburg, DR: German Institute of Global and Area Studies (GIGA).

Douglas M. (1982) The effects of modernization on religious change. *Daedelus.* Winter, pp. 1-18.

Dunleavy, P., & Hood, C. (1994). From old public administration to new public management. *Public Money & Management,* 14(3), 9–16.

DuWalte, K.M. and DuWalte, B. (2011) *Participant Observation: A Guide for Fieldworkers (2nd Ed.)* Plymouth, UK: AltaMira Press.

Ebisui, M., Cooney, S. and Fenwick, C. (2017). *Resolving individual labour disputes: A general introduction.* Geneva, CH: ILO.

Edwards, J.R. and Berry, J.W. (2010), The presence of something or the absence of nothing: increasing theoretical precision in management research, *Organizational Research Methods*, 13 (4) pp. 668-689.

Eisenach, E. J. (1994) *The Lost Promise of Progressivism*. Lawrence, Ka: University Press of Kansas Press.

Elkatiri, I. (2016). Saudi Arabia's Labor Market Challenge. *Harvard Business Review*. [Online] Available at: https://hbr.org/2016/07/saudi-arabias-labor-market-challenge [Accessed 01/03/2023].

Ellemers, N, and Rink, F. (2016). 'Diversity in Work Groups. *Intergroup Relations* 11, pp. 49–53.

El-Sofany, H. F., Al-Tourki, T., Al-Howimel, H., and Al-Sadoon, A. (2012). E-Government in Saudi Arabia: Barriers, challenges and its role of development. *International Journal of Computer Applications*, 48(5), pp. 16-22.

Ely, R. J., & Meyerson, D. E. (2000). Theories of gender in organizations: A new approach to organizational analysis and change. Research in Organizational Behavior, 22, 103–151. https://doi. org/10.1016/S0191-3085(00)22004-2

Endot, S. (1995) *The Islamisation Process in Malaysia*, unpublished PhD thesis, University of Bradford.

Esposito, G. (2022) Inclusion and Diversity in Public Administration – Where are we now and how far are we on the path to an inclusive society? [Online] Available at :
https://www.puntoorginternationaljournal.org/index.php/PIJ/article/view/154/107 [Accessed 22/08/2023].

Eum, I. (2019) "New Women for a New Saudi Arabia?" Gendered Analysis of Saudi Vision 2030 and Women's Reform Policies *Asian Women* 35(3), pp. 115-133.

Ewain, S.A., (1999) *Perceptions of employers and job seekers toward obstacles to Saudization of the workforce in the Saudi private sector*. Ph.D. Thesis, The Ohio State University.

Fakeeh, M.S. (2009) *Saudization as a Solution for Unemployment: The Case of Jeddah Western Region. Ph.D. Thesis*, Glasgow, UK: University of Glasgow thesis repository. Available online:

https://ncys.ksu.edu.sa/sites/ncys.ksu.edu.sa/files/emp24_5.PDF (accessed on 10 December 2023).

Fargues, P. and Shah, N.M. (2018) *Migration to the Gulf: Policies in Sending and Receiving Countries*, edited by Fargues, P. and Shah, N.M. Cambridge: Gulf Research Centre Publication.

Fenster, T. (2005) The right to the gendered city: Different formations of belonging in everyday life, *Journal of Gender Studies,* 14(3), pp. 217–231. doi:10.1080/09589230500264109.

Fetterman, D.M. (1998) *Ethnography Step-By-Step* (2nd Ed.), Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Fiedler, F.E. (1978) The contingency model and the dynamics of the leadership process. In L. Berkowitz (Ed.), *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology, Vol. 11* pp. 59-96, New York (NY): Academic Press.

Fullan, M. (2007). *Leading in a culture of change*. John Wiley & Sons.

Frederickson, H., Smith, K., Larimer, C., & Licari, M. (2016). *The Public Administration Theory Primer*. New York: Routledge,

Friedland, R., and Alford, R.R. (1991). Bringing Society Back in: Symbols, Practices, and Institutional Contradiction. In Powell, W.W. and DiMaggio. P.J. (ed.s) *The New Institutionalism in Organizational Analysis, 232-266*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Galbin, A. (2014). An Introduction to Social Constructionism. *Social Research Reports,* 26, pp. 82-92.

Gallie, D. (2005). Work pressure in Europe 1996–2001: Trends and determinants. *British journal of industrial relations,* 43(3), pp. 351-375.

Gardberg, N. A., & Fombrun, C. J. (2006). Corporate citizenship: Creating intangible assets across institutional environments. *Academy of Management Review*, 31(2), 329–346.

Garengo, P., and Sardi, A. (2021). Performance measurement and management in the public sector: state of the art and research opportunities. International Journal of Productivity and Performance Management, 70(7), 1629-1654

Gavris, M. and Heyes, J., (2019). Varieties of labour administration in Europe and the consequences of the Great Recession. *Economic and Industrial Democracy 42*(4), pp. 1282–1304.

Geiger, A., and Kent, L. (2017). *Number of women leaders around the world has grown, but they're still a small group.* Pew Research Center: FactTank.

General Authority for Statistics, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (2016) *Saudi Arabia Labor Market Report.* Riyadh: General Authority for Statistics.

General Authority for Statistics, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. (2020). *The total population number.* Riyadh: General Authority for Statistics.

George, A., Bennett, A., Lynn-Jones, S. and Miller, S., (2005). *Case studies and theory development in the social sciences.* Boston: MIT Press.

Gerring, J., (2007). *Case study research: Principles and practices.* Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Gill, D., Kissova, Z., Lee, J., and Prowse, V. (2019). First-place loving and last-place loathing: How rank in the distribution of performance affects effort provision. *Management Science*, 65(2), 494.

Glaser B., and Holton J. (2004). Remodelling grounded theory. *Qualitative Social Research*, 5(2), 1–29.

Glesne, C. (2011). *Becoming qualitative researchers: An introduction.* Boston, MA: Pearson.

Gooden, S.T. (Ed.). (2020) *Global equity in administration: nervous areas of government.* New York: Routledge.

Goodstein, J.D. (1994) Institutional pressures and strategic responsiveness: employer involvement in work–family issues. *Academy of Management Journal* 37, pp350– 82

Gov.UK (2021) *Language interpreting and translation: migrant health guide*
[online] Available at: https://www.gov.uk/guidance/language-interpretation-migrant-health-guide#:~:text=Where%20language%20is%20a%20problem,accuracy%20and%20impartiality%20of%20interpreting [Accessed 27.09.2023].

Gov.SA, (1992) *Basic Law of Governance, Royal Order No. A/91, 27 Sha'ban 1412H, 1 March 1992*. Available from
http://www.wipo.int/edocs/lexdocs/laws/en/sa/sa016en.pdf [Accessed 27.09.2023].

Gov.SA (2005) *Labour Law, Royal Decree No. M/51, 23 Sha'ban 1426 / 27 September 2005*. Available from
https://laboreducation.mlsd.gov.sa/sites/default/files/2022-01/Labor.pdf [Accessed 01/06/2023].

Gov.SA (2023) *National Unified Portal [Online]* Available at:
https://www.my.gov.sa/wps/portal/snp/main?lang=en [Accessed 16/09/2023].

Grand, S. and Wolff, K. (2020) *Assessing Vision 2030: A 2020 Review*
Washington, DC: Atlantic Council Publication.

Green, F., and McIntosh, S. (2001). The intensification of work in Europe. *Lab. Econ.* 8, pp. 291–308. doi: 10.1016/S0927-5371(01)00027-6

Green, F. (2004). Why has work effort become more intense? *Ind. Relat. J. Econ. Soc.* 43, pp. 709–741. doi: 10.1111/j.0019-8676.2004.00359.x

Greenwood, R. and Hinings, C.R. (1996) Understanding Radical Organisational Change: the Old and the New Institutionalism. *The Academy of Management Review* 21(4), pp. 1022-54.

Gregory, I. (2003). *Ethics in Research.* London: Continuum.

Gruening, G. (2001). Origin and theoretical basis of New Public Management. *International Public Management Journal*, *4*(1), pp.1-25.

Guba, E.G. and Lincoln, Y.S. (1989) *Fourth Generation Evaluation*. London: SAGE Publications.

Guba, E. G., & Lincoln, Y. S. (1994). Competing paradigms in qualitative research. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research (pp. 105– 117).* London, England: Sage.

Gusdorf, M. (2008). *Recruitment and Selection: Hiring the Right Person.* New York, NY: SHRM Academic Initiatives Publication.

Haddad, M 2013, "Women paid 50 percent less than men in private sector", *Arab News*, 8 April [online]. Last viewed 16 November 2023 http://www.arabnews.com/news/447408

Haigh, F., Kemp, L., Bazeley, P. and Haigh, N. (2019) Developing a critical realist informed framework to explain how the human rights and social determinants of health relationship works. *BMC Public Health* 19, p. 1571.

Håkansta, C. (2022) Ambulating, digital and isolated: The case of Swedish labour inspectors. *New Technology, Work and Employment*, 37, pp. 24– 40. https://doi.org/10.1111/ntwe.12211

Hall, P and Taylor, R. (1996). Political Science and the Three New Institutionalisms. *Political Studies.* XLIV, pp. 936-957.

