



Metin Mitchell & Company

Roads to the top for Saudi Women

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Metin Mitchell & Company

About Metin Mitchell & Company

Metin Mitchell & Company is a Dubai-based executive search and management advisory firm that specialises in recruiting board members, chief executives and other senior members of a company's management team. We have particular expertise working in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Each of our senior team members has had an extensive and distinguished career and brings in-depth expertise and experience to our firm's clients.

Since our firm was created in 2011, we have achieved a high success rate identifying and recruiting executives locally and internationally to meet the specific requirements of clients throughout the Middle East and North Africa.

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Roads to the top for Saudi Women

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Introduction



I have long been an advocate of women in the workplace. I am extremely proud of my mother and what she achieved in difficult circumstances. And many years ago, I was inspired by a colleague, Ruth Tait, who wrote *Global Roads to the Top* based on her research with global leaders – this report borrows from her title in tribute to her memory.

I have seen first hand, in more than 20 years of headhunting in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and across the Middle East, that time and again it is the women who are the outstanding candidates on our shortlists. I have been delighted to see

them excel in their careers and become wonderful role models to the next generation of women.

That is what this report is about. These early female leaders have a wealth of insights and expertise to help future female leaders – but also to give their perspective on how to speed up the rate that women progress in the workplace and use their skills to help the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia succeed in its ambitions.

I am extremely grateful to the women who spared time for our interviews – the conversations were inspiring, insightful and thought-provoking. I hope this report reflects their wisdom and vision.

Metin Mitchell & Company wishes the Kingdom every success on its own road in the years to come – and there is no doubt that women have a key role to play on that journey.

Metin Mitchell, Chief Executive
Metin Mitchell & Company DMCC

Our thanks to ...

HRH Princess Banderi bint Abdulrahman AlFaisal,
Director General, King Khalid Foundation

Amal Fatani,
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College Of Pharmacy, King Saud University, KSA

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Hala Kudwah,
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PriceWaterhouseCoopers

Dr Taghreed M Al-Saraj,
Head of eLearning Content Development, Takamol Holding

Dr Sameera Maziad Al Tuwaijri,
Global Lead, Health, Nutrition and Population Global Practice,
World Bank Group

.... and other female leaders who preferred to be anonymous

We have also drawn on case studies, quotes, information and insights from

- **Women's Careers in the GCC** – Four Good Practice Case Studies by Pearl Initiative
- **Inspiring Change for Saudi Arabia's Women** – Hana'a Y AlSyead for the World Economic Forum



What is Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030?

"My first objective is for our country to be a pioneering and successful global model of excellence, on all fronts, and I will work with you to achieve that..."

The Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques,
King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud

In April 2016, the Saudi cabinet launched its ambitious vision for the future of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, to create a vibrant and diverse economy that will ensure long term sustainability for its people. The National Transformation Program 2030 outlines future workforce skills for success and targets to increase the number of women in key sectors. To date it has not looked at the skills for future leaders.

Executive summary

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is at a pivotal moment in its history. Saudi Vision 2030 recognises the need to increase women's participation in the workforce from 22% to 30% and the government is both delivering reforms to achieve this and encouraging changes in cultural practices to make them work. This report is based on interviews with leading women from education, medicine, financial services, philanthropy, e-commerce and the professions to share experiences of their working lives and success and their perspectives of what the government, society and women themselves can do to encourage the next generation of working women.

While our interviewees are clearly trailblazers, it is striking that the women rarely talked about their gender as a roadblock in their career. The personal challenges they mentioned are those that both men and women face in their working lives, practical issues such as how to sack an



The biggest challenge is getting more women into middle management positions

employee or how to explain a technical job role. The biggest society challenge is seen as getting more women into middle management positions – and from there, more will move into leadership positions.

It is impressive how these women also own the issue of increasing the number of working females, with comments such as 'I have done maybe 10% of what I could be doing to help women progress' to the responsibility of mothers to teach their sons they are not better and 'don't deserve extra candy'.

