

Strategic Leadership Competencies: Evidence from the State of Qatar

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Abstract

Leading in the age of more chaotic environments with newly emerging challenges and crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, demands special strategic leadership (SL) competencies. The main purpose of this study is to identify a specific SL set of competencies that should be available to strategic leaders and verify their availability to top-level public sector managers in the State of Qatar. An empirical analysis of 120 respondents revealed strategic leadership competency gaps among Qatari top-level managers. Further, top-level managers were not fully engaged in determining their organizations' strategic direction, did not exercise all SL behaviors, and only partially demonstrated strategic leadership characteristics, as they were more engaged in the operational activities of leadership. The study revealed that there are no statistically significant differences among respondents toward strategic leadership behaviors and characteristics attributed to their personal and occupational variables. The findings of this study will significantly contribute to enhancing and building strategic leadership competencies for top-level managers in the public sector organizations. A list of strategic leadership competencies that this research identified can serve as a frame of reference for designing strategic leadership training and development programs to enhance strategic leaders' capacities to manage their organizations more effectively.

Keywords

Strategic Leadership, Top-Level Managers, Competencies, Public Sector, The State of Qatar

1. Introduction

To achieve strategic goals, top-level executives of public sector organizations must possess and master certain competencies. These competencies, including

knowledge and awareness, skills and abilities, behaviors, and other characteristics (or KSABOs thereafter), are assumed to be central to the management and leadership of efforts leading to the achievement of the national vision and strategic goals. Existing strategic leadership literature conforms to this assumption and suggests that top-level managers, as key decision and policy makers, play a significant role in strategy formulation and implementation relating to their organizations, and that this requires specific knowledge, skills, and leadership styles (Elenkov, Judge, & Wright, 2005; Gupta & Govindarajan, 1984; Hambrick & Mason, 1984; Silva, Figueroa, & González-Reinhart, 2007; Shao, Feng, & Hu, 2017). However, the extant leadership literature has mainly focused on leadership competencies with a more generic label (e.g., the work of Heinen et al., 2019) and little research has been strategic-leadership-specific. Further, each “competency” has received a reasonable amount of attention in the leadership literature, but not in an all-inclusive list covering all competency areas, and seldom in the special context of high-stakes and deep-uncertainty environments that can make or break organizations (Schoemaker, Krupp, & Howland, 2013). This may be because of the “difficulty to imagine an all-inclusive list of competencies” (Guillot, 2003: 74). Thus, there is no universal consensus or final agreement among scholars on what exactly these competencies are. Yet, literature has shown that certain competencies are centrally associated with strategic leadership effectiveness (e.g., Guillot, 2003). Nevertheless, aligning these competencies to the strategic type of leadership has received very little scholarly attention.

Based on the description above, the aims of this study are to: 1) identify a list of relevant groupings of the most essential strategic leadership competencies (i.e., KSABOs) required for top-level managers to effectively manage and lead their organizations’ strategic direction, 2) identify the extent to which these essential strategic leadership competencies (behaviors and other characteristics in particular) are available to the Qatari top-level public sector managers, and 3) give recommendations to public sector policy and decision makers to bridge top-level public sector managers’ competency gaps and deficiencies, and thereby help them manage their organizations’ strategic goals effectively.

2. Theoretical Background and Previous Research

2.1. Strategic Leadership (SL)

It is recognized that “the common usage of the term *strategic* is related to the concept of strategy—simply a plan of action for accomplishing a goal” (Guillot, 2003: 67). On the other hand, *strategic leadership* is defined as “the ability of an experienced, senior leader who has wisdom and vision to create and execute plans and make consequential decisions in the volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous strategic environment” (Guillot, 2003: 68). Remarkably, an early citation on strategic leadership was the work of Hosmer (1982). The researcher noted that a leader must constantly consider the organizational strategy in rela-

tion to the external environment, and that leadership theories did not capture this reality. Since then, strategic leadership has been recognized as a distinct form of leadership and has started to attract interest and an identity.

To continue giving strategic leadership its eminent character and meaning, [Norzailan, Yusof, and Othman \(2016: 66\)](#) noted that SL is “about leadership activities at higher levels of a firm”. These researchers believe that, unlike leadership at the operational level, which relies mainly on technical skills and is usually procedure-bound, strategic leadership requires a different mindset. [Norzailan, Othman, and Ishizaki \(2016\)](#) conform to this assumption and believe that while “general” leadership skills are still important, they are not sufficient for strategic leadership. Subscribing to this view, [Gerras \(2010: 28\)](#) suggested that, compared to a more “generic” form of leadership, “strategic leaders need to be able to envision long-range future requirements and to apply integrative thinking skills”, among many other competencies that are specific to strategic leaders.