Hammersley, M. (1990). *Reading Ethnographic Research: A Critical Guide.* New York, NY: Longman.

Hamza, S. (2014) *Migrant Labor in the Arabian Gulf.* University of Tennessee Honours Thesis Projects, http://trace.tennessee.edu/utk_chanhonoproj/1710.

Harrison, R. T., Leitch, C.M. and McAdam, M. (2020). Woman's Entrepreneurship as a Gendered Niche: The Implications for Regional Development Policy. *Journal of Economic Geography* 20(4), pp. 1041–1067

Hart, O., Shleifer, A., & Vishny, R. (1997). The proper scope of government: Theory and an application to prisons. *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, **112**, 1127– 1161.

Hastings, T and Heyes, J. (2016). *Comparative developments in labour administration.* Geneva, CH: International Labour Organisation Working Paper.

Heath, G. (2019). *Performance Management and Rationality in Public Sector Organisations.* Luleå, SE: University of Technology Licentiate dissertation.

Heinrich, C. (2012). Measuring Public Sector Performance and effectiveness. In: Peters, B and Pierre, J (eds). *The SAGE Handbook of Public Administration*. London, UK: SAGE Publications.

Heyes, J. (2001). *Labour administration in the United Kingdom*. Geneva, CH: ILO Publication.

Heyes, J . (2013). Labour policy and administration in a time of crisis. In: Heyes, J and Rychly, L (ed.), *Labour Administration in Uncertain Times, Policy, Practice and Institution*, *pp. 46-65,* London, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing.

Heyes, J and Rychly, L (ed.), (2013) Labour Administration in Uncertain Times, Policy, Practice and Institution, pp. 46-65, London, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing.

Hillard, A. L. (2018). 'Modern gender roles and stereotypes: The cultural funnelling of individuals toward gendered choices'. In Nadler, J.T. and Lowery, M. *The War on Women in the United States. Beliefs, Tactics and the Best Defenses*. Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 36-56.

Hirsch, P. M., & Lounsbury, M. (1997). Ending the Family Quarrel: Toward a Reconciliation of "Old" and "New" Institutionalisms. *American Behavioral Scientist,* 40(4), pp. 406-418.

Hood, C. (1991). A Public Management for All Seasons? *Public Administration 69* (1): 3–19.

Hood, C. (1995). Contemporary public management: a new global paradigm? *Public Policy and Administration 10* (2): 104–117.

Hood, C., Rothstein, H. and Baldwin, R. (2001) *The Government of Risk*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Hooker, J. (2023) *A Cross-Cultural View of Corruption* Pittsburgh, PA: Carnegie Mellon University Publication. Available at:
https://johnhooker.tepper.cmu.edu/corruption.pdf [Accessed 22/02/2024]

HRSD (2022) *Labour Law, Royal Decree No. M/51, 23 Sha'ban 1426 / 27 September 2005.* Available from Labor Law | Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development (hrsd.gov.sa) [Last accessed 22/09/2023].

HRSD (2023a) *The Human Resources and Social Development Portal* [Online]. Available at: https://www.hrsd.gov.sa/en [Accessed 01/09/2023].

HRSD (2023b) *Basic Law of Governance, Royal Order No. A/91, 27 Sha'ban 1412H, 1 March 1992*. Available from http://www.wipo.int/edocs/lexdocs/laws/en/sa/sa016en.pdf [Accessed 01/09/2023].

Horowitz, J. and Igielink, R. (2020). *A Century After Women Gained the Right To Vote, Majority of Americans See Work To Do on Gender Equality.* [Online] Pew Research Center, July 7, 2020. Available at A Century After Women Gained the Right To Vote, Majority of Americans See Work To Do on Gender Equality | Pew Research Center [last Accessed 22/07/2023].

Huque, A.S. (2001) Governance and Public Management: The South Asian Context, *International Journal of Public Administration*, 24:12, pp. 1289-1297. DOI: 10.1081/PAD-100105940.

Hutchings, K., and Weir, D. (2006). Understanding networking in China and the Arab world: Lessons for international managers. *Journal of European Industrial Training,* 30, pp. 272–290.

Hutchings, K., Michailova, S., & Wilkinson, A. (Eds.), (2024). *A Guide to Key Theories for Human Resource Management Research.* Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing.

Hyndman, N., and McGeough, F. (2008). NPM and performance measurement: a comparative study of the public sectors in Ireland and the UK. *Irish Accounting Review, 15*(2) pp 5-46.

l-Bakr, F., Bruce, E. R., Davidson, P. M., Schlaffer, E., and Kropiunigg, U. (2017). Empowered but Not Equal: Challenging the Traditional Gender Roles as Seen by University Students in Saudi Arabia. In *FIRE: Forum for International Research in Education* 4(1), pp. 52-66.

Ibrahim, A. (2022) *What is Sahwa, the Awakening Movement under pressure in Saudi?* [Online]. Available at www.aljazeera.com/features/2019/6/5 [last accessed 19/07/2023]

Ibrahim, A. H. H., Satispi, E., Andriansyah, A., Szczepanska-Woszczyna, K., and Kot, S. (2023). New Public Management rhetoric in developing country: will agencification and management control lead to organisational culture transformation? *Administratie Si Management Public*, *41*, 73–90 [https://doi.org/10.24818/amp/2023.41-04].

Ibrahimkhan, M.W, (2007). *Income as a possible factor in the employment of Saudis in private and public-sector organizations: A human capital theory approach.* Ph.D. Thesis Malibu, FI: Pepperdine University Publication.

Idris, A. (2007), Cultural Barriers to Improved Organisational Performance in Saudi Arabia *SAM Advanced Management Journal,* 72, 2, pp. 36-53.

IMF (2023) *Saudi Arabia's Economy Grows as it Diversifies.* Available at: Saudi Arabia's Economy Grows as it Diversifies (imf.org) [Last Accessed 17/03/2024]

Ingraham, P. (2012). Human Resources Management. In: Peters, BG, & Pierre, J (ed.s) *The SAGE Handbook of Public Administration*. London, UK: SAGE Publications.

INSEAD, (2023) *Women Leaders programme [Online]* Available at: Women Leaders Programme | INSEAD Accessed 02/09/2023].

International Labour Organisation (2010*). C150 - Labour Administration Convention, 1978 (No. 150). Convention concerning Labour Administration: Role, Functions and Organisation*. Geneva, CH: International Labour Organization.

International Labour Organisation (2012) *Global unemployment trends 2012*. Geneva: ILO

International Labour Organisation (2013). *Saudi Arabia Labour Inspection Audit.* Geneva: International Labour Organisation Publication.

International Labour Organisation (2014). *Labour Inspection in Arab States: Progress and Challenges. ILO Regional Office for Arab States*. Beirut: ILO, 2014.

International Labour Organisation (2018). *Saudi Arabia - Country baselines under the ILO Declaration (2000-2017).* Geneva, CH: International Labour Organization.

International Labour Organisation (2019). *Regulatory Framework Governing Migrant Workers.* Geneva, CH: International Labour Organization.

International Labour Organisation (2024a) *General Surveys Home* [Online] Available at: https://libguides.ilo.org/general_surveys/home [Accessed 25th June 2024]

International Labour Organisation (2024b) *Labour administration in a changing world of work [electronic resource] : Labour Administration Convention, 1978 (No. 150) and Labour Administration Recommendation, 1978 (No. 158) / International Labour Conference, 112th Session, 2024,* Geneva, CH: International Labour Office. Available at https://labordoc.ilo.org/discovery/delivery/41ILO_INST:41ILO_V2/1212399621000 2676 [Accessed 25th June 2026]

Irani, E. (2019) The Use of Videoconferencing for Qualitative Interviewing: Opportunities, Challenges, and Considerations. *Clinical Nursing Research.* 28(1):3-8. doi:10.1177/1054773818803170

Jabbra, J. and Jabbra, N. (2005) 'Administrative Culture in the Middle East' in O. P. Dwivedi (ed.) *Administrative Culture in a Global Context.* Whitby, ON: de Sitter, pp135-153.

Jaccard, J., & Jacoby, J. (2010). *Theory Construction and Model-Building Skills: A Practical Guide for Social Scientists.* New York: Guilford Publications.

James, P. (2005)*Globalism, Nationalism, Tribalism: bringing the theory back i*n London: Sage Publications.

Javad, A. and Ameen, F. (2024) *What is Saudization? A guide to Saudization and Nitaqat program [Online]* Available at: https://www.qureos.com/hiring-guide/guide-to-saudization-nitaqat-program

Jiffry, F., (2013) Gender-segregation partitions draw mixed reaction. In *Arab News*, *2 February*, [online] http://www.arabnews.com/gender-segregation-partitionsdraw-mixed-reaction. [Last accessed 9 April 2023].

Johannesson, P., Perjons, E. (2014). Research Strategies and Methods. In: *An Introduction to Design Science.* Cham: Springer

Judson, A. (1991). *Changing behaviour in organizations: Minimizing resistance to change.* Cambridge, MA: Basil Blackwell.