Throughout our interviews, the importance of the family in the success of a woman is a recurring theme. Many fathers encouraged and were the inspiration to their daughters, while supportive husbands have withstood cultural pressures to help their wives succeed. As one interviewee said, 'The family unit will always remain the major portion of a holistic, stable society.'

PERCENTAGE OF FEMALES IN CIVIL SERVICE

BASELINE
39.8 %

TARGET 2020
42 %

REGIONAL BENCHMARK
36 %

GLOBAL BENCHMARK
52 %

Several women mentioned the influence of Queen Effat, who helped start women's education. She has been powerful in achieving practical change and motivating princesses and other ladies in the top layer of the country to open doors for the generations that came after her.

Women are pleased to see the ambitions and plans for Saudi Vision 2030, saying 'it cannot be achieved for half of the society –and it will take the entire society to deliver it. We cannot ignore 50% of the workforce.' This report includes practical suggestions to achieve change, from the need to help women progress through middle-management to day care centres with quality care for children and compensation for women to invest in themselves.

While it is easy for outsiders to see the progress of working women in Saudi as slow, as many pointed out the rest of the world is also

“
It will take the
entire society
to deliver
Vision 2030
– we cannot
ignore 50% of
the workplace
”

struggling to achieve equality for women at work. In Saudi, there has been no history of a pay gap as in so many countries – however there is concern that this should not creep in as more women join the workforce.

We recently interviewed a number of leading Saudi chief executives for our report on ***What makes an outstanding Saudi Chief Executive?*** Those chief executives could not have been more enthusiastic about the contribution that women make to the workforce. They recognised the cultural challenges but leaders want to see more women in executive positions.

Clearly there is great willingness from all quarters to see more women in the Saudi workforce and to succeed to the top. We hope this report will provide insights and practical ideas as to how this can be achieved.

PERCENTAGE OF FEMALES OCCUPYING TOP POSITIONS IN GOVERNMENT SECTOR

(GRADE 11 AND ABOVE)

BASELINE
1.27 %

TARGET 2020
5 %

REGIONAL
BENCHMARK
10 %

GLOBAL
BENCHMARK
36 %

Source: Saudi Vision 2030: strategic objective 1

“

How do you see Saudi progressing?

When I came back to Saudi [from the US] last year, I could see that change was happening so rapidly. The changes are fantastic. But I get told when I am abroad that Saudi isn't moving along and I say, 'Come on, we're a very young country. Lloyds Bank is older than the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia!' We might seem to the rest of the world that we are changing slowly, but in reality, we are moving fast forward especially with the Saudi vision 2030. We are developing!

In the Kingdom it is not about how to get the men engaged, it is how to get the women engaged. The men are holding the positions and the women are just creeping up the working ladder. Getting a woman engaged so she can come out of the house, get a job and feel she is not abandoning her motherhood is just one part of the engagement. Some women choose to stay at home and there is nothing wrong with that. But we (women) have to play a role in advancing our economy alongside the men. Getting women engaged is the issue here."

Dr Taghreed M Al-Saraj

Head of eLearning Content Development,
Takamol Holding

1

Womens' vision of the Kingdom's future – and their place in it

How do women see the future of their kingdom and their role in it? As one said, "The directional change of the government gets me very excited – in terms of participation of women and also engagement in general. There is so much to do. I am interested in what to do for younger women – in my job and externally."

"Our vision is to have more women leaders to be role models. This will encourage more women into middle management and to take on the top jobs."

Many talked about the leaps of change that have been achieved over the lives of their careers and see this continuing. The opportunities for women are growing rapidly – in many cases it is for the women to grasp these. "There is a dynamic in Saudi Arabia and this needs to be completely owned by women themselves."

There is recognition that Saudi Arabia is more conservative than the rest of the Middle East and that has its benefits, "Saudi society in general has this fabric of standing for one another. A sense of belonging and a sense of cohesion, which is a good aspect."