In explaining strategic leadership further, [Boal and Hooijberg \(2000\)](#) argued that the essence of strategic leadership involves learning and changing capacities and managerial wisdom. According to these researchers, strategic leadership integrates charismatic, transformational, and visionary leadership theories, adding to them the concepts of social intelligence. Similarly, [Sebnem et al. \(2011\)](#) viewed strategic leadership as a “three-dimensional” concept: charismatic, transformational, and visionary. In the same vein, [Adair \(2009\)](#) conceptualized leadership into three layers: the small team level with a given task(s); the operational level with several team leaders; and the strategic level of a whole organization. [Agyepong et al. \(2018\)](#) and [Guillot \(2003\)](#) expanded the boundaries of the environment in which strategic leaders work, to include the national, sub-national, and international levels. The work of [Agyepong et al. \(2018\)](#), for example, demonstrated that strategic leadership could be practiced at the national, sub-national or international agency levels, involving the ability to make decisions, communicate vision, develop structures and processes, control systems and manage multiple constituencies in a participatory leadership environment. Closely enough, and reflecting on the military environment, [Guillot \(2003\)](#) identified four distinct, interrelated parts of strategic leadership: the national security, domestic, military, and international environments (see [Figure 1](#)). For the author, strategic leaders usually work within both political and military environments, hence, cannot separate these four components, especially when they are dealing with issues relating to the national level.

As previously noted, the literature on strategic leadership is still in its early stage of development. Specifically, very little empirical research has been conducted to capture and verify the full range of competencies required for strategic leaders to lead effectively. Nevertheless, a few attempts have been made to address certain competencies that are viewed as essential to strategic leadership performance. [Coban, Ozdemir, and Pisapia \(2019\)](#), for example, have examined the relationship between the strategic leadership attitudes of top-level managers at the Ministry of National Education (MoNE) in Turkey and their competencies

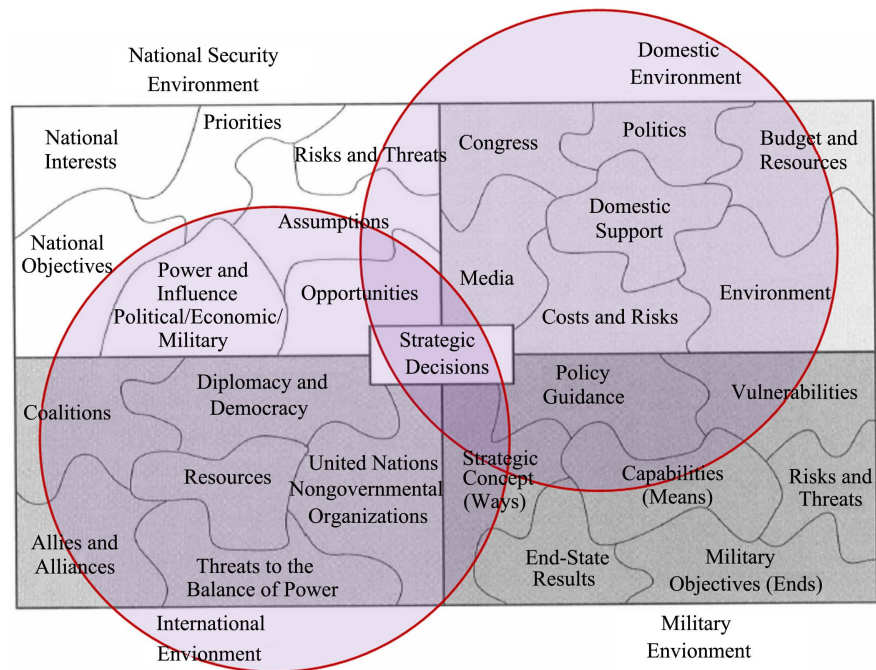


Figure 1. Four distinct, interrelated parts of strategic leadership (Adopted from Guillot, 2003: p. 69).

for managing organizational change, and found a highly positive relationship between the two variables. Similarly, a study conducted by Irtaimeh (2018) in the Jordanian context found that strategic leadership competencies (including dimensions of strategic thinking competencies and leadership competencies) have a significant impact on core competencies (team working, empowerment, communication, and influence).