Kalliny, M., Cruthirds, K. and Minor, M. (2006) Differences between American, Egyptian and Lebanese humour styles: Implications for international management. *International Journal of Cross Cultural Management*, **6** (1), pp. 121-134.

Kant, C. (2016). *The Evolving Role of the CFO: An institutional conception of professional roles and identities*. Linnaeus University Dissertation Repository. Available at: https://lnu.diva-portal.org/smash/record.jsf?pid=diva2%3A933236&dswid=375

Kattan, M. M., de Pahlos Heredero, C., Botella, J.L. & Margalina, V.M. (2016). Factors of Successful Women Leadership in Saudi Arabia. *Asian Social Science* 12 (5), pp. 94–107. doi:10.5539/ass.v12n5p94.

Katsamunska, P., (2012). Classical and modern approaches to public administration. *Economic Alternatives*, 1, pp.74-81.

Kaufmann, D., Kraay, A., & Zoido-Lobaton, P. (2000). Governance matters. *Finance Development*, *37*(2), p. 10.

Kaufmann, W., Hooghiemstra, R., & Feeney, M. K. (2018). Formal institutions, informal institutions, and red tape: A comparative study. *Public Administration*, *96*(2), 386-403.

Kavanagh, M. H., and Ashkanasy, N. M. (2006). The impact of leadership and change management strategy on organizational culture and individual acceptance of change during a merger. *British journal of management*, *17*(S1), S81-S103.

Kavanagh, M. H., and Ashkanasy, N. M. (2006). The impact of leadership and change management strategy on organizational culture and individual acceptance of change during a merger. *British Journal of Management*, 17(S1), S81-S103.

Kim, S., Kim, H. J., and Lee, H. (2009). An institutional analysis of an e-government system for anti-corruption: The case of OPEN. *Government Information Quarterly,* 26(1), pp. 42-50.

Kinninmont, J. (2017). *Vision 2030 and Saudi Arabia's Social Contract Austerity and Transformation.* London, UK: Chatham House for the Royal Institute of International Affairs Publication.

King, N. (2012). Doing template analysis. In G.Symon and C.Cassell (Eds.), *Qualitative Organizational Research*, London: Sage.

Klein, N., Ramos, T.B., and Deutz, P. (2021). Factors and strategies for circularity implementation in the public sector: An organisational change management approach for sustainability. *Corporate Social Responsibility and Environmental Management*, *29*(3), 509-523. https://doi.org/10.1002/csr.2215

Klindt, M.P., Baadsgaard, K., and Jørgensen, H. (2023). Boundary spanning and partnership performance: bringing the structural perspective into the game. *Public Management Review*, 1-26. https://doi.org/10.1080/14719037.2023.2197914

Korczynski, M., Hodson, R and Edwards, P.K., (2006). *Social theory at work,* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Kraatz, M. S., and Block, E. S. (2008). Organizational implications of institutional pluralism. In Greenwood, R., Oliver, C., Suddaby, R. and Sahlin, K. The Sage Handbook of Organizational Institutionalism, 243-275, Thousand Oaks, Ca: Sage.

Král, P., and Králová, V., (2016) Approaches to changing organizational structure: The effect of drivers and communication, *Journal of Business Research*, http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2016.04.099

Kropf, A., & Newbury-Smith, T. C. (2016). Wasta as a form of social capital? An institutional perspective. In *The political economy of Wasta: Use and abuse of social capital networking* (pp. 3-21). Cham: Springer International Publishing.

Kubicek, B., Korunka, C., Paškvan, M., Prem, R., and Gerdenitsch, C. (2014). "Changing working conditions at the onset of the twenty-first century: facts from international datasets," in Korunka, C. and Hoonakker, P. (eds)*The Impact of ICT on Quality of Working Life*, (Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands), pp. 25–41. doi: 10.1007/978-94-017-8854-0_3

Kuhn, T, (1962). *The structure of scientific revolutions* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Laffin, M. (2019). Explaining reforms: post-New Public Management myths or political realities? Social housing delivery in England and France. *International Review of Administrative Sciences*, *85*(1), 45-61.

Lane, J.E. (2002). *New public management: an introduction.* New York: Routledge.

Lapuente V, Van de Walle S. (2020) The effects of new public management on the quality of public services. *Governance* 33: 461–475. https://doi.org/10.1111/gove.12502

Latta, G. F. (2009). A process model of organizational change in cultural context (OC3 Model) The impact of organizational culture on leading change. *Journal of Leadership & Organizational Studies*, *16*(1), 19-37.

Lavee, E. and Guy Itzchakov, G. (2021) Good listening: a key element in establishing quality in qualitative research. *Qualitative Research* 23(3), pp. 614-631

Lawrence, T. B.; Suddaby, R. (2006). Institutions and Institutional work. In Clegg, S; Hardy, C; Lawrence, T (eds.). *Handbook of Organization Studies (2ⁿᵈ ed.) pp.215–254.* London: Sage.

Lederan, O.C., Curşeu, P., Vermeulen, P. A., and Geurts, J. L. (2011). Cognitive representations of institutional change: Similarities and dissimilarities in the cognitive schema of entrepreneurs. *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, *24*(1), 9-28.

Lee, E. W. Y. (1995). Political science, public administration, and the rise of the American administrative state. *Public Administration Review*, pp. 538-546.

Li, X., and Ding, Y. (2020). Holistic Governance for Sustainable Public Services: Reshaping Government-Enterprise Relationships in China's Digital Government Context. *International journal of environmental research and public health*, *17*(5), 1778.

Lincoln, Y. S., and Guba, E. G. (2000). Paradigmatic controversies, contradictions, and emerging confluences. In N. K. Denzin, & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The Handbook of Qualitative Research (2nd ed., pp. 1065-1122)*, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Lindberg, S. I. (2003) It's our time to "chop": Do elections in Africa feed neo-patrimonialism rather than counter-act it? *Democratization*, 10(2), pp. 121-140.

Lonti, Z. & Gregory, R. (2007) Accountability or Countability? Performance Measurement in the New Zealand Public Service, 1992-2002. *Australian Journal of Public Administration*. [Online] 66(4), pp. 468–484.

Looney, R. (2004). Development Strategies for Saudi Arabia: Escaping the rentier state syndrome. *Strategic Insights*, 3(3), p. 45 Available at http://www.ccc.nps.navy.mil/si/2004/mar/looneyMar04.asp [Last Accessed 01/06/2023].

Loue, S. (2004). *Textbook of Research Ethics*. New York: Kluwer Academic.

Ma, B. (2008) Innovation in government management based on the New Public Management. In Journal of Policy Research & Exploration, 2008(04), p4.

Mabey, C. & Graeme, S. (1997). 'Strategic Human Resource Management: For Change, Development & Performance'. New Delhi: Beacon Books. Cited in Rajasekar, J and Khan, S. (2013). Training and Development Function in Omani Public Sector Organizations: A Critical Evaluation. *Journal of Applied Business and Economics* 14(2), pp. 37-52.

Maesschalck, J. (2004). The impact of new public management reforms on public servants' ethics: Towards a theory. *Public Administration*, 82(2), pp. 465-489.

Magaldi, D., Berler, M. (2020). Semi-structured Interviews. In: Zeigler-Hill, V., Shackelford, T.K. (eds) *Encyclopedia of Personality and Individual Differences*. Cham: Springer.

Mahmood, H., Alkhateeb, T.T.Y. & Furqan, M. (2020) Oil sector and CO_2 emissions in Saudi Arabia: asymmetry analysis. *Palgrave Communications* **6**, 88.

Mahoney, J. and Thelen, K. 2009. *Explaining institutional change: ambiguity, agency, and power*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Maisel, S. (2014). The new rise of tribalism in Saudi Arabia. *Nomadic Peoples*, *18*(2), pp. 100–122.

March, J.G. (1997). Administrative Practice, Organization Theory, and Political Philosophy: Ruminations on the Reflections of John M. Gaus, *PS: Political Science and Politics*, 30(4), pp. 689–98.

Maneva, R.I., Kravets, O.J., Keneshbayev, B., & Zhaxybayeva, A. (2017). Building the adaptive project groups in the vertically integrated industries within the quality management system. *Quality-Access to Success*, 18(160), 79-82.

Marquette, H., & Peiffer, C. (2018). Grappling with the "real politics" of systemic corruption: theoretical debates versus 'real world' functions . *Governance*, 31(3), pp. 499-514

Marquis, C., Glynn, M. A., & Davis, G. F. (2007). Community isomorphism and corporate social action. *Academy of Management Review*, 32(3), 925–945.

Marquis, C. and Tilcsik, A. (2016) Institutional Equivalence: How Industry and Community Peers Influence Corporate Philanthropy. In *Organization Science* 27(5), pp. 1325–1341.

Mason, J. (2002) *Qualitative researching,* 2nd ed. London: Sage.

Mason, M, (2010). Sample size and saturation in PhD studies using qualitative interviews. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 11(3).