And what will Saudi look like by 2030? Some discussed Saudi's future by comparing it to how neighbouring countries have developed, but the overall view is that Saudi women want their own model. One offered this view, "I think we will be closer to Kuwait. I would not say Dubai because Dubai is very different in terms of ratio of locals to internationals. I would say we will have more men and women working together and there will be more openness, but we will still be quite a conservative society."

WORLD ECONOMIC FORUM 2014 - EXTRACT

"Attracting the talent is no longer as big an issue as it is to sustain and empower women throughout their careers, which will continue to depend on the transformation of society's mind-set – and that of the women themselves... This matter has been given a lot of emphasis by the government with its visible appointment of women in the Shura Council and the efforts of several government entities including the Ministry of Labour."

Hana'a Y AlSyead

Head of Diversity
at Olayan Financing Company

2 The role of mothers and female role models

As more women work, this brings challenges in terms of their role in the home and as a mother – a debate that continues to occupy women across the world.

Female role models of all sorts have encouraged women to step into a working life, from mothers (even if they did not work) to princesses who have chosen careers despite their social stature.

“In my family, my mother is one of the strongest women I have met and she always focused on education and never took no for an answer. For her everything is possible, there is always a way to get to what you want or do what you want. She pushed for independence – in thought, financially, making decisions, failing – she was setting the stage of always looking to do more.”

There is no doubt that female members of the royal family have had a powerful influence on the progression of women, both in practical terms such as starting women’s education and taking on leadership roles. Queen Effat was particularly mentioned. “When princesses started working, they broke a taboo. Families used to be reluctant to allow a woman to work because it looked as if they couldn’t afford to live without her income. The princesses showed that work for women is as much about self-realisation.”

And for the next generation, women talked about the need to be role models for young women – but also as mothers to raise sons without gender stereotyping and daughters to think of more than just marriage.

“

How is the increasing influence of women affecting relationships with men?

“We need to change some of the male and female stereotypes and set roles. People should be equal, it isn’t your gender that matters, it’s what you do and how and what you contribute to your family and society. We already see two-income households more and more in the country. Recently, especially in Vision 2030, the focus is on providing women with opportunities to study and work. Our society is changing and both men and women need to be open to change. I think female economic empowerment is very important for the future of our country.”

HRH Princess Banderi bint Abdulrahman AlFaisal
Director General, King Khalid Foundation

“

What do women need to teach their daughters?

“Girls should not be going through life with one dominant thought in their minds - marriage; and that when marriage will arrive at the door one day, they will drop everything – just because they have been reared into waiting for that moment in a white dress. The white dress is very important, don’t get me wrong, but it is just a component of all the things we have to do in this life.”

Dr Sameera Maziad Al Tuwaijri
Global Lead, Health, Nutrition and Population Global Practice,
World Bank Group

3 The male support network – fathers, husbands and the next generation

Fathers

Not surprisingly, fathers played a key part in giving many of our women confidence and belief that they could do anything. There can still be cultural challenges – fathers wanting their daughter to make the world their own, but then struggling with unexpected cultural barriers this can bring.

Several mentioned their fathers in heroic terms, others as a constant support and gentle guider. One interviewee said, “Growing up, whenever there was a powerful woman, dad would point her out. You see this woman, she comes from this and that background, she made it and one day you are going to make it and do this. Maybe that instilled in me the drive to do something and to challenge myself.”

Another mentioned a long history in their family of pioneers from both mother’s and father’s sides, “I have a very ambitious mother and father and I am a very ambitious person”.

Husbands

The role of husbands is equally important. Women commented that just as a man would struggle to be a father and work, so these women value and rely on the support of their husbands.

One comment was typical, “My husband is very supportive. If you do not have the support within your family it is very difficult to go forward. I have never been stopped from doing anything I wanted to do as long as I put my head to it and I was actually encouraged.”



What potential positive role can fathers, brothers and other male figures play in a woman’s life?

