
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Contextual Dynamism of Organizational Leadership in Saudi Arabia: What is Next After Change, Transition, and Transformation - Is it Transmogrification?

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| ABSTRACT

Saudi Arabia continues to undergo significant change and transformation as it shifts from an oil-dependent economy to diversification. Through the Vision 2030 framework, the leadership is focused on investing in various sectors to ensure economic diversification. The review examines concepts related to the contextual dynamism of organizational leadership in Saudi Arabia and highlights a wide range of opportunities for leadership development across multiple sectors in the transformative ecosystem and programs of the Vision 2030. It also illustrates the significance of education and training programs in shaping a new generation of leaders equipped to navigate complex challenges. Furthermore, the importance of partnerships with global institutions in leadership development in Saudi Arabia is demonstrated. The need for company leaders to embrace diversity, harmony, and effective alignment strategies is emphasized to encourage leadership practices that foster timely project deliverables. The conceptual review indicates that leaders should remain agile to navigate challenges such as variations in cultural norms, talent shortages, and language barriers. The review illustrates that thought leadership as a precursor to effective organizational change should be embraced to drive futuristic thinking on inputs, creation processes, and outcomes. As a reflection on change, it is demonstrated that Saudi Arabia's transformation is an indicator of the significance of economic diversification programs in the Vision 2030 plan. The analysis shows that opportunities in the country attract individuals with distinguished talent for employment in an environment that promotes innovation and creativity. The Saudi Arabian government also sustains local talent development to sustain a blend of local Saudi expertise who partner with international experts to contribute to Vision 2030. Culture training ensures that international experts respect the country's norms while contributing to advancement of programs. As illustrated in the review, the transition process in Saudi Arabia has contributed to major developments in various sectors. Furthermore, the review shows that the country has improved its education system, agricultural sector, tourism industry, exports, and the manufacturing sector, among other industries, through the economic transformation journey. The review concludes by demonstrating that the targeted interventions by the Saudi government will likely lead to transmogrification, which is connected to globalization as countries focus on expanding economic activities beyond their borders.

| KEYWORDS

Change, transition, transformation, transmogrification, multinational workforce, talent acquisition, innovation and creativity, thought leadership

| ARTICLE INFORMATION

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Introductory Overview

Saudi Arabia continues to undergo significant change and transformation as it shifts from an oil-dependent economy to diversification. Through the Vision 2030 framework, the leadership is focused on investing in non-oil industries such as technology, sports, entertainment, tourism, health, and renewable energy. In the energy sector, the government is advancing

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renewable energy adoption to generate power more sustainably. Tourism is emerging as a key sector, with the Saudi government focused on positioning the country as a global tourism destination. New projects in the sector are aimed at creating luxury resorts and sustainable tourism while promoting historic and cultural sites as tourist attraction facilities. The entertainment sector is equally undergoing transformations, with the promotion of social interactions, and the establishment of new entertainment venues such as cinemas and concert halls. The transformation in Saudi Arabia has led to the growth of a robust local entertainment market to attract international tourists and artists. The development of mega-projects and growth in public-private partnerships signal this shift, evidenced by determined expert talent acquisition. Saudi Arabia has become a hub of opportunities for international experts with distinguished talent who are attracted to a society that fosters innovation and creativity. The Saudi Arabian government also supports local talent development through various initiatives to sustain local Saudi expertise who partner with international experts to assist in achieving Vision 2030. Fostering diversity, harmony, and effective alignment strategies is essential in navigating challenges and delivering projects on time. After the change, transition, and transformation phases, Saudi Arabia will possibly experience a transmogrification phase characterized by unrecognition of previous economic reforms as people embrace new concepts such as globalization. The focus, beyond 2030, to 2040 and further, is imagining the future with interconnectedness as another level of intersectoral cooperation and collaboration within the contextual dynamism of a maturing transformative ecosystem. However, it commences by reflecting seriously about the horizons of the future beyond 2030.