In the Zimbabwean context, a study conducted by Mapetere et al. (2012) revealed that relatively low leadership involvement in strategy implementation and the lack of a strategic, well-articulated vision and communication led to limited strategy success. Maarten and Mikhail (2010) have also examined the potentials for strategic success in global firms working in Russia through the building of strategic leadership competencies. The findings support the importance of conducting a strategic Leadership Growth Profile (LGP) analysis of the anticipated strategic managers, as this was linked to strategic success.

In recognition of the importance of strategic leaders having certain skills and characteristics, the results of the study conducted by Hirschi and Jones (2009) showed that national culture, competitiveness, and market development affect strategic leadership and that the characteristics and skills of strategic leaders play a crucial role in enabling them to see the big picture ahead. Seeing the big picture, however, is only part of the story in strategic leadership, as strategic leaders must also be adaptive in reacting to environmental shifts. Research by Schoemaker, Krupp, and Howland (2013), and based on a survey of more than 20,000 executives, confirmed this assumption and identified six skills that, when mastered and used, allow leaders to think strategically and navigate the unknown ef-

fectively. These are the abilities to anticipate, challenge, interpret, decide, align, and learn.

Notably, substantial challenges that the 21st century has brought to contemporary organizations, such as building people’s capacities and understanding and rapidly changing technological advancements have created a need for different forms of leaders—i.e., strategic leaders (Irtaimeh, 2018). In theory, although the concept has recently gained more attention, it is still considered a relatively under-researched area.

2.2. Strategic Leadership “Competencies”

In attempting to define the term “competency”, Gerras (2010: 28) stated that “competencies are the knowledge, skills, attributes, and capacities that enable a leader to perform his [*her*] required tasks”. According to the researcher, “what typically distinguishes a competency from a trait [for example] is the understanding that competencies can be developed and significantly improved for most individuals” through education and by reflective experience. For Gerras (2010: 28), “the major categories of leadership competencies consist of conceptual, technical, and interpersonal”.

While there is no universally agreed-upon definition of the concept of “competency”, Javidan (1998) attempted to establish differences among “core competency”, “competency”, “capability”, and “resources” in strategic management, in a hierarchical order, based on their difficulty and value. Javidan’s (1998) classification is an attempt to create a “universal understanding” of these concepts (Figure 2).

As contemporary organizations become more networked and have become more involved and engaged in sophisticated governance arrangements and actions, strategic leadership competencies, in particular, appear to be at the core of policy makers’ attention and focus. That is simply because SLs demand special, untraditional management methods and competencies in making decisions, developing flexible structures, enabling and inspiring people, communicating future vision, and managing multiple and networked constituencies (Ireland & Hitt, 1999; Bolden, 2011; Bass, 2007). Norzailan, Yusof, and Othman (2016) confirmed that strategic leaders, to be effective in their role, must have a certain predisposition and a set of key competencies.

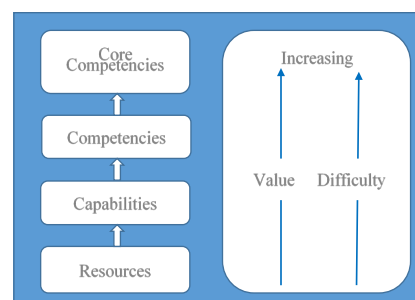


Figure 2. The competency hierarchy (Javidan, 1998).

It is widely acknowledged that the extant literature on leadership has addressed “*leadership*” competencies in a more general term. Very little scholarly research has addressed “*strategic leadership* competencies” as such (see, for example, Weiler & Dohlen, 2019; Ruben, 2019; Fasial & Ayub, 2018). Closely enough, few attempts were made to introduce the concept of “strategic thinking competency”, with little insight into what it takes to become a strategic thinker (Norzailan, Yusof, & Othman, 2016; Farazmand, 2007). All the same, endeavors to conceptualize the concept of “strategic leadership competency” in the world of academic literature are still in progress (Fairholm & Fairholm, 2009). This has resulted in a lack of theoretical understanding, leaving little guidance for strategic leaders (Liedtka & Rosenblum, 1998).

The current research proposes that strategic leadership competencies include *knowledge* and *awareness*, *skills* and *abilities*, *behaviors*, and *other characteristics* (KSABOs). For purposes of this research, we also distinguish between those competencies that can easily be assessed by others due to their obtrusive observability nature, on the one hand, and those competencies that are unobtrusively observable by others and that can mainly be assessed by the SLs themselves, on the other hand (Figure 3). In particular, the obtrusively observable competencies (e.g. behaviors and characteristics) have been targeted for empirical testing in this research, as we used middle-level managers to judge the availability of these competencies to their top-level managers.