“I am one of ten kids with seven sisters and two brothers. My father did not practice polygamy and he was my biggest role model. Our family were traders and he was the first to settle and have formal education. It was a very tribal culture. My father more or less decided to convert his herd of liabilities into assets so he invested in his girls heavily. I’m not talking about money or emotions, he was involved in every single thing we did.”

However, it doesn’t really matter how progressive fathers, husbands or brothers are, there is a limit to the extent to which they can protect or encourage women to take the next step forward.

My experience was not different. I lived in a bubble enjoying the finest education, the ability to make my own choices and the flexibility to venture into new experiences; up to a limit! And that limit is an invisible fine line that no one wants to cross, no one wants to see themselves on the wrong side of it.

Crossing the line also has a cost, a heavy one, and it does remain up to an individual’s ability to look beyond what is unfolding in their lives at that particular moment and think about future generations.

That is exactly why gender equality and the empowerment of women is central to all development aspects, anywhere - Saudi Arabia being the case in point and not the exception.”

Dr Sameera Maziad Al Tuwaijri

Global Lead, Health, Nutrition and Population Global Practice,
World Bank Group

Has your husband supported your career?

"I have a wonderful husband who listens and says, 'Here's my two cents, take it or leave it, it's up to you.' If I am forced to do something and don't have the buy-in, it will be very hard for me to do it. My husband tells me to think about it and see it through. If you always had somebody to tell you what to do, you don't shine, you're not creative in your solutions because you are just following orders.."

Dr Taghreed M Al-Saraj

Head of eLearning Content Development, Takamol Holding

Was it hard for your husband to support you, culturally?

"I admire that my husband was able to support me despite cultural pressure. There were many decisions that we jointly took against the norm in order to support my career ambitions. Why is your wife so focused on her career? He didn't pay attention to that at all, he believed in me and always stated his opinion publicly, whether socially or at work – that his wife does work, it is a demanding job, and she is away from home often. That's not easy."

I think his advice to other men would be to confidently support women despite the perceived cultural limitations. Also to encourage men to play a larger role at home. He has a very demanding job but I think contributing to raising the kids or being there with the family leaves more room for women to participate in the workplace. He tells me he takes quite a bit of pride when he looks at my achievements and that these are his shared achievements. If young Saudi men would look at it from that perspective, we will see higher female participation across sectors."

May bint Mohammed Al-Hoshan

General Manager Human Resources, Alawwal Bank

I have never been
stopped from doing
anything I wanted



What support do women need to succeed?

"Women need to be empowered to achieve a balance between high-powered careers and family. This will come through infrastructure, administration and HR policies so women are not denied career progression because of taking time off to be mothers. For example, we need day care facilities at centres where they can entrust children for short periods, not leaving them with untrained or unqualified help. Compensation and incentives will encourage women to invest in themselves."

We need training and to build development paths for women to get middle management off the ground – cashier positions in supermarkets and retail stores may be a start but not sufficient for building local ability. We need to help women get through this bottle neck called middle-management – there needs to be incentives for businesses to do that. I don't want this just through numbers or window dressing.

We need to create an environment that helps create balance between their responsibilities and protection through national policies. I would like to see that any position being offered is gender-agnostic, and anyone who is qualified can get it."

Hala Kudwah
Consulting Leader, KSA Financial Services,
PriceWaterhouseCoopers

4 Leading from the top: the roles of organisations

A consistent theme of our interviews was that women have found society and their country very supportive; providing education, opportunities and encouragement. What will be needed to help women to 2030?

Government

While there is great enthusiasm for Vision 2030 and 'directional change', this is tinged with realism and perhaps sadness about what can be achieved in a short time. One woman said, "I thought it was brilliant and got involved with aspects of the government, but recently came to the realization that my generation will not see a woman minister. I pray I am wrong." Others are more hopeful, one saying, "I would like to see a female minister, judge and ambassador" and others are keen for the government to take a lead in appointing women to senior positions in the government.