Maxwell, J.A., (2012). *Qualitative research design: An interactive approach (Vol. 41).* Thousand Oaks, Ca: Sage publications.

McCandless, S., Bishu, S. G., Gomez Hernandez, M., Paredes Eraso, E., Sabharwal, M., Santis, E. L., and Yates, S. (2022). A long road: Patterns and prospects for social equity, diversity, and inclusion in public administration. *Public Administration*, *100*(1), pp. 129-148.

McGhee, G., Marland, G., & Atkinson, J. (2007) Grounded theory research: literature reviewing and reflexivity, *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 60(3), pp. 334-342.

McGregor, S. L., and Hamdan Alghamdi, A. K., (2022). Women's role in nation building: socialising Saudi female preservice teachers into leadership roles. *School Leadership & Management*, 42(5), pp. 520-542.

Meijer, R., (2010). Reform in Saudi Arabia: The gender-segregation debate. *Middle East Policy*, 17(4), pp. 80-100.

Meirison, M., Rahmi, R. and Susilawati, S., (2023). The Kafãla system as one of the first instruments of slavery and ignorance in Islamic views. *Jurisdictie: Jurnal Hukum dan Syariah*, *14*(1), pp. 55-74.

Mellahi, K. and Wood, G. (2001). Human Resource Management in Saudi Arabia. In Budhwar, P. S. and Debrah, Y. A. (Ed.s*) Human Resource Management in Developing Countries pp. 135–52.* London: Routledge.

Merriam, S. B. (2009). *Qualitative research: A Guide to design and implementation.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

MHRSD, (2020). *The Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development, Saudi Arabia, Website.* Available from: https://mlsd.gov.sa/en/page/ministry [Last accessed 06/06/2023].

Min, B., An, S., Ki, N. (2024). Understanding the dynamics of Civil Society Organization responses in the cross-sector collaboration process with a government partner: A typology from a grounded theory approach. *Nonprofit Management and Leadership*, 1–28.

Ministry of Economy and Planning, (2010) *Ninth development plan (2010-2014)*, Available at: http://www.mep.gov.sa/index.jsp?event=SwitchLanguage&Code=AR [Last accessed 11 February, 2021).

MISK (2023) *2030 Leaders: Uncommon leaders, One common goal* Riyadh, KSA: Mohammed bin Salman Foundation publication [Online] Available at https://misk.org.sa/leaders2030/ [Accessed 02/10/2030].

Mizruchi, M. S., and L. C. Fein. 1999. The social construction of organizational knowledge: A study of the uses of coercive, mimetic, and normative isomorphism. *Administrative Science Quarterly* 44:653–83.

Mohamed, A and Mahamad, M. (2011). The effect of wasta on perceived competence and morality in Egypt. *Cross Cultural Management: An International Journal.* 18, pp. 412-425.

Moradi, E., Mohammadbagher S. Jafari, Z, Doorbash, M. and Mirzaei, A. (2021) Impact of organizational inertia on business model innovation, open innovation and corporate performance, *Asia Pacific Management Review,* 26, (4) pp*71-179*

Morgan, G., Campbell, J.L., Crouch, C., Pedersen, O.K., and Whitley, R. (2010). (Ed.s). *The Oxford Handbook of Comparative Institutional Analysis*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

Morse, J. (1999) Editorial: Qualitative Generalisability. In *Qualitative Health Research*, 9(1), pp. 5-6

Moshashai, D, Leber, A, Savage, J. (2020). Saudi Arabia plans for its economic future: Vision 2030, the National Transformation Plan and Saudi Fiscal Reform, *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 47(3) 381-401.

Mulligan, J. R., & Bull Schaefer, R. A. (2011). A New Hope for Rank and Yank. *Journal of Leadership & Organizational Studies*, 18(3), pp. 385-396.

Murtaza, G., Abbas, M., Raja, U., Roques, O., Khalid, A. and Mushtaq, R. (2014) Impact of Islamic Work Ethics on Organizational Citizenship Behaviors and Knowledge-Sharing Behaviors. *Journal of Business Ethics* [online]**, 133**(2), pp. 325-333 [Accessed 24 August 2023]. Available at:<https://link.springer.com/>.

Nadrah, R., Gambour, Y., Kurdi, R., & Almansouri, R. (2021). E-government service in Saudi Arabia. *PalArch's Journal of Archaeology of Egypt/Egyptology*, 18(16), pp. 21-29.

Naseem, S., & Dhruva, K. (2017). Issues and challenges of Saudi female labor force and the role of Vision 2030. *International Journal of Economics and Financial Issues*, *7*(4), pp. 23-27.

North, D. (1990). *Institutions, Institutional Change and Economic Performance*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

OECD, (1997). Public service training systems in OECD countries*. SIGMA Papers, No.16.* Available at: http://www.sigmaweb.org/dataoecd/52/39/1819020.pdf [Accessed 01.12.2023].

OHCHR (2023) Gender Stereotyping [Online]. Available at https://www.ohchr.org/en/women/gender-stereotyping [Accessed 03/04/2024]

Oliffe, J. L., Kelly, M. T., Gonzalez Montaner, G., & Yu Ko, W. F. (2021). Zoom Interviews: Benefits and Concessions. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 20. https://doi.org/10.1177/16094069211053522.

Oliver C. (1991) Strategic responses to institutional processes. *Academy of Management Review* 6:145– 79.

O'Neil, D., & Hopkins, M. (2015). The impact of gendered organizational systems on women's career advancement. *Frontiers in Psychology,* 6, 905. http://dx.doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2015. 00905

Palthe, J. (2014). Regulative, normative, and cognitive elements of organizations: Implications for managing change. *Management and Organizational Studies*, 1(2), 59-66.

Páramo, P., and Vega, M. L. (2017). New forms of work and labour inspection: The new compliance challenges. *IUSLabor 2, 2017.* [Online] Available at https://core.ac.uk/reader/155003520 [Last Accessed 22/07/2023].

Parmenter, D. (2012). *Key performance indicators for government and non-profit agencies: Implementing winning KPIs.* New York: John Wiley & Sons.

Parveen, R. (2021). Corporate Governance in Saudi Arabia: Analysis of current practices. *Journal of Legal Ethical & Regulatory Issues*, *Special Edition 2021* (24) 1.

Parveen, M. (2022), Women empowerment: New paradigm shift of Saudi women into labor workforce, *Society and Business Review*, 17(1), pp. 66-91. https://doi.org/10.1108/SBR-10-2020-0123

Peck, J.R. (2017) Can Hiring Quotas Work? The Effect of the Nitaqat Program on the Saudi Private Sector. *American Economic Journal. Economic Policy* 9(2), pp. 316-347.

Peretz, H., & Fried, Y. (2012). National cultures, performance appraisal practices, and organizational absenteeism and turnover: A study across 21 countries. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 97(2), p. 448.

Perry, J.L., & Christensen, R.K. (2015). *Handbook of Public Administration*. New York, NY: John Wiley & Sons.

Peters, B.G. & Pierre, J., (2012). *The SAGE Handbook of Public Administration.* Thousand Oaks, CA; Sage.

Pillay, S., & Kluvers, R. (2014). An institutional theory perspective on corruption: The case of a developing democracy. *Financial Accountability & Management*, *30*(1), 95-119.

Piotrowski, S. J., Rosenbloom, D. H., Kang, S., and Ingrams, A. (2018). Levels of value integration in federal agencies' mission and value statements: Is open government a performance target of U.S. federal agencies? Public Administration Review, 78(5), 705–716. https://doi.org /10.1111/puar.12937

Piotrowski, S. J., Berliner, D., and Ingrams, A. (2022). The power of partnership in open government : reconsidering multistakeholder governance reform (1st ed.). The MIT Press.

Pollitt, C. (2003). Public Management Reform: Reliable Knowledge and International Experience*. OECD Journal on Budgeting,* 3(3), p. 19.

Pollitt, C. (2007). The new public management: an overview of its current status. *Administration and Public Management Review*, 8, pp.110-115.

Popa, B.M., (2015). Challenges When Developing Performance Indicators. *Journal of Defense Resources Management*, 6(1), 111–114.

Pratschke, J., & Morlicchio, E. (2012). Social Polarisation, the Labour Market and Economic Restructuring in Europe: An Urban Perspective. *Urban Studies*, 49(9), pp. 1891-1907. https://doi.org/10.1177/0042098012444885

Prawatt, R.S. (1992) Teachers' beliefs about teaching and learning: A constructivist perspective *American Journal of Education,* 100(3) pp. 354-395.

Priya, A. (2021). Case Study Methodology of Qualitative Research: Key Attributes and Navigating the Conundrums in Its Application. *Sociological Bulletin*, 70(1), 94–110.

Rahman, K., (2020). An overview of corruption and anti-corruption in Saudi Arabia. *Transparency International* [Online]. Available at: https://knowledgehub.transparency.org/assets/uploads/helpdesk/Country-profile-Saudi-Arabia-2020__PR.pdf [Last Accessed 22/07/2023].

Rajasekar, J and Khan, S. (2013). Training and Development Function in Omani Public Sector Organizations: A Critical Evaluation. *Journal of Applied Business and Economics* vol. 14(2), pp. 37-52.