The Contextual Dynamism of Organizational Leadership in Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia presents a wide range of opportunities for leadership development across multiple sectors, driven by the transformative ambitions of Saudi Vision 2030. Major investments in giga-projects like NEOM, a futuristic city built on smart technologies, attract professionals in AI, design, engineering, and entrepreneurship, among other fields (Narayayan, 2024). The country has a hub of opportunities, especially for individuals with distinguished talent who are attracted to work in an environment that promotes innovation and creativity. Central to the transformation is Vision 2030, the Kingdom's ambitious reform plans aimed at diversifying the economy beyond oil and positioning Saudi Arabia as a global leader in technology, tourism, and sustainability. Mega-projects illustrate Saudi Arabia's commitment to expanding opportunities for international experts to collaborate with local professionals to enhance developments that contribute to realization of the 2030 Vision plan and beyond.

Regulatory reforms have made it easier for international experts to live and work in the country, creating a more inclusive and dynamic workforce. A notable reform is the establishment of the Premium Residency program, which allows expatriates to live, work, and own property in Saudi Arabia without a local sponsor (Saudi Visa, 2025). The initiative helps to attract highly skilled international experts and investors and fosters collaboration with local professionals to promote national development. In the labor sector, the Labor Reform Initiative has eased restrictions by allowing foreign experts to change employers without seeking their current employer's consent (Shaker, 2024). The change creates the flexibility needed for an attractive environment for international experts to live and work in Saudi Arabia. The atmosphere fosters stability for international experts, enabling them to pass on their specialized skills to local talent through collaborative work processes.

The Saudi Arabian government also actively supports talent development through various initiatives to sustain a blend of local Saudi expertise who partner with international experts to achieve Vision 2030. For instance, the MiSK Foundation was established to advance young people's skills across Saudi Arabia and enable them to play active roles in the country's transformation. Founded in 2011 by His Royal Highness Prince Mohammed bin Salman bin Abdulaziz, the foundation is a non-profit organization dedicated to empowering young people and promoting leadership and learning to shape a brighter future for Saudi Arabia (Mohammed Bin Salman Foundation, 2025). Through the foundation, the government supports youth across the nation by creating opportunities and nurturing an atmosphere where creativity and innovation can thrive. The foundation focuses on two primary areas: entrepreneurship and education through science and technology (Mohammed Bin Salman Foundation, 2025). Its strategy includes developing targeted programs and building partnerships with both local and international organizations to create a knowledge-driven society. Culture and art also form a part of the empowerment programs offered through the MiSK Foundation (Mohammed Bin Salman Foundation, 2025). As a result, Saudi Arabia is transforming to align with international trends and development, but the cultural norms of the country are foundational, and international experts respect the approach while undertaking developments with cutting-edge technology. By launching various initiatives and collaborating with diverse partners, the MiSK Foundation demonstrates the government's commitment to creating a local workforce that can effectively collaborate with international companies and professionals to drive the nation's transformation and add long-term value to Saudi Arabia's economic development.

The Human Capability Development Program in Saudi Arabia also signifies efforts to have a local workforce with the competencies and skills to foster national development through collaboration with international experts. Initiated in 2021, the

program aims to empower Saudi citizens and prepare them for success while contributing to national development (Saudi Vision 2030, 2025). It is centered on aligning educational outcomes with labor market demands, promoting innovation and enhancing skills. Through the program, the government offers funding opportunities and mentorship to local professionals, nurturing homegrown talent and contributing to the broader goals of Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030. The initiative shows the Saudi government's bold steps to strengthen the capabilities of its citizens and boost their global competitiveness. Collaboration is central to the program's success. It brings together government bodies, non-profit organizations, and private enterprises to create a supportive and inclusive ecosystem for Saudi citizens' professional development (Saudi Vision 2030, 2025). Through the partnerships, the Human Capability Development Program helps to build a resilient, skilled, and adaptable Saudi population.

As Saudi Arabia undergoes rapid social and economic reforms, it offers unparalleled opportunities for emerging and established leaders to shape future development of firms across diverse industries. The national development agenda of the Vision 2030 program is to diversify the economy, reduce dependence on oil, and build a thriving society rooted in sustainability, innovation, and global competitiveness (The Business Continuity Institute, 2024). Vision 2030 places strong emphasis on human capital development, with initiatives like the FutureX platform providing different pathways for individuals to hone their skills in different areas of human capital and leadership, fostering skills and leadership capabilities among Saudi citizens (The Business Continuity Institute, 2024). Programs such as FutureX are not only essential for infrastructural development but also platforms for cultivating visionary leadership in a wide range of areas.