2.3. Knowledge and Awareness Competencies

Leading the strategic direction of an organization requires leaders who have a “bird’s eye view” so that they can read the organization’s external environment as well as internal capabilities (Norzailan, Yusof, & Othman, 2016; Vera & Crossan, 2004). In a similar view, Goldman (2012) suggested that strategic leaders should have a good understanding of the external environment so that they can deal with the changes, challenges, and discontinuities that emerge from time to time.

Sotarauta (2005) and Huang (2009) stressed the importance of having strategic thinking and strategic planning skills and knowledge for the strategic leader to perform effectively. To help to determine specific strategy weights and utilizing the balanced scorecard (BSC) framework developed by Kaplan and Norton

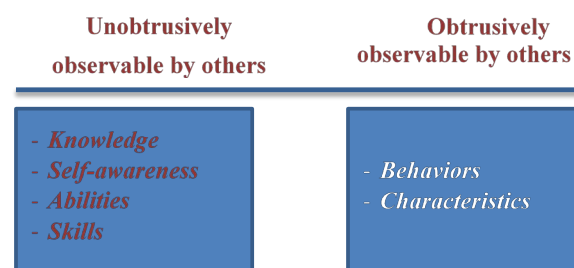


Figure 3. Unobtrusively-obtrusively observable strategic competencies suggested for this study.

(1992), as well as using key performance indicators (KPIs), Huang (2009) proposed an integrated view of overall organizational performance as a powerful tool for strategic planning. The idea is to place more emphasis on learning and growth, internal process, and customer and financial performance in the context of strategic leadership, taking into account both financial and non-financial aspects.

In distinguishing between innovative thinking and strategic thinking, Deshler (2018) agreed that a strategic leader must understand and recognize themes, trends, and implications, and envision big ideas and their exact implications in real-life situations. Adding to this, Guillot (2003) suggested that strategic leaders must be culturally sensitive. Table 1 presents strategic leadership competencies relating to *knowledge* and *awareness* as suggested by scholars in the field.

2.4. Skills and Abilities Competencies

For strategic leaders to be effective in their roles, Norzailan, Yusof, and Othman (2016: 66) proposed three key competencies that they must have. These are “strategic thinking skills (to be able to think out of the box [see also, Mintzberg, 1994], skills in managing politics (to deal with the key coalitions and stakeholders involved in the strategizing process) and change management) to be able to realign internal capabilities to support the new strategy”. Sotarauta (2005) confirmed that strategic leaders must have strategic thinking and planning skills. In this regard, Sotarauta (2005: 69) added, “strategic leaders should have: 1) the ability to define strategies and visions, 2) the ability to transform these visions into focused strategies and action, 3) the ability to transform crisis situations into something constructive, 4) the ability to launch, manage and lead processes persistently in different phases, 5) the ability to find correct timing for development work and seize the competitive advantage by being a pioneer, and 6) the ability to achieve big objectives”.

Table 1. Summary of strategic leadership competencies relating to knowledge and awareness as suggested by scholars in the field.

Competency	Reference in literature
Knowledge and awareness (Strategic leaders should...)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> read the organization’s external and internal environments precisely 	Norzailan, Yusof, & Othman (2016); Vera & Crossan (2004)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> know how to deal with challenges emerging from the external environment 	Goldman (2012)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> understand and recognize themes, trends, and data applications envision big ideas and their implications 	Deshler (2018)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> know about strategic planning processes, evaluation, and requirements 	Sotarauta (2005); Huang (2009)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> be aware of cultural sensitivity 	Guillot (2003)

Source: Drawn from multiple sources.

In their endeavor to distinguish between successful and less successful leaders, Pisapia, Reyes-Guerra, and Coukos-Semmel (2005) identified three cognitive processes (or skills) associated with strategic thinking. These skills are systems thinking skill (“the ability to see systems holistically by understanding the properties, forces, patterns and interrelationships that shape the behaviors of the systems which provides options for actions”, p. 48), reframing skill (“the ability to switch attention across multiple perspectives, frames, mental models and paradigms in order to generate new insights and options for actions”, p. 52), and reflecting skill (“the ability to weave logical and rational thinking through the use of perceptions, experience and information to make [a] judgment”, p. 56). Likewise, Goldman et al. (2015) confirmed that strategic leaders must be able to connect and synthesize ideas. Schoemaker, Krupp, and Howland (2013) identified six skills that, when mastered and used at one time, allow leaders to think strategically and navigate the unknown effectively. These skills are the abilities to anticipate, challenge, interpret, decide, align, and learn. Graetz (2012: 457) confirmed that strategic leaders must use “imagination to assess and interpret the cues from the external environment and deciding how to respond to them”. For Stigter and Cooper (2015) and Appiah-Adu and Aming (2016), signs of change are not very clear and require sense-making ability on the part of the strategic leader. **Table 2** presents strategic leadership competencies relating to *skills* and *abilities* as suggested by scholars in the field that should be available to strategic leaders to manage effectively.