Ramady, M. (2013). Gulf unemployment and government policies: prospects for the Saudi labour quota or Nitaqat system*, International Journal of Economics and Business Research*, 5(4), pp.476-498.

Rana, T., Ahmed, Z. U., Narayan, A., & Zheng, M. (2022). An institutional theory perspective on public sector reform and service performance reporting by New Zealand universities. *Journal of Accounting & Organizational Change*, *18*(3), 461–484. https://doi.org/10.1108/JAOC-08-2020-0112

Ransome, P., (2010). *Social Theory for Beginners*, Bristol, UK: Policy Press.

Ravitch, S. M., & Carl, N. M. (2016). *Qualitative research: Bridging* the conceptual, theoretical, and methodological. Los Angeles, CA: Sage.

Read, B. L. (2018) Serial Interviews: Why and when to talk to someone more than once. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 17 pp. 1-10.

Reed, M. (2016) *Saudi Vision 2030: Winners and Losers.* [Online]. Available at https://carnegieendowment.org/sada/64227 [Accessed 22/06/2022].

Rees, J., Taylor, R., and Damm, C. (2022). *Opening the black box: Organisational adaptation and resistance to institutional isomorphism in a prime-led employment services programme.*[online] https://doi.org/10.1177/09520767221118490

Ribas, C. H., and Bermudez, J. (2022). Risk-based regulation for all: The need and a method for a wide adoption solution for data-driven inspection targeting. [Pre-print] Available online at https://arxiv.org/ftp/arxiv/papers/2204/2204.03583.pdf [last Accessed 22/07/2023]

Richards, L. and Morse, J.M. (2007) *Readme First for a User's Guide to Qualitative Methods.* Thousand Oaks, Ca: Sage Publications

Robinson O.C. (2014) Sampling in Interview-Based Qualitative Research: A Theoretical and Practical Guide, *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 11:1, pp. 25-41, DOI: 10.1080/14780887.2013.801543.

Robson, C. and McCartan, K. (2016) *Real World Research* (5th Ed.) London: Wiley.

Rogers, R. (2018). Coding and Writing Analytic Memos on Qualitative Data: A Review of Johnny Saldaña's The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers. *The Qualitative Report*, 23(4), pp. 889-892.

Roller, M.R. and Laverack, P.J. (2015) *Applied Qualitative Research Design. A Total Quality Framework Approach*. New York: Guilford Press.

Rubin, H.J. and Rubin, I.S. (1995) *Qualitative Interviewing: The Art of Hearing Data. 2nd Edition*, London: Sage Publications.

Rychly, L. (2013). *Ministries of Labour: Comparative Overview – Database, Organograms, ILO Action.* Geneva: ILO.

Sabry, M. I. (2015). Good governance, institutions and performance of public private partnerships. *International Journal of Public Sector Management,* 28(7), pp. 566-582*.*

Sahay, U., and Kaur, G. (2021). A Systematic Review Of The Impact Of Performance Appraisal Systems And Competency Management Framework On The Performance of Employees In The Telecom Sector. *Psychology and Education*, *58*(1), 2515-2531.

Sahi, T. and Bhogaita, C. (2019) *Market Insights and Strategy* [Online] Available at: https://www.bankfab.com/-/media/fabgroup/home/cib/market-insights/daily-morning-news/daily-morning-news-pdfs/2019/aug/01-08-2019.pdf?view=1 [Last accessed 26/08/2023].

Sakib, N.H. (2020). Institutional Isomorphism. In: Farazmand, A. (eds) *Global Encyclopedia of Public Administration, Public Policy, and Governance.* Cham: Springer.

Saldaña, J. M. (2015). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers (3rd ed.).* London, UK: SAGE Publications.

Saldaña, J., and Omasta, M. (2018). *Qualitative Research: Analyzing Life*. Los Angeles: Sage.

Salvini, S. (2014). Gender Discrimination. In: Michalos, A.C. (ed.) *Encyclopedia of Quality of Life and Well-Being Research*. Dordrecht: Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-007-0753-5_1126

Salzman, P.C. (2008). The Middle East's Tribal DNA. *The Middle East Quarterly* **15**(1), pp. 23–33.

Samuelson, P. and Nordhaus, W. (2010) *Economics*, 19th ed. New York: McGraw-Hill Education.

Saudi General Authority of Statistics (2020). *Labor market statistics Q3 2020*. Available from:

https://www.stats.gov.sa/sites/default/files/LM_Q3%202020%20%28Press%20release_EN%20%29.pdf [Accessed 22/07/2022].

Saudi General Authority of Statistics (2023). *Labor market statistics Q3 2024.* Available from: 2023 | General Authority for Statistics (stats.gov.sa) [Accessed 23/10/2023].

Saunders, M., Lewis, P. & Thornhill, A., (2016). *Research Methods for Business Students 7th ed.*, Harlow: Pearson Education.

Saunders, M.N.K., Lewis, P. and Thornhill, A. (2019) *Research Methods for Business Students. 8th Ed.*, new York (NY): Pearson.

Savin-Baden, M. and Howell Major, C. (2013). *Qualitative Research: The essential guide to theory and practice*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Schell, C. (1992). *Value of the Case Study as a Research Strategy*, Manchester, UK: Manchester Business School Publication.

Schuler, R. and Jackson, S. (1987). Linking competitive strategies with human resource management practices. *Academy of Management Executive*.1(3), pp. 207-219.

Schreiber, L.M. and Valle, B.E. (2013) Social constructivist teaching strategies in the small group classroom. *Small Group Research, 44*(4), pp. 395–411.

Scott, W. R. (2008). *Institutions and Organizations: Ideas and Interests*. Thousand Oaks, Ca: Sage.

Scott, W.R. (2013) *Institutions and Organisations* Stanford, Ca: Stanford University Press.

Scott W. R. (2014) *Institutions and organisations: Ideas, Interests and Identities.* London, UK: Sage.

Seale, C. (2004). Social Research Methods: A Reader. Creativity. London: Routledge.

Selvaraj, P., Ghosh, S. K., & Jagannathan, S. (2016). Downside of Performance Appraisals & the Potential for Deviant Behaviors. *Indian Journal of Industrial Relations,* 52(1), pp. 117–128.

Selznick, P. (1948) Foundations of Theory of Organisation *American Sociological Review* 13(1), pp. 25-35.

Setiawan, I. & Purba, H. H. (2020). A Systematic Literature Review of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) *Implementation. Journal of Industrial Engineering & Management Research*, 1(3), pp. 200-208. https://doi.org/10.7777/jiemar.v1i3.79

Sfakianakis, J 2011, New employment rules to shake up Saudi Arabia's private sector, *Arab News, 15 June 2011 [Online]* Available at: http://www.zawya.com/story.cfm/sidZAWYA20110615032135/Impact_On_Private_Sector [last accessed 31 August 2021].

Shadnam, M., & Lawrence, T. B. (2011). Understanding widespread misconduct in organizations: An institutional theory of moral collapse. *Business Ethics Quarterly*, *21*(3), 379-407.

Shi, (2023). The Reform of Human Resource System in the Public Sector under the New Public Management System. *SHS Web of Conferences*, 154, pp. 1007–. https://doi.org/10.1051/shsconf/202315401007

Sidani, Y.M. and Thornberry, J. (2013). Nepotism in the Arab world: an institutional theory perspective. *Business Ethics Quarterly* 23(1), pp. 69-96.

Sidani, Y. M., Konrad, A. and Karam, C.M. (2015). From Female Leadership Advantage to Female Leadership Deficit: A Developing Country Perspective. *Career Development International* 20(3), p. 273–292.

Simon, A. (1970), *Public Administration* New York, NY: Vikas Publishing House.

Simon, S. (1996), *Gender in Translation: Cultural Identity and the Politics of Transmission*, Routledge, London.

Singh, H. P., and Alshammari, T. S. (2020). An Institutional Theory Perspective on Developing a Cyber Security Legal Framework: A Case of Saudi Arabia. *Beijing Law Review*, 11, pp. 637-650.

Smith, P.B., Torres, C., Leong, C.H., Budhwar, P., Achoui, M. and Lebedeva, N., (2012). Are indigenous approaches to achieving influence in business organisations distinctive? A comparative study of guanxi, Wasta, jeitinho, svyazi and pulling strings. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 23(2), pp. 333-348.

Snowden, A. and Martin, C. R. (2011) Concurrent analysis: towards generalisable qualitative research. *Journal of Clinical Nursing*. 20 (19-20), pp. 2868–2877.

Snyder, H. (2019) Literature review as a research methodology: An overview and guidelines. *Journal of Business Research,* 104, pp. 333-339, ISSN 0148-2963.

Song, J. (2019). "She needs to be shy!": Gender, culture, and nonparticipation among Saudi Arabian female students. *Tesol Quarterly*, *53*(2), 405-429

Spencer E.A. & Brassey J. (2017) Ascertainment bias. In Catalogue of Biases Collaboration, *Catalogue Of Bias 2017* [Online]. Available at: https://catalogofbias.org/biases/ascertainment-bias/ [Accessed 01/08/2023]

Stewart, S.M., Gruys, M.L. and Storm, (2010) Forced distribution performance evaluation systems: Advantages, disadvantages and keys to implementation. *Journal of Management & Organization* (2010) **16**: 168–179.