Education and training programs are equally shaping a new generation of leaders equipped to navigate complex challenges. For instance, Tuwaiq Academy is dedicated to nurturing local talent and enhancing leadership competencies in alignment with Saudi Vision 2030 (The Business Continuity Institute, 2024). It offers diverse programs in fields such as AI, cybersecurity, data science, and software development, which play a crucial role in enhancing individuals' leadership competencies in different sectors to reduce the likelihood of failure for emerging businesses. The training strengthens leadership resilience against unpredictable challenges and supports the growth of new enterprises and innovative solutions. Thus, Saudi Arabia under Vision 2030 is not just transforming its economy, but becoming a global hub for nurturing leadership across sectors.

Partnerships with global institutions and companies in the planning and development of large projects in Saudi Arabia facilitate knowledge transfer and cross-cultural leadership development. Saudi Arabia's mega-projects, such as NEOM, serve as global platforms that attract top-tier talent and expertise from around the world. The Australian architectural firm, Delugan Meissl Associated Architects, was enlisted in the NEOM project to serve as the lead urban designer in collaboration with other specialists in sectors such as ecology, sustainability, and mobility and logistics (Narayayan, 2024). Mott MacDonald, a management, engineering and development consultancy firm based in the United Kingdom, was also contracted for the NEOM project to provide specialized infrastructural engineering services (Narayayan, 2024). The ambitious developments are part of the Kingdom's Vision 2030, aimed at diversifying the economy and transforming the country into a global hub for innovation, tourism, and sustainability. To achieve the goals, the projects bring together professionals, such as urban planners, engineers, architects, and digital technology experts, from a wide range of countries and industries. Such international collaboration fosters knowledge exchange and drives innovation by combining global best practices with local insights. By engaging a multinational workforce, the projects help build local expertise and leadership competence through training and knowledge transfer, creating a lasting impact on the Saudi workforce.

In the modern world's dynamic business environment, company leadership needs to embrace diversity, harmony, and effective alignment strategies to navigate challenges and meet project timelines. According to Butler-Sims (2024), diversity of thought, background, and experience fuel innovation and creativity while promoting effective decision-making and talent acquisition and retention, which improve business performance. Leaders need to foster inclusive cultures where varied perspectives are valued and leveraged to maximize efficiency and output in order to meet project timelines. Harmony within teams, built through trust, open communication, and collaboration, ensures a unified approach to achieving goals (Mbatha et al., 2022). Such an approach to project management contributes to effective conflict management, which eventually translates to timely project deliverables. Alignment of vision, strategy, and operations across departments is also essential to maintain focus and efficiency. The alignment requires clear direction from leadership and continuous engagement with stakeholders. However, challenges such as variations in cultural norms, talent shortages, and language barriers limit leadership effectiveness in sustaining diversity, harmony, and alignment (Yakamoto, 2024). Leaders need to remain agile, embrace continuous learning, and prioritize flexibility in business and project management to overcome the challenges.

Thought Leadership as a Precursor

An essential intersection within the ecosystem related to the contextual dynamism of organizational leadership in Saudi Arabia is thought leadership, which Harvey et al. (2021) indicate has become a focus in knowledge-intensive organisations that embrace professional services as part of core business. Furthermore, it is asserted that it should be interdisciplinary to include academic-

practitioner approaches, whereby there are macro-, meso-, and micro-levels of creatively driving futuristic thinking on inputs, creation processes, and outcomes. The intellectual journey that follows here fulfills the implied description by Aghion (2017) that innovative growth within an entrepreneurial mindset opens new windows to view the future. The underpinning of the intellectual journey is not about predicting the future, but using creative and innovative thoughts that are given texture by lived experiences to examine the past, and import lessons learnt into the pathway ahead. This conceptual journey within the contextual dynamism of organizational leadership has four dimensions, namely (i) reflecting on change; (ii) reviewing transition; (iii) elevating transformation; and (iv) anticipating transmogrification.