Table 2. Summary of strategic leadership competencies relating to *skills* and *abilities* as suggested by scholars in the field.

Competency	Reference in literature
<i>Skills & abilities (Strategic leaders should have...)</i>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the ability to imagine, anticipate, assess, interpret, and challenge environmental changes; decide upon and align strategies in dealing with them; learn from their experiences; and have sense-making ability 	Schoemaker, Krupp, & Howland (2013); Graetz (2012); Stigter & Cooper (2015); Appiah-Adu & Aming (2016)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the ability to define strategies and visions; transform visions into strategies and action; transform crisis into something constructive; launch, manage, and lead change processes; find the correct timing for change and development; and achieve big objectives 	Sotarauta (2005); Agyepong et al. (2018)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the ability to connect and synthesize ideas 	Goldman et al. (2015)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the ability to think and plan strategically, and manage politics and change 	Norzailan, Yusof, & Othman (2016); Mintzberg (1994); Sotarauta (2005); Farazmand (2007)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the ability to think systematically, and have reframing and reflecting skills 	Pisapia, Reyes-Guerra, & Coukos-Semmel (2005)

Source: Drawn from multiple sources.

2.5. “Practiced” Behavioral Competencies

Guillot (2003) asserted that certain “behaviors” relating to strategic leadership can be learned, as strategic leaders are made, not born. The researcher argued that strategic leaders must anticipate, lead, and foster change, seek novel ideas and foster creativity, act effectively in times of chaos, critically analyze their own thinking, build effective teams, negotiate effectively, assume the role of mentor and teacher, and invest in developing other leaders.

In his research, Shao (2019) found that “idealized influence” and “inspirational motivation” behaviors in transformational leadership are significant behavioral drivers of business strategic alignment. Beer and Eisenstat (2000) stressed the importance of demonstrating six effective strategic leadership practices in strategy formulation and implementation. These are: 1) a top-down direction with upward influence; 2) clear strategies; 3) an effective top management team; 4) open vertical communication; 5) effective coordination; and 6) the allocation of clear accountability and authority to middle management. Likewise, Bass (2007: 42) offered nine “effective strategic leadership practices”. These being: “1) focusing attention on outcomes and processes; 2) seeking to acquire and leverage knowledge; 3) fostering learning, and creativity; 4) improving workflows by attention to relationships; 5) anticipating internal and external environmental changes; 6) maintaining a global mindset; 7) meeting the diversity of the interests of the multiple stakeholders; 8) building for the long-term while meeting short-term needs; and 9) developing human capital”. Similarly, Ireland and Hitt (1999) proposed six components of effective strategic leadership in which strategic leaders must get involved, including: 1) determining the organization’s purpose or vision; 2) exploiting and maintaining core competencies; 3) developing human capital; 4) sustaining an effective organizational culture; 5) emphasizing ethical practices; and 6) establishing balanced organizational controls. Building on the work of Hitt, Ireland, and Hoskisson (1995), Hagen, Hassan, and Amin (1998) examined the six core competencies developed by the previous researchers and found that these competencies were present to the respondents (in order of importance) as follows: 1) determining strategic direction; 2) developing human capital; 3) exploiting and maintaining core competencies; 4) sustaining an effective corporate culture; 5) emphasizing ethical practices; and 6) establishing strategic controls. Table 3 presents strategic leadership competencies relating to strategic leaders’ behaviors as suggested by scholars in the field.

2.6. Characteristics of Strategic Leaders

The extant literature on strategic leadership stressed that, for strategic leaders to perform successfully, they must possess certain characteristics, qualities, traits, and attitudes. Schoemaker, Krupp, and Howland (2013), for example, suggested that strategic leaders should be resolute and flexible, and show persistence in the face of setbacks. Norzailan, Othman, and Ishizaki (2016) confirmed that strategic leaders must be persistent and resilient in order to face difficulties and failures

Table 3. Summary of strategic leadership behaviors as suggested by scholars in the field.