Strategic Objectives and Vision Realization Programmes (2017). *Vision 2030*. Available from: https://vision2030.gov.sa/sites/default/files/vision/Vision%20Realization%20Programs%20Overview.pdf [Accessed 22/04/2023]

Strauss A, and Corbin J (1994) 'Grounded theory methodology: an overview'. In: Denzin NK, Lincoln YS, (eds). *Handbook of Qualitative Research 1– 18.* London: Sage.

Suddaby, R. (2006) From the Editors: What Grounded Theory Is Not, *Academy of Management Journal*, 49(4), pp. 633-642.

Sunstein, C.R. (2019) 'Sludge and ordeals'. In *Duke Law Journal* 68 : 1843–1883

Swim, J. K., Mallett, R., & Stangor, C. (2004). Understanding subtle sexism: Detection and use of sexist language. *Sex Roles*, 51(3/4), pp. 117–128.

Tagliapietra, S. (2017) '*The Political Economy of Middle East and North African Oil Exporters in times of global decarbonisation*', Bruegel Working Paper 2017/05. Available at: https://www.econstor.eu/bitstream/10419/173150/1/wp-2017-05.pdf [Accessed 21/03/2024]

Taylor, F.W. (1911) *The Principles of Scientific Management.* London: Harper.

Temmes, M. and Melkas, H. (2001). *Labour administration in Finland*. Geneva, CH: ILO Publication.

The Government Summit, (2013). *Taking a More Sophisticated Approach to GCC Labour Market Policy*. Dubai, UAE: The Government Summit / Mckinsey & Company Collaboration. Available at: taking_a_more_sophisticated_approach_to_gcc_labour_eng.pdf (worldgovernmentsummit.org) [Last Accessed 11/09/2023].

Thelen, K. (2010). Beyond Comparative Statics: Historical Institutional Approaches to Stability and Change in the Political Economy of Labor. In: Morgan, G., Campbell, J.L., Crouch, C., Pedersen, O.K., and Whitley, R. (Ed.s). *The Oxford Handbook of Comparative Institutional Analysis*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

Thoenig, J.C., (2003). Institutional theories and public institutions: Traditions and appropriateness. In G. Peters, G. and Pierre, J. (eds) *Handbook of Public Administration pp. 127-148,* London, Sage, 2003.

Thompson, M. C. (2021) The Impact Of Vision 2030 On Saudi Youth Mindsets. *Asian Affairs (London).* 52 (4), pp. 805–825.

Thornton, P. and Ocasio, W. (2008) 'Institutional Logics'. In Greenwood, R., Oliver, C., Suddaby, R. and Sahlin, K. *The Sage Handbook of Organizational Institutionalism, 100-129,* Thousand Oaks, Ca: Sage.

Tian L. (2008) The pros and cons of New Public Management in Human Resources and Social Security *Enterprise Reform and Managemen*t, 2015(24)

Tlaiss, H. (2015). Neither-nor: Career Success of Women in an Arab Middle Eastern Context. *Employee Relations* 37 (5), pp. 525–546.

Toonen, T. (2012). Administrative Reform. In Peters, BG, & Pierre, J (eds). *The SAGE Handbook of Public Administration*. London, UK: SAGE Publications.

Treviño, L. J. (2016). Institutional theory and institution building in emerging economies. In *Handbook of Contemporary Research on Emerging Markets* (pp. 62-87). Edward Elgar Publishing.

Tukiainen, S. and Granqvist, N. (2016), Temporary organizing and institutional change. In *Organization Studies*, 37(12), pp. 1819-1840.

Uchem, R.O. and Erunke, C.E. (2013). Nature and scope of public administration. *International Journal of Development and Sustainability*, 2(1), pp.177-182.

Uddin, N. and Hossain, F. (2015). Evolution of Modern Management through Taylorism: An Adjustment of Scientific Management Comprising Behavioral Science. *Procedia Computer Science*. 62. 578-584.

UN (2015). *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Resolution Adopted by the General Assembly on 25 September 2015, 42809, 1-13.* Geneva, Ch: UN Publications

UNDP (2019) *Kingdom of Saudi Arabia: Gender Justice and The Law.* New York, NY: UNDP Publication.

UNDP (United Nations Development Programme) (2020). *Human Development Report 2020: The Next Frontier: Human Development and the Anthropocene*. New York: UNDP Publication.

UNECE, (2019) *Combatting Ageism in the world of work. [Online Policy Briefing]* Available at: https://unece.org/DAM/pau/age/Policy_briefs/ECE-WG1-30.pdf [Last accessed 19/07/2023].

UN Women (2021) *Women and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) [Online]* Available at: https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/in-focus/women-and-the-sdgs [Last accessed 02/0.2/024]

van Geel, A. (2016). Separate or together? Women-only public spaces and participation of Saudi women in the public domain in Saudi Arabia. *Contemporary Islam* 10, pp. 357–378.

van Knippenberg, B., Martin, L., and Tyler, T. (2006). Process-orientation versus outcome-orientation during organizational change: The role of organizational identification. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 27, pp. 685–704.

van Nes, F., Abma, T., Jonsson, H. *et al.* (2010) Language differences in qualitative research: is meaning lost in translation?. *European Journal of Ageing* 7, pp. 313–316.

Velimirović, D., Velimirović, M. and Stanković, R., (2011). Role and importance of key performance indicators measurement. *Serbian Journal of Management*, 6(1), pp. 63-72.

Venuti, L. (1995), *The Scandals of Translation: Towards an Ethics of Difference*, Routledge, London.

Verheijen, T (2012). Comprehensive Reform and Public Administration in Post-Communist States. In Peters, BG, & Pierre, J (eds) .2012. *The SAGE Handbook of Public Administration.* SAGE Publications. London. The United Kingdom.

Vision 2030 (2017). *Saudi Vision 2030. An ambitious vision for an ambitious nation.* [Online] Available from: https://www.vision2030.gov.sa/v2030/overview/ [Last Accessed 22/07/2023].

Vision 2030 (2022). *Vision 2030 Achievement 2016 – 2020*. [Online] Available from: https://www.vision2030.gov.sa/media/irsiefvh/achievements-booklet_en.pdf [Last Accessed 22/07/2023].

Vision Realisation Office, (2020). *Ministry of Energy Website*. Available from https://www.vro.meim.gov.sa/English/about/Pages/default.aspx [Accessed 22/06/2023].

Vismara, E. (2018) The contemporary nature of tribalism. Anthropological insights on the Libyan case. Bergen, N: Chr Michelsen Institute Publication.

Warner, G. 'The Other Davos,' Planet Money, *National Public Radio* (2018), https://www.npr.org/sections/money/2018/01/31/582233478/episode-821-the-other-davos [Accessed 21/03/2024]

Waxin, M-F., Bateman, R., (2009). HRM Reform in the Public Sector: Is it Enough? In Wallis J., Goldfish S., *International Handbook of Public Management Reform 103-161*, Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing.

Weber, M. (1964). *The theory of social and economic organization*. New York: The Free Press.

Weber, M. (1978) *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Welter, F., and Smallbone, D. (2010). The embeddedness of women's entrepreneurship in a transition context. In *Women Entrepreneurs and the Global Environment for Growth: A Research Perspective*. Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing.

Welter, F., Brush, C. and De Bruin, A. (2014). *The Gendering of Entrepreneurship Context*. Bonn, DR: Institut für Mittelstandsforschung: Working Paper 1: 14.

World Economics (2019) *Saudi Arabia's Gini Coefficient* [Online]. Available at: https://www.worldeconomics.com/Inequality/Gini-Coefficient/Saudi%20Arabia.aspx [Accessed 1st June 2024].

Xanthopoulou, P. & Plimakis, I. (2021). From New Public Management to Public Sector Management Reforms during the pandemic. The effects of Covid-19 on public management reforms and effectiveness. *Technium Social Sciences Journal,* 26, pp. 576–596. https://doi.org/10.47577/tssj.v26i1.5177

Yin, R. K. (2009). *Case Study Research: Design and Methods* (Vol. 5). Thousand Oaks, Ca: Sage.

Yusoff, W.F.W. and Alhaji, I.A. (2012) Insight of corporate governance theories, *Journal of Business and Management, 1*(1): 52-63

Zakaria, Z., Yaacob, Z., Noordin, N., Sawal, M.Z.H.M. and Zakaria, Z., (2011). Key performance indicators (KPIs) in the public sector: a study in Malaysia. *Asian Social Science*, 7(7), pp.102.

Zamberi Ahmad, S. (2011). Evidence of the Characteristics of Women Entrepreneurs in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia: An Empirical Investigation. *International Journal of Gender and Entrepreneurship* 3(2): 123–143.

Zhang, X. (2015) The Value of Human Resource Management in the Public Sector - A Perspective on the Development of Western Public Administration Theory *Reform & Opening* 2015(12), pp. 119-120+122.