As across the world, women say that change will come from a mix of new government policies and legislation and new working practices in business and organisations – as well as from women themselves. Measuring and setting targets for increased numbers of women by sector will play a part in bringing change.

Childcare was mentioned by many and a typical comment was, "If I was given the Ministry of Education, the first thing I would do is to teach gender equality in primary schools. I would do it subtly through role play and storytelling."

Women are
doing very well
and better than
Saudi men in
some cases

Corporates

Saudization is proving to be a golden opportunity for women. The requirement for companies and organizations to employ local Saudi people is forcing change. As one woman said, "Companies couldn't figure out how to get enough men so they hired women in junior and back-office positions because they had to deliver Saudization – and then realized the women are doing very well and better than Saudi men in many cases."

A number of corporates are emerging as having good practices in employing and advancing women in the workforce – the Pearl Initiative's report of 2016 cites Olayan in Saudi and Pepsico, GE and Petroleum Development Oman operating across the Gulf. However, others believe global companies are not doing enough in Saudi, "I think this is to do with the fear of the unknown. They have corporate governance standards for other countries – why not apply these in Saudi?"

GE, SAUDI ARABIA

GE hired their first woman in 2009 and by 2016 employed 100 Saudi women in their headquarters, factory and field roles

- Practical issues such as separate office space or transportation 'were all easily solved'
- Other challenges such as the need to improve networking skills were addressed with specific training
- Women are encouraged to apply for all roles with the company and especially roles not originally deemed appropriate for women
- A 3-day leadership course was designed specifically for 25 Saudi GE women

In 2014, a joint venture between Tata Consultancy Services and GE opened an all-woman business and IT services centre in Riyadh, supporting 55 countries. In two years they hired more than 1,000 women and plan to employ 3,000 by 2020. All women have a bachelors degree and are fluent in English.

"GE's efforts to instill an inclusive and supportive culture, to hire the right people and enable them to achieve success for themselves and the business have proven to work well for women's careers."

Nabil Habayeb, President & CEO, GE, Middle East, North Africa and Turkey

HOW DID GE ACHIEVE SUCCESS IN THE REGION ?



Hiring high achievers



Creating a strong performance culture



Focusing on career paths and development



Investing in targeted training programmes



Implementing supportive policies



Providing networking opportunities in the region

Source: Women's Careers in the GCC - The Pearl Initiative 2016

THE OLAYAN GROUP, SAUDI ARABIA

The Olayan Group is one of the few large private enterprises in Saudi Arabia led by a woman and in the last 15 years has put a lot of effort into increasing the number of women it employs and increased the number of women in managerial or executive roles more than threefold since the inception of its diversity effort.

The company's holistic strategy framework for diversity has in its pillars, activities including

- Monitoring promotions across all levels to ensure qualified women move up the pipeline
- Introducing HR policies that support women in the workplace, such as policies on harassment prevention, inclusiveness and daycare
- Conducting regular visits to operating companies to discuss and agree on future plans as well as address any diversity issues
- Hosting an Annual Forum, where women can share their ambitions, success and challenges with the CEO and executive management

"My vision is of a country with a prosperous and diversified economy in which any Saudi citizen, irrespective of gender, can find a job in the field for which he or she is best qualified."

Lubna S Olayan, CEO, The Olayan Group

HOW DID OLAYAN ACHIEVE SUCCESS ?



Making diversity and inclusion a strategic priority



Making diversity an ubiquitous topic in the organisation



Encouraging the gender diversification of traditionally male roles



Providing support and creating development opportunities



Being an advocate in the wider community



Proactively engaging women and management

Source: Women's Careers in the GCC - The Pearl Initiative 2016

Headhunters should aim to put forward 25% of women for middle and senior roles

Executive search advisers

There was little mention of the role of headhunters to advance women at work. We would agree with the comment that Saudization is an opportunity and our own experience is that almost without fail, when we put forward a woman on a shortlist for a senior position – they will be the outstanding candidate.