Competency	Reference in literature
<i>Behaviors (Strategic leaders should...)</i>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> demonstrate idealized influence and inspirational motivation behaviors; and anticipate, lead, and foster change 	Shao (2019); Guillot (2003)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> give top-down clear directions and facilitate upward communication; formulate clear strategies; support effective coordination; and allocate clear accountability and authority to middle management 	Beer & Eisenstat (2000)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> focus attention on outcomes and processes; seek and leverage knowledge; foster learning and creativity; improve workflows by paying attention to relationships; maintain a global mindset; meet the interests of multiple stakeholders; work on long-term goals while meeting short-term needs; and develop human capital 	Bass (2007)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> determine the organization's purpose or vision and strategic direction; exploit and maintain core competencies; develop human capital; sustain an effective organizational culture; emphasize ethical practices; and establish balanced controls 	Ireland & Hitt (1999); Hitt, Ireland, & Hoskisson (1995); Hagen, Hassan, & Amin (1998)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> seek novel ideas and foster creativity; effectively act in times of chaos; critically analyze one's own thinking; build effective teams; negotiate effectively; assume the role of mentor and teacher; and invest in developing other leaders 	Guillot (2003)

Source: Drawn from multiple sources.

and deal with uncertainties. Likewise, Sotarauta (2005) argued that the knowledge economy requires brave and visionary leaders who can deal with new emergent innovative networks to get things done.

In the military sector, Wong et al. (2003) identified six meta-competencies for a strategic leader, including identity, mental agility, cross-cultural savvy, interpersonal maturity, world-class warrior, and professional astuteness. In a similar vein, Guillot (2003) proposed a "must-have" list of competencies that seem essential for strategic leaders to have. To the researcher, leaders must be proactive in responding to the strategic environment as vision makers, be aware of cultural sensitivity, and be transformational in inspiring people toward shared goals and values. In fact, strategic leaders serve as champions of innovation, adaptation, and the incubation of new creative ideas (Bass, 2007). Also, close to Guillot (2003), Coban, Ozdemir, and Pisapia (2019) conformed to the view that strategic leaders should have a vision in terms of the direction in which employees should go.

Marshall (2019) saw passion, ambition, and commitment to shared values as key success qualities of strategic leaders. Marshall (2019) also believed that trust, respect, and agility are qualities necessary for strategic leaders to help their organizations move forward strategically. Further, the researcher viewed data

analysis, agility and creativity, horizon scanning, diversity and inclusivity, and E4 leadership (i.e., be energized; empowered and empower others; be engaged and engage others) as essential for today's strategic leaders and those of the future. Agyepong et al. (2018: ii35) also confirmed that strategic leaders should have certain competency requirements, such as "providing vision and inspiration for the organization, core personal values and character qualities such as integrity and trustworthiness, [...] adapting to situations and context and creating and maintaining effective change and systems". Sashkin (1992) added cognitive capacity, self-efficacy, and the power motive as personal requirements for competence in strategic leadership. Table 4 presents strategic leadership competencies relating to "leaders' characteristics" as suggested by scholars in the field.

As previously noted, for purposes of this research, we distinguish between those competencies that can easily be assessed by others due to their obtrusive observability nature, on the one hand, and those competencies that are unobtrusively observable by others and that can mainly be assessed by the SLs themselves, on the other hand (Figure 3). In particular, the obtrusively observable competencies (e.g. behaviors and characteristics) have been targeted for empirical testing in this research, as we used middle-level managers to judge the availability of these competencies to their top-level managers.

Based on the foregoing discussion, this study hypothesizes that:

Table 4. Summary of strategic leadership *characteristics* as suggested by scholars in the field.

Competency	Reference in literature
<i>SLs' characteristics (Strategic leaders should...)</i>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> be inclusive, resolute, and flexible, and show persistence and resilience in facing difficulties and uncertainties 	Schoemaker, Krupp, & Howland (2013); Norzailan, Othman, & Ishizaki (2016); Marshall (2019)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> be brave; be visionary; act as champions of innovation; and adapt and incubate new ideas 	Sotarauta (2005); Coban, Ozdemir, & Pisapia (2019); Bass (2007)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> have mental agility and creativity; be cross-culturally savvy; have interpersonal maturity; be world-class warriors; and have professional astuteness 	Wong et al. (2003)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> be proactive 	Guillot (2003)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> be energized; be empowered and empower others; be engaged and engage others 	Marshall (2019)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> be trustworthy and respectful; have integrity, agility, passion, and ambition; and have commitment to shared values 	Marshall (2019); Agyepong et al. (2018)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> have cognitive capacity, self-efficacy, and the power motive 	Sashkin (1992)

Source: Drawn from multiple sources.