Reflecting on Change

Economic change in Saudi Arabia has been a result of targeted programs implemented by the government to reduce dependence on oil revenues. For instance, the privatization plan established in 2018 was an initiative to promote business growth and the performance of corporate sectors in the country (Raid et al., 2024). Through the privatization process, the government focused on increasing revenue generated from businesses and boosting economic performance. Raid et al. (2024) noted that the privatization program had fostered foreign direct investment (FDI) to raise its GDP share from 3.8% to 5.7%. Through the process, the government has created a conducive environment to stimulate and sustain foreign investment in diverse sectors. Saudi Arabia launched the initial phase of reforms and privatization in the late 1990s to create an attractive investment atmosphere (Bardesi, 2024). The government also enacted a series of new laws to make key economic sectors more attractive for FDI. The regulations include the new investment law, which ensures equal treatment of local and foreign investors and promotes alternative dispute resolution mechanisms (Ministry of Investment, 2024). The legal changes ensure minimal barriers to entry into Saudi Arabia's economy for foreign investors. An upsurge in FDI is vital to funding mega-projects and sustaining efforts to reduce reliance on oil revenues.

Economic growth and productivity are crucial for Saudi Arabia's sustainable change. Since the 1970s, the state has been developing five-year growth plans, entailing diversifying key sectors of the non-oil economy (Raid et al., 2024). The approach has increased the contribution of non-oil sectors to the nation's GDP. For instance, non-oil GDP grew from 103733 to 1491735 million riyals between 1970 and 2020 (Raid et al., 2024). The change is an indicator of the importance of the economic diversification programs adopted in Saudi Arabia. It is also accompanied by a decline in dependence on oil for GDP growth. According to Raid et al. (2024), the contribution of Saudi Arabia's oil sector to GDP dropped from 77% to approximately 40% between 1970 and 2020. The change shows that non-oil sectors in Saudi Arabia have stabilized over the years, resulting in significant economic benefits. It also illustrates reduced economic exposure to negative fluctuations in global oil prices. Balanced development in Saudi Arabia has led to sustainable growth of non-oil sectors.

Reviewing Transition

The transition process in Saudi Arabia has led to significant developments in different sectors. For instance, the government has created plans to increase gas production by expanding the Jafurah unconventional gas field to sustain its energy transition initiatives (PwC, 2024). The program to transition to renewable energy is important in sustaining the country's economic development. A report by PwC (2024) shows that gas production at Jafurah is projected to begin in the third quarter of 2025, with output anticipated to rise to 2 bcf each day by 2030. More government initiatives are also dedicated to expanding renewable energy production. For instance, the government has set the goal of increasing renewable energy capacity by 20GW each year to achieve a target of 130GW by 2030 (PwC, 2024). Other plans are dedicated to developing the solar energy sector to increase the production of renewable energy. For instance, the 700MW Al-Rass solar plant is a part of the state's ambitious plan to expand renewable energy sources, with the capacity expected to grow to 21GW by 2026 (PwC, 2024). The transition to renewable energy is vital to advancing industries in Saudi Arabia. Renewable energy projects in the country are intended to generate 43,698 GWh of power yearly (Suliman, 2024). The progress attained in the energy transition process demonstrates Saudi Arabia's capability to create new opportunities, promote development, and ensure sustainability.

Saudi Arabia has also transitioned to an education system that contributes to the development of skills and knowledge required to meet its economic growth goals. Based on a report by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, or OECD (2020), the government of Saudi recognizes that meeting the needs of the modern knowledge-based economy means that it has to develop a skilled labor force, making education a key part of the Vision 2030 plan. As a result, various achievements have been realized to ensure improved access to basic and higher education and enhance training standards. For instance, transition efforts in the education sector entail implementation of a new evaluation system that promotes student learning and a career development plan for teachers based on performance. The government's expenditure on education grew from 5.3% of GDP in 1985 to 7.5% in 2018 (Alam et al., 2022). With more resources allocated to education reforms, new agencies have been developed in Saudi Arabia to oversee the transition to better education standards. The OECD (2020) indicates that the Education Training and Evaluation Commission (ETEC) has been established as a national accreditation, standards-setting, and assessment

body across the country. One of the key roles of ETEC in the transition process is to create a new school evaluation framework that will develop clear national standards for schooling and steps for self-evaluation and external assessment. ETEC is also required to identify new methods to benchmark the performance of schools in Saudi Arabia. The transition initiatives in the Saudi Arabian education sector focus on establishing high performance standards to improve skills development.