One woman did comment, "Headhunters should aim to put forward at least 25% of women for middle and senior roles." Certainly this is something we are doing whenever we have the candidates – and we actively go looking for female candidates.

As so many women have commented in this report, there is a need for women to push through the middle-management barrier, but also – again, as their peers recommend – put themselves on the radar to be found. Having a strong LinkedIn profile and sending CVs to executive search firms are good things to do. In our own case, we also work closely with HR teams to advise on how women can develop their careers for future top positions.

5

How women have succeeded – overcoming roadblocks, lessons learned, ambitions for the future

Overcoming roadblocks

All the women recognised the challenges they face but as one interviewee said, 'I don't bring my gender to work'. These women are successful because of their abilities at work and their leadership.

Cultural change

Women, of course, recognise the enormous changes going on in their country and the impact on society and cultural norms. Many talked about how women themselves have to accept change and the conflicts this sometimes causes with family and in society – but as progress is made, so working women are becoming the norm.

“

How did you become the most senior woman at your bank and what were the roadblocks?

“There were different factors - one was sponsorship. I was lucky to have leaders around me who promoted the success of women in banking. The landscape looked very different – in my previous organization I was hired as the first female in HR and today we have hundreds of women in HR across industries.

There were roadblocks – being the only female required a lot of trial and error. For the longest time I wanted to be seen as one of the guys, which also influenced my personal decisions, like when to start a family. All I wanted to do was be in the playing field and to be equal. If I look back, that was the wrong thing to do. If we want to promote women's participation and progression we need to realize that women play different roles. You can have kids and still have promising careers. You can have a family life with obligations and still be able to balance and thrive in your job. Women that were able to cut through certain barriers are in a great position today to, through their jobs, push for the workplace to provide strategies, tools, and programs for females to be integrated. Impactful female participation in the workplace will only come when organizations actively promote not only diversity but real inclusion.

The roadblocks were mainly cultural, the expectation.”

May bint Mohammed Al-Hoshan
General Manager Human Resources, Alawwal Bank

How strategic was your career choice?

"I knew I wanted a career, and when I looked around me then I knew it would be difficult. Hence I aimed for a profession that would possibly make it difficult for my fellow countrymen to turn my job application down. I chose information technology because at that time there weren't many qualified. I thought: pick that right now because there are many avenues open but there weren't many male Saudis that were qualified. I took a bet that my qualification will at least give me a fair hearing. And that bet worked. I chose that education to enable me to knock on doors."

Hala Kudwah

Consulting Leader, KSA Financial Services, PriceWaterhouseCoopers

How did you become a specialist in toxicology?

"I think I am from the few Saudi females in the Kingdom who worked with scorpion venoms - that was my MS & PhD thesis. My supervisor, a venomologist and toxicologist, said, 'There is a letter from the Ministry of Health asking us to do a study - the rate of death from scorpion stings is higher than anywhere else, because human interaction with the desert is more frequent. This is your project if you want it.' And I said: sure."

That was my Master's degree and I basically proved that the anti-venom we were giving was of little value. Our scorpions and snakes were much more virulent than where we were getting the anti-venom from. So I produced the first anti-venom in my lab & house - my kids worked in my labs from day one."

I am very proud of my results and the results of my colleagues at the Anti-venom Centre which is now exporting scorpion and snake anti-venoms to the Middle East."

Amal Fatani

Associate Professor, Dept Of Pharmacology & Toxicology,
College Of Pharmacy, King Saud University, KSA

⋮ I knew I wanted
⋮ a career

Career choice

For some women they carried out research and were strategic in their choice of career – a few career choices were not understood or recognised as prestigious and they had to stand their ground to follow their passion. As a headhunter, we would say that the more specialised someone is, the more it can open doors.

Planning a career and looking at the skills that are needed for the next decade and positioning yourself is a good way to be a woman in demand.