Zhou, J. and Shalley, C.E. (2003) Research on employee creativity: a critical review and directions for future research. *Research in Personnel and Human Resources Management* (22), pp. 165-217.

Appendix 1 – Ethics Form

Downloaded: 19/10/2023
Approved: 11/11/2021
Ali Aljaber
Registration number: 190228994
Management School
Programme: PhD in Management

Dear Ali

PROJECT TITLE: The Impact of 2016 Public Administration Reforms on the changing nature of work and employment in the Saudi Labour Administration System
APPLICATION: Reference Number 043738

On behalf of the University ethics reviewers who reviewed your project, I am pleased to inform you that on 11/11/2021 the above-named project was **approved** on ethics grounds, on the basis that you will adhere to the following documentation that you submitted for ethics review:

- University research ethics application form 043738 (form submission date: 10/11/2021); (expected project end date: 17/11/2023).
- Participant information sheet 1098059 version 3 (09/11/2021).
- Participant consent form 1098060 version 2 (09/11/2021).

If during the course of the project you need to deviate significantly from the above-approved documentation please inform me since written approval will be required.
Your responsibilities in delivering this research project are set out at the end of this letter.

Yours sincerely

Sophie May

Ethics Administrator
Management School

Please note the following responsibilities of the researcher in delivering the research project:
The project must abide by the University's Research Ethics Policy: https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/research-services/ethics-integrity/policy
The project must abide by the University's Good Research & Innovation Practices Policy:
https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/polopoly_fs/1.671066!/file/GRIPPolicy.pdf
The researcher must inform their supervisor (in the case of a student) or Ethics Administrator (in the case of a member of staff) of any significant changes to the project or the approved documentation.
The researcher must comply with the requirements of the law and relevant guidelines relating to security and confidentiality of personal data.
The researcher is responsible for effectively managing the data collected both during and after the end of the project in line with best practice, and any relevant legislative, regulatory or contractual requirements.

Appendix 2 – Consent Form

The University Of Sheffield.

The Impact of 2016 Public Administration Reforms on the Changing Nature of Work and Employment in the Saudi Labour Administration System - Consent Form

Please tick the appropriate boxes	Yes	No
Taking Part in the Project		
I have read and understood the project information sheet and the project has been fully explained to me. (If you will answer No to this question please do not proceed with this consent form until you are fully aware of what your participation in the project will mean.)	☐	☐
I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the project.	☐	☐
I agree to take part in the project. I understand that taking part in the project will include participating in semi- structured interviews.	☐	☐
I understand that my taking part is voluntary and that I can withdraw from the study at any time; I do not have to give any reasons for why I no longer want to take part and there will be no adverse consequences if I choose to withdraw.	☐	☐
How my information will be used during and after the project		
I understand my personal details such as name, phone number, address and email address etc. will not be revealed to people outside the project.	☐	☐
I understand and agree that my words may be quoted in research outputs. I understand that I will not be named in these outputs unless I specifically request this.	☐	☐
I understand that my answers will be recorded during the interviews for the purpose of returning back to them form the researcher.	☐	☐

Name of participant [printed]   Signature   Date

Name of Researcher: Ali Aljaber   Signature   Date

Project contact details for further information:
If you have further questions, please contact me on aaljaber1@sheffield.ac.uk
You can also reach the project supervisors.
Main supervisor: Prof. Jason Heyes j.heyes@sheffield.ac.uk
Second supervisor: Dr Caitlin Fox-Hodess katy.fox-hodess@sheffield.ac.uk

The template of this consent form has been approved by the University of Sheffield Research Ethics Committee and is available to view here: https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/rs/ethicsandintegrity/ethicspolicy/further-guidance/homepage

Appendix 3 – First Phase Data Collection Interview Guide

Questions for Managers	
Theme	Questions
Participant Information	Can you please tell us about yourself?
Work Organisation	How is work organised in your deputy ministry / department? In what ways, if at all, has the introduction of public administration reforms changed working patterns at your deputy ministry / department? How has the process of reorganising work been managed? What are the consequences of work reorganisation for working time? What are the consequences of work reorganisation for the nature of work? What are the consequences of work reorganisation for delivery of services? To what extent has the intensity of work changed since 2016? How has the increase in work intensity been managed? How have employees responded? In what ways, if at all, has your role changed since the public administration reforms? Has your authority as a manager increased or decreased due the public administration reforms? If so, how? Has the implementation of public administration reforms resulted in the use of new technology at work? If so, what new technologies have been employed? Has the introduction of new technologies presented challenges to employees and if so, how are they coping with these challenges? How has Covid-19 changed work in your deputy ministry? What is the impact of Covid-19 on the service you provide to the community?
Diversity and culture	How do you find the work culture in the Ministry compared to your previous job? How would describe the core values of the Ministry?

	What is the proportion of women employees in your deputy ministry /department?
	Has proportion of women employed by your deputy ministry/department changed since the introduction of the reforms? If so, how much?
	If women representation increase, what factors have contributed to the change of women's representation in your deputy ministry/department?
	If so, to what extent do you think the reforms are responsible for the increase of women's employment and what practices and policies have led to the increase? Could you please specify which reform?
	Have you taken any steps to integrate women into workforce, and what are they?
	Are women employed in the same types of jobs as men? Is women's employment represented only in certain jobs? If so, why?
	Do men and women have the same promotion and pay opportunities?
	How have men responded to the increase in women's employment?
	Have your deputy ministry/ department encountered any HRM problems as a result of a more diverse workforce? How has your deputy ministry responded?
	Has gender segregation at the workplace been reduced as a result of the reforms? If so, what are the consequences of gender segregation reduction in relation to work?
	To what extent has the reduction of gender segregation in the workplace helped your deputy ministry \ department to achieve tasks and objectives?
	Has the reduction in gender segregation made work easier? Do men and women face any challenges as a result of the reduction in gender segregation, for example, in teamworking?
	If Wasta has been reduced, to what extent do you think the reforms are responsible for the decrease of the use of Wasta and what practices and policies have led to the decrease? Could you please specify which reform?
	Has the use of Wasta in recruitment, promotion and performance appraisal been reduced since the reforms?
	If so, how did you manage to reduce use of Wasta in recruitment and performance appraisal?
Employment Relations	What new management techniques, if any, has your deputy ministry/ department adopted since the reforms?

and Management	Why have these management techniques been adopted?
	Have these management techniques been effective? Have they achieved intended objectives and goals?
	In what ways have HRM practices changed since the PA reforms?
	How does recruitment in your deputy ministry / department take place?
	Has this changed since the public administration reforms? If so, in what ways has it changed?
	How do initial and continuing training take place in your deputy ministry /department? Has it changed since 2016? If so, in what ways has it changed?
	Implementing private sector management style implies flexibility in hiring and paying, did that happen in the Ministry, if so, how and why?
	How are staff rewarded/recognised? Could you please provide your answer with comparison to the past?
	How is attendance monitored at your department? Could you please provide your answer with comparison to the past?
Performance Management	Do all departments agree with each other on clearly defined objectives? If so, how?
	Do you link employee's motivation to the Ministry objectives, if so how?
	How do you deal with the issue of achieving efficiency and providing good service?
	Are you able to translate long term mission into annual performance goals, if so, how?
	Are your short-term goals correlated to long ones, if so how?
	To what extent does the management method help to achieve departmental performance?
	How is your department's performance measured?
	What are the criteria for measuring your performance?
	Have performance criteria changed as a result of the public administration reforms?
	What are your department's key performance inductors (KPIs)?
	How has the application of a KPI system changed your work? If so, in what ways?

	What are the consequences if your department does not meet a KPI?
	How are the targets for employees established?
	What are the consequences if an employee does not meet his or her target? How do you know if a KPI has been achieved or not?
Questions for Employees	
Theme	Questions
Participant Information	Can you please tell us about yourself?
Work Organisation	Could please describe your responsibilities in this department? How has the introduction of public administration reforms changed your work? How many hours do you typically work in a day and in a week? Has your workday become longer since 2016? If so, how have you adapted to that? Do you perform more tasks these days in comparison to work before the public administration reforms? Have you begun using new technologies since the public administration reforms? Has this posed challenges for you? How are you coping with these challenges? How has covid-19 changed your work? In your opinion, what is the impact of Covid-19 on the service you deliver to the community? Has Covid-19 brought any challenges to you?
Diversity and culture	Where did you work before joining the Ministry? When did you join the Ministry? How would you describe the work culture in the Ministry? What is your opinion of the reduction of gender segregation at the workplace? How have men responded to the increase of women's employment?