The agricultural sector in Saudi Arabia has also undergone transition to contribute significantly to national development. The Ministry of Environment, Water and Irrigation (n.d.) illustrates that adopting technological innovations in agriculture is essential to meet the ambitious goals set by the Saudi government. Various programs, supported by technology, have been developed in the country to promote a transition to sustainable agricultural practices. For example, the Aquaculture Development Program aims to improve the survival rates of aquaculture species and lower expenses by at least 30% each year to achieve savings of over \$400 million (Ministry of Environment, Water and Irrigation, n.d.). Some of the activities that the government has undertaken under the program include examining current and potential feeds and testing better feed formulations to reduce costs. Irrigation and water management technologies are also a part of the systems that the Saudi government promotes to foster transition to sustainable agricultural practices (Baljon, 2024). The government's aim is to reduce wastage of water in irrigation through the use of optimal technology for each soil type and plant. About 88% of freshwater withdrawals in Saudi Arabia occur in the agricultural sector (Li et al., 2023). Approaches such as linear move irrigation, center pivot irrigation, drip or partial irrigation, and smart irrigation are considered to be appropriate for increasing agricultural productivity while minimizing wastage of water (Ministry of Environment, Water and Irrigation, n.d.). Optimizing agricultural production is essential for increasing Saudi Arabia's economic performance.

Elevating Transformation

Significant transformations have occurred in various sectors as a result of the Saudi government's efforts to diversify the economy. One of the sectors that has been transformed considerably is the tourism industry. Anis and Salameh (2021) show that the Saudi Vision 2030 plan recognizes the need to grow the country's tourism and travel sector to enhance economic development. Increased tourism generates more income and earns the country more foreign exchange. While Saudi Arabia is one of the most popular destinations for pilgrimage tourism due to its Islamic tradition, it is also recognized for its geographical position and natural environmental factors such as deserts, high mountains, and plains (Hammond, 2024; Kayal, 2023; Anis & Salameh, 2021). As a result of the significance of the tourism sector, the Saudi government has launched a wide range of transformations to enhance its performance. For instance, the Ministry of Tourism announced a plan in October 2021 to invest approximately \$1 trillion in the industry over a period of 10 years (Oxford Business Group, n.d.). The country has also become more liberal as restrictions imposed on visas, cinemas, and other social activities have been lifted (BBC, 2019; Juma et al., 2021; Embassy of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Washington DC., 2019). These efforts illustrate the government's commitment to advancing the tourism sector. The Red Sea Global project is also a significant undertaking for enhancing the performance of the tourism sector (Maqbool et al., 2024). More destinations have been identified for increased investment since they present opportunities for attracting tourists. They include Jeddah, Riyadh, Al Ula, and Aseer (Mir & Kulibi, 2023; Oxford Business Group, n.d.). Increased investment in the tourism sector signifies major transformation to enhance its performance and contribute to economic diversification.

Transformations in Saudi Arabia's exports also indicate increased government efforts to diversify the economy. Gibbon (2024) indicates that Saudi Arabia's non-oil exports increased by nearly 13% to \$6.7 billion in October 2024 compared to the same period a year earlier. Some of the products that contributed to the growth in non-oil exports include chemicals, plastics, and rubber products. Gibbon (2024) shows that chemical products accounted for approximately 26.8% of the exports, while rubber products and plastics constituted about 23.7% of the goods. Agricultural products have also contributed to the growth of Saudi Arabia's non-oil exports. The country has become one of the largest exporters of dates worldwide, accounting for approximately 14% of global date exports (Alamri et al., 2024; Saudi Press Agency, 2024). This and revenues from other non-oil exports contribute to the country's income.

The manufacturing sector in Saudi Arabia has also transformed over the years due to economic diversification initiatives. The sector, excluding petroleum refining, has grown by 4.1%, contributing 8.3% to the nation's GDP over the past year (Knight, 2022). The expansion is largely attributed to government-led initiatives aimed at attracting both local and foreign investments. The efforts encompass offering incentives to attract foreign investors. Currently, foreign investments make up approximately 39% of total investments in Saudi Arabia's industrial sector (Knight, 2022). The investments have considerably increased local production in the country. Between January and May 2022, international investments represented about 8% of the value of established and developing factories in the Kingdom (Knight, 2022). Other companies in Saudi Arabia have been developed through joint ventures, indicating the importance of FDI in the growth of the industrial sector. Saudi Arabia has achieved considerable growth in the manufacturing sector, as it was approximately SAR 32 billion in 1974 and increased to nearly SAR 319.5 billion in 2018 (Ali,

2020). The growth reflects the success of the government's strategy to foster a more diverse and sustainable industrial base, attracting substantial foreign capital and partnerships for supporting local production.