H1: There is a high degree of agreement among the study respondents that their top-level managers exhibit strategic leadership behaviors in their positive values.

H2: There is a high degree of agreement among the study respondents that their top-level managers have strategic leadership characteristics in their positive values.

H3: There are no statistically significant differences (at the significance level of $\alpha \leq 0.05$) among respondents about the study concepts (strategic leadership behaviors) and (strategic leadership characteristics) attributed to their personal and occupational variables.

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Research Design

This study follows four research steps. First, and based on the literature reviewed on the topic, we identified the competencies that are essentially required for strategic leaders to effectively manage and lead their organizations strategic direction. Second, a questionnaire survey was specifically designed for this study to measure the availability level of these competencies (behaviors and characteristics in particular) to the Qatari public sector top-level managers. Third, samples were collected using Qualtrics Web survey system. Fourth, data were collected and then analyzed using SPSS package.

3.2. Instrument/Measurement

Based on a review of the literature on the topic, a quantitative research design was employed. To do so, a pre-tested, self-administered questionnaire survey was designed particularly for this study to collect data from the target population. This custom-tailored questionnaire survey was used to target the views of middle-level managers in Qatari public sector organizations on the level of certain strategic leadership competencies available to their top-level managers. The survey was ethically pre-approved and participation was voluntary and completely anonymous.

A 5-point Likert scale was used in the survey and given the following values: “1 = strongly disagree”, “2 = disagree”, “3 = not sure”, “4 = agree”, and “5 = strongly agree”. Lower scores are associated with a lesser extent of availability of strategic leadership practices. In this study, mean values ranging between 3.19 and 3.34 were considered neutral values. Therefore, values greater than 3.34 were considered an overall approval, while values below 3.19 indicated a disapproval response.

The survey consisted of three parts. Part I included personal information (gender, age, and level of education) and occupational information (years of service and job level). Part II displayed strategic leadership behaviors practiced by the target population and consisted of 30 items. Part III displayed characteristics of strategic leaders and consisted of 20 items.

3.3. Population and Sampling

The survey for this study was randomly distributed to 152 respondents representing middle-level employees working in different Qatari public sector organizations, using the electronic Qualtrics platform. A total of 129 participants filled out the questionnaire, creating a response rate of 85%; of these, 120 were valid for analysis. Although the respondents could be categorized into strata or clusters depending on the type of public organization, this was not a wise choice due to the heterogeneity of the data and because most questions treated the sample as a whole, without subdividing it depending on strata or clusters. Therefore, the sampling method chosen was simple random sampling.

3.4. Validity and Reliability

In determining the consistency of the instrument, the Cronbach's Alpha test was used to measure the reliability of the study dimensions (see **Table 5**). The overall Cronbach Alpha for all items in the research instrument was determined as 0.861, which was detected as higher than the threshold value of 0.7 and proves that research scale was clearly understood by the participants and the question in the scale were not inaccurate, therefore, the research instrument was deemed very reliable.

4. Study Findings and Discussion

Personal and Occupational Characteristics of Respondents

A total of 120 employees completed the survey; about 53% of them were male respondents. Almost a half of the respondents (47.5%) fall in the age group of 31 to 40 years old, 30% of them have had 16 to 20 years of experience, with 55% holding master's degrees, and most of them (60%) are Division Heads. Personal and occupational factors are presented in **Table 6**.

Validating the study hypotheses

Validating H1:

This hypothesis states that there is a high degree of agreement among the study respondents that their top-level managers exhibit strategic leadership behaviors in their positive values.

Table 7 shows descriptive statistics of the respondents' degree of agreement on the availability of strategic leadership behaviors to Qatari top-level managers in their positive value. The overall mean for all items was 3.20, which means that respondents agreed that only certain SL behaviors were available to Qatari

Table 5. Reliability statistics.