Opportunities

One point really struck home in these conversations with women – it is a time of rich opportunity for females in Saudi. "Saudi women are some of the most highly educated women in the world and globally we are one of the leading countries for women in STEM – technology, science and engineering."

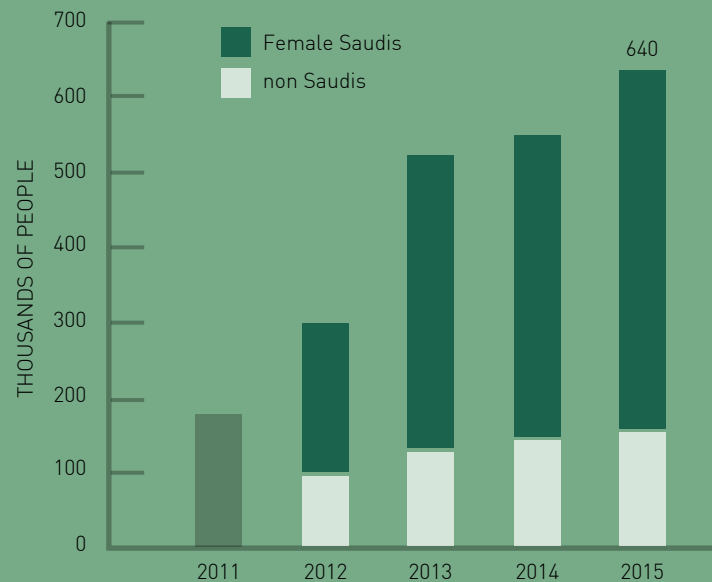
Saudization is a significant opportunity, as are the government targets, the changing culture in families and the wish of women themselves. Most of our interviewees talked about having been a pioneer in some sense – typically being the first or only woman in an organisation – but there were hundreds, if not thousands, by the time they moved on to their next job.

The number of Saudi women working in the private sector increased by 130 per cent in the last four years. From 215,000 in 2012, the number of women in the private sector jumped to 496,000 in 2016, an average of 8,500 jobs per month. Women now represent 30 per cent of the total Saudi work force in the private sector, up from just 12 per cent in 2011. Riyadh has the highest figure in employment opportunities for Saudi women with 203,600 jobs, representing 41 per cent of the total number.

Ministry of Labour and Social Development in March 2017



WOMEN'S EMPLOYMENT IN THE PRIVATE SECTOR



Source : GOSI Yearly Reports 1432-1435

How have you found working in the private sector?

When I came back after graduating in the US, I worked in a mixed environment. I was in head office so I worked with the men, not in female branches. Because banking is structured to be an international organization they are used to dealing with women. But whenever I had to deal with entities outside of the banking sector, that was a challenge. They were not used to dealing with women, particularly women in banking who are not in the branch network – locally, here in Saudi Arabia. It was more about closed entities, rather than, 'I don't want to deal with you'. I was never told, 'I would rather deal with a man than deal with you'.



How did you learn your management skills?

My first management responsibility happened unexpectedly when I was much younger. I was given the responsibility of managing a four-tower real estate complex that the organization I worked for owned. I knew very little about real estate management and I had very little experience in general, not to mention leading a team of men only. I was the youngest and the only female and this was quite a challenge for me. Not only did I have to learn quickly about real estate but I also had to learn quickly about managing people and delegating responsibilities.

I attended staff meetings and just listened and tried to understand. I started delegating responsibilities but nothing would happen. I thought: I am the boss and I have the authority so why am I asking for things to be done and nothing is happening? It took six to eight months of feeling as if my staff didn't hear what I was saying when it became clear to me that I wasn't communicating correctly. The way women and men communicate here is extremely different – I was saying, please, thank you, I am sorry to ask you, if you don't mind, if it doesn't bother you, etc etc – and I think my staff felt I was asking them for a favour. My first year was a complete disaster until I learned to be much more assertive, more specific, and more direct in order to get things done!