Anticipating Transmogrification

Targeted interventions by the government of Saudi Arabia to ensure changes and transformations that enhance economic diversification will potentially lead to transmogrification. Tonelli (2024) notes that transmogrification differs from transformation as it involves challenging and altering the fundamental principles of a context. It represents a potential emerging trend in organizations, highlighting the importance of awareness among organizations and employees. Understanding what transformation entails helps to identify individuals capable of driving change, aligning them with organizational plans. The transmogrification model contributes to systems psychodynamics, offering insight into underlying transformational processes and the reasons for potential change (Tonelli, 2024). The model acknowledges the possibilities of venturing into unknown spheres, which necessitates new developments to adapt to new contexts such that the point of original departure is unrecognized at the point of advanced progress.

As a result of transmogrification, the early phases of Saudi Arabia's economic transformations will possibly be unrecognized as the starting point for change due to adaptation to new contexts. For instance, Saudi Arabia has joined various regional and international organizations to create networks for fostering economic ties. The country is a member of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), which comprises other states such as Qatar, Kuwait, the UAE, Bahrain, and Oman (International Trade Administration, 2024). GCC membership confers special investment and trade privileges within the countries. The GCC also implemented a Customs Union in 2003, which allows free movement of goods and services among member states (International Trade Administration, 2024). The privileges imply that Saudi Arabia will potentially focus on expanding regional trade to advance its economic performance. The outcome of transmogrification is positive for Saudi Arabians as a non-oil economy presents new opportunities for enhancing people's living standards.

Transmogrification is also associated with globalization as states focus on enhancing economic activities beyond their borders. Globalization is a multifaceted and complex phenomenon that significantly influences the world's economies by facilitating interactions among traders in different countries (Cervantes et al., 2020; Siddiqui, 2020). After attaining considerable economic transformations, Saudi Arabia will likely capitalize on globalization to allow local companies to access more customers in different parts of the world. Due to globalization, trade is not limited to within countries' borders but the entire world (Cervantes et al., 2020; Islam et al., 2019; Baidoo et al., 2023). Globalization promotes the creation of a transnational single market based on the principles of free movement of goods and services facilitated by increased exchange of information, which creates an opportunity for states to engage in a wide range of economic transactions. Therefore, more Saudi Arabians are likely to embrace economic concepts associated with globalization as previous country characteristics become extinct.

Conclusion

Change, transition, and transformation of Saudi Arabia's economy is not happening by chance; it entails instead deliberate efforts by the nation's leadership to ensure diversification and sustainability. Various changes in sectors such as tourism, agriculture, education, and commerce have led to transformations aligned with the government's strategic diversification goals. Leadership development opportunities also emerge from the economic diversification programs implemented in different sectors in Saudi Arabia. International partnerships embraced in implementing large projects bring together experts from various parts of the world, which enhances skills and leadership competencies for Saudi citizens. Local professionals also possess the competencies to collaborate with international experts to drive Saudi Arabia's economic transformation in accordance with the Vision 2030 plan. Saudi Arabia is steadily advancing in empowering its citizens by providing them with essential skills and knowledge to thrive and become more adaptable in the evolving economic landscape. Initiatives such as the MiSK Foundation and the Human Capability Development Program in Saudi Arabia illustrate the government's efforts to enhance citizens' contribution to the development agenda in collaboration with international experts. While diversity, harmony, and alignment are central to timely project delivery, leaders should be flexible to overcome challenges such as variations in cultural norms, talent shortages, and language barriers. After the transformations, Saudi Arabia is likely to experience transmogrification as previous economic changes will not be recognized by future generations. Instead, people will pay attention to the economic effects of globalization apparent in regional blocs such as the GCC, and beyond in the global community. The outcome is beneficial to Saudi Arabia as it presents new and unique opportunities for strengthening economic development and advancement.

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