	In your opinion, do men and women have the same opportunities for promotion and pay increases?
	To what extent has the reduction of gender segregation in workplaces helped your deputy ministry \ department to achieve tasks and objectives?
	Has the reduction in gender segregation made work easier?
	Do men and women face any challenges, for example, in teamworking?
	What is your opinion of working in a mixed workplace? Did you face any tribal pressure from your family?
	Do you think Wasta was used when you were recruited and assessed?
	If the use of Wasta has decreased, to what extent do you think the reforms are responsible for the decrease of use of Wasta?
Employment Relations and Management	What new management techniques, if any, has your deputy ministry / department adopted since the reforms?
	Why have these management techniques been adopted? What do they consist of?
	In your opinion, have these management techniques been effective? Have they achieved intended objectives and goals?
	In your opinion, in what ways have HRM practices changed since PA reforms?
	Could you please tell me how you were recruited to work here?
	Could you please tell me about training and development opportunities in your department and how these have changed since 2016?
	Has your department encountered any HRM problems as a result of employing a more diverse workforce? How has your department responded?
Performance Management	What are your KPIs and how has the use of KPIs changed your work?
	How is your attendance monitored?
	How is your performance assessed?
	How are you rewarded and recognised?
	What are the criteria for measuring your performance?

- 332 -	Have your performance criteria changed as result of the PA reforms?

What are the consequences if you do not meet a KPI?

Do you get fixed annual raises? What are the procedures?

How do you get promoted? Did you get a promotion before? Would you consider the process of promotion to be fair?

What are the consequences when you are not able to finish work on time?

How much pressure do you feel from managers to meet a target? |

Appendix 4 – Second Phase Data Collection Interview Guide

Introduction to the new interviewees for the second phase of data collection:

Having interviewed other people, I now want to ask some more detail about the themes that have arisen. The overall research question related to the first theme is:

> **How have public administration reforms changed the culture, inclusion and empowerment of women in the workplace since Vision 2030 was introduced?**

The following specific questions will help us understand some specific areas around this; these questions are for managers and other employees (labour inspectors/ employment service providers):

Q1/ What is your view of women's empowerment in the Ministry after Vision 2030?

Q2/ What are your experiences of working in a mixed workplace?

Q3/ Could you please tell me about your experience working in a mixed-gender workplace in relation to the family and tribal and religious norms?

Q4/ What challenges do you face as a woman in the Ministry?

Q5/ What problems do you encounter developing your career and relationships at work?

Q6/ How has Vision 2030 helped you to develop at the workplace?

Q7/ What developmental roles do you play in the Ministry after Vision 2030?

Q8/What steps did the ministry take to integrate you into the mixed workplace?

Q9/ Are you satisfied with gender equality regarding employment, positions, pay, and promotion in the ministry? Why?

Q10/ What is your perception of the future of women in the Ministry?

This is the same process but for the next theme identified. The overall research question for the next theme is:

How have the public administration reforms changed the organisation of work in The Ministry since Vision 2030 was introduced and what are the consequences of this?

Q1/ How is your work planned, organised, and managed after the reforms? Could you please point out the differences between the past and now?

Q2/ What are your responsibilities? Have they changed? Does technology play a role in changing your responsibilities?

Q3/ How is your work divided into job tasks? Is there a difference after the reforms?

Q4/ How is your work coordinated and controlled? And why?

Q5/What are your work processes after the reforms? Have they changed?

Q6/ In your opinion, have the new forms of work organisation affected your work? If so, how?

Q7/ How have the new methods of performance management affected your work?

Q8 / Could you please tell me about your experience of job insecurity after the public administration reforms?

Q9 / Has your work-life balance been affected after Vision 2030 reforms? Why and why not? Could you please tell me about your experience?

Q10/ Did you perceive there to be any negative behaviours among employees after the reforms and the new performance measures?

This is the same process but for the next theme identified. The overall research question for the next theme is:

How have the public administration reforms affected the quality of labour inspection and employment services since Vision 2030 was introduced?

Note: Questions for either employment services or inspection services as appropriate to interviewee

*LABOUR INSPECTION QUESTIONS

Q1/ How do you think the reorganisation of work and the inclusion policies impacted the labour inspection services provided to the public (e.g., effectiveness, accessibility quality, technical issues etc.)?

Q2/ Have women's inclusion and mixed-gender workplace policies helped raise the effectiveness of services?

Q3/ Nowadays, the ministry relies on technology and the web to provide services; Are there any negatives to that?

Q4/ Could you please tell me about the negative side of using technology in providing services?

Q5/ How about (Tamam[1]) platform; would you say that engaging in the platform had any specific negative impacts on the customers (e.g., business, citizens etc.)?

Q6/ In your opinion, Are there accessibility or literacy issues among the public?

Q7/ How do you think the customers are satisfied with the inspection services?

Q8/ After the reforms, there has been an increase in labour inspection visits; Did you perceive any negative sides to the inspection visits?

Q9/ It is written in the Saudi media that the extensive labour inspection visits after the reforms have impacted small and medium businesses; how do you think labour inspection services impact small and medium enterprises?

Q10/ Were there any advantages and disadvantages of the inspection services since the public administration reforms? If so, what are they?

(*1 Tamam is an online platform to initiate and follow up on inspection services.)*

*EMPLOYMENT SERVICES QUESTIONS

Q1/ How do you think the reorganisation of work and the inclusion policies impacted the employment services provided to the public (e.g., effectiveness, accessibility quality, technical issues etc.)?

Q2/ Have women's inclusion, and mixed-gender workplace policies helped raise the effectiveness of employment services?

Q3/ Nowadays, the ministry relies on technology and the web to provide employment services; Are there any negatives to that?

Q4/ In your opinion, Are there accessibility or literacy issues among the public?

Q5/ Could you please tell me about the negative side of using technology in providing employment services?

Q6/ In your opinion, to what extent the public is engaging and satisfied with the employment services?

Q7/ How do you think (Taggat * and Netaggat *) helped the unemployed people? In your opinion, is there any negative side to those programmes?

Q8/ The ministry established several employment and training programmes (e.g. Qiwa *, Tamher *, Hafiz *); Would you say that engaging with these programmes had any specific negative aspects?

Q9/ Were there any advantages and disadvantages of the employment services since the public administration reforms? If so, what are they?

Note: Taggat, Netaggat, Qiwa, Tamher, and Hafiz are all programmes to provide employment, training, vocational guidance and jobseeker support services to the public.

Appendix 5 – Data Management Plan

Institutional Analysis of the Saudi Arabian Labour Administration: The Impact of 2030 Public Administration Reforms

Defining your data

- What data will you collect or create during the project?
- How will the data be collected or created, and over what time period?
- What formats will your digital data be in?
- Approximately how much digital data will be generated during the project?
- Are you using pre-existing datasets? Give details if possible, including conditions of use

I will collect data regarding labour administration entities, work, organisation and impact of public administration reforms. The data will be in two types recording and normal notes. The data will be collected through online interviews, which will be collected at the beginning of next December to the end of March 2022. The number of interviews is estimated to be around 60. I will use a digital recording device, and the data collected will remain in that device and used only for research purposes. The data format will be in mp4 format. The volume of data approximately 80MB. The mp4 recording will later transfer into plain texts (.txt) for data analysis and will be kept safe during and after data analysis. The texts will also be transferred into word (Docx format) for final writing project.

Looking after your data

- How will you make data easier to understand and use? *(e.g. creating a README file)*
- Where will you store digital and physical data during the project?
- How will you name and organise your data files?
- **How will you ensure data is backed up?** *(e.g. using* University research data storage*)*
- How often will you check your backup files? *(e.g. on backup, at set intervals)*

- Will you use extra security precautions for any of your digital or physical data? *(e.g. for sensitive and/or personal data)*

I will used abbreviations, headings, pseudonyms and letters in my research. This technique will be used during data analysis to be ensure confidently and anonymity. The data will be stored the University of Sheffield Google Drive during transferring and analysing. I will name data files based on themes. For example, work organisation is one theme, which will have one file with this name (work organisation). All files will be organised according to the themes that will occur during data analysis. Overall, all files data will be encrypted and secure.

Archiving your data

- What data will be archived (stored on a long-term basis) at the end of the project?
- How long will the data be stored for? (e.g. standard TUoS retention period of 10 years)
- Where will the archive be stored? *(e.g. subject-specific repository,* ORDA*)*
- Who will archive the data? *(e.g. you, your supervisor)*
- If you plan to use storage other than a repository, who will be responsible for the data?

Data will be used only for the PhD project. However, data will be stored anonymously for at least 10 years using the university ORDA to make sure of the research validation.

Sharing your data

- How will you make your data available outside the research group after the project? *(e.g. through data repository, access on request via data availability statement)*
- Will you make all of your data available, or are there reasons you can't do this? *(e.g. personal data, commercial or legal restrictions, very large datasets)*
- How might you make more of your data available? (e.g. anonymisation, participant consent, analysed data only)

- What licence might you attach to your data to say how it can be reused and shared?

The data I will be working on is based on a case study research, which is to a large extent is related to that case study (Saudi labour administration).

Implementing your plan

- Who is responsible for making sure the plan is followed? *(e.g. you, your supervisor)*
- How often will the plan be reviewed and updated? *(e.g. if the project changes, yearly)*
- What actions have you identified from the rest of this plan? (e.g. selecting a repository, requesting University research data storage

I will be responsible for the implementation of the data management plan. The plan will be discussed with the supervisors and will be checked every 3 months to ensure the plan is followed precisely. In addition, my supervisors will guide me on ensuring the data management plan works well.