Work environment is very different now. There are many more women in the workplace and women in positions of authority. I grew up at a time when men and women were completely segregated in education and in the workplace so I had almost no experience interacting with men in a professional environment. Similarly, the men on my team did not know how to deal with the situation they were in – with a young, female boss of all male employees. Things are changing very quickly now but as a manager and a leader, it is always good to reflect, listen, not be afraid to fail and be able to re-visit and adjust how you deal with people and issues.

I often learnt on the job by trial and error and although one learns quickly this way, it is also important to constantly improve oneself through training and professional development. We at KKF pride ourselves as being a learning organization, which means learning on the job as well as through training. At KKF, some of our projects were a failure and we learnt a lot from those failures. It is crucial that people as well as organizations learn from their mistakes and be open to change. There is no way one can have all the answers from day one.

HRH Princess Banderi bint Abdulrahman AlFaisal
Director General, King Khalid Foundation



What advice would you give to young women today?

Be relevant. The world is changing. For example in pharmacy - by the time I had graduated, half of what I had learned had become obsolete. By the time I had my Master's then my PhD: the same. You are into a continuous change of knowledge and whatever you learned at university might not help you in the real world. Be a lifelong learner.

Number two: don't be afraid to take chances on change or to think outside the box. This next era is something none of us know anything about. Knowledge and technology that used to take decades now happens every month. You need to make sure you are on top of everything and you are willing to take up new challenges. Same-old-same-old doesn't work and you have to add value in this upcoming age of digitalization, automation and robotics.

Third thing: life-work balance. The family unit will always remain the major portion of a holistic, stable society. We need to spend more time with our children, give them what we were given and make them ready to fit in a global world - but not forget their roots."

Amal Fatani
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Steps for female success

We asked our women to share what they have learnt along the way and what advice they would give to their younger selves or to young women today. These are their pooled tips and insights.

- Persistence – just about every woman said that persistence and tenacity are needed, and it is determination that will get you where you want
- Support networks – women need to help each other. “I read an article that said in the Obama administration they had very few women, so they came up with a strategy to amplify their voice. If May says we should focus on the strategy of expanding in the eastern region then Noura, another woman in the room a few minutes later would repeat what May said to make sure May was heard. It can be as simple as reiterating what somebody else said in a meeting.”
- Find a mentor/become a mentor
- Focus on exposure – look for public speaking opportunities, debate, leadership in general
- Make a business case and plan for your career. “Make a case first of all – I learned this from business people : - don’t come to me with a problem unless you have a solution for it.”
- Be a lifelong learner
- Don’t be afraid to take chances
- Insist on getting into the boardroom – if you want it. “If you don’t want it, that’s OK. You’re not going to be frowned on. But I tell those who do, don’t let anything stop you. We have choices”
- Life-work balance – family will always be important in the Saudi culture
- Invest in your career – put in time and effort. Learn new things and practice what you learn
- Build confidence - many women still feel they are not up to the leadership challenge. As one commented, this is a global issue, but “Our voice matters, your opinions count and we would love to hear them. If you never try, how will you know?”



What did you learn from your mentor?

“My mentor passed away a few years ago – at the time I did not realise he was mentoring me. I remember an interview where I met with the heads of operations and they were proudly telling me about a system that I knew was really old-fashioned. I just couldn’t hold back so I gave the guy a piece of my mind during the interview. I thought: I definitely didn’t get the job and then they called me back and said I needed to meet so-and-so. He said, you meet us and trash us – you don’t do that on a first interview! He called me later with the offer – obviously they wanted a person who challenges their decisions.

From then on, the thing he kept telling me was that I was highly opinionated. I told him that was a compliment. He said that not everybody took it as a compliment. That was the second thing. The third thing was that he told me my hard work and perseverance had got me where I was but I needed to develop more skills, different skills to get to where I wanted to be. Like what? And he said: stop shooting people between the eyes. I am very direct and I know what he means but I can’t do it.”



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