Factor	No. of Items	Cronbach alpha value
SL Behaviors	30	0.847
SL Characteristics	20	0.875
<i>Overall</i>		0.861

Table 6. Distribution of respondents according to their personal and occupational characteristics.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Gender	Male	64	53.0	53.0
	Female	56	47.0	47.0
	Total	120	100.0	100.0
Years of Service	less than 5 years	12	10.0	10.0
	5 - 10 years	24	20.0	20.0
	11 - 15 years	24	20.0	20.0
	16 - 20 years	36	30.0	30.0
	21 years or more	24	20.0	20.0
	Total	120	100.0	100.0
Job Level	division head	72	60.0	60.0
	department head	18	15.0	15.0
	main department head	12	10.0	10.0
	consultant	18	15.0	15.0
	Total	120	100.0	100.0
Age	20 - 30	15	12.5	12.5
	31 - 40	57	47.5	47.5
	41 - 50	45	37.5	37.5
	51 - 60	3	2.5	2.5
	Total	120	100.0	100.0
Qualification	bachelor	42	35.0	35.0
	master	66	55.0	55.0
	doctorate	12	10.0	10.0
	Total	120	100.0	100.0

Table 7. Descriptive statistics of the respondents' degree of agreement on strategic leadership behaviors.

	SL Behaviors of Qatari top-level managers	Mean	Std. Deviation
30	engage stakeholders in setting out organization's strategic plans	3.60	0.90
23	assume the role of mentor and teacher	3.55	1.60
16	emphasize ethical practices	3.48	1.20
11	meet the interests of multiple stakeholders	3.45	0.81
22	negotiate effectively whenever needed	3.43	1.11
27	conduct a systematic performance evaluation on the progress of achieving our strategic plans	3.40	1.01
29	establish partnerships and networks with communities, the private sector, and other civil society organizations	3.40	1.13

Continued

4	give clear top-down directions	3.35	1.23
7	focus attention on outcomes	3.35	1.19
10	maintain a global mindset	3.28	1.01
8	foster organizational learning processes	3.25	1.13
19	act effectively in the times of chaos	3.25	1.01
26	participate actively in national and international strategic leadership discussions	3.25	1.03
21	build effective teams	3.23	1.21
24	sustain an effective organizational culture	3.18	1.06
25	support research agendas on future strategic planning	3.18	1.17
9	improve work flows by attention to relationships	3.15	1.19
14	ensure developing human capital	3.15	1.17
28	design action plans for mobilizing public and political support for our organization's programs and policies	3.15	1.05
12	focus on long-term goals while meeting short-term needs	3.14	1.03
3	lead and foster strategic change	3.13	1.14
6	allocate clear accountability and authority to middle management	3.13	1.18
17	establish balanced control systems	3.13	1.11
1	demonstrate idealized influence	3.05	1.18
5	ensure that bottom-up communication is kept open	3.03	1.27
18	seek novel ideas and foster creativity	3.03	1.21
2	demonstrate inspirational motivation behaviors	2.98	1.10
20	critically analyze their own thinking	2.93	1.07
15	invest in developing other leaders	2.83	1.17
13	determine our organization's mission, vision, and national strategic direction	2.63	1.13
		3.20	1.126

top-level managers; yet responses have not shown high levels of agreement. Further, the standard deviation for all items was 1.126, which means that differences in the respondents' views about these items were relatively minimal. More specifically, the respondents agree that Qatari top-level managers engage stakeholders in setting their organizations' strategic plans (which achieved the highest level of agreement, with an average score of 3.6). They also consider multiple interests of the stakeholders, act as mentors to employees, emphasize ethical practices, negotiate effectively whenever needed, conduct systematic performance evaluations to achieve strategic plans, establish partnerships and networks with communities, private sector, and other civil society organizations, give clear top-down directions, and focus their attention on outcomes. At the same time, respondents tend to disagree on whether their top-level managers actually de-

termine their organizations' mission, vision, and national strategic direction (which achieved the lowest level of agreement, with an average score of 2.63). They also disagree that their top-level managers invest in developing other leaders, critically analyze their own thinking, demonstrate inspirational motivation behaviors, seek novel ideas and foster creativity, ensure that bottom-up communication is kept open, and demonstrate idealized influence. In conclusion, hypothesis H1 was partially accepted.

Looking deeper into these results, it can be concluded that Qatari top-level managers are not fully engaged in determining their organizations' strategic direction and do not exercise all strategic leadership behaviors, particularly transformational leadership practices. Instead, they are more engaged in the operational activities of leadership. This finding corresponds well with Norzailan, Yusof, and Othman's (2016), Norzailan, Othman, and Ishizaki's (2016), and Gerras' (2010) belief that strategic leaders [should] engage in activities at the higher levels of the organization and must be able to envision long-range future requirements, while a "generic type" of leadership is usually practiced at the operational level which mainly relies on technical skills and is usually procedure-bound.

Validating H2:

This hypothesis states that there is a high degree of agreement among the study respondents that their top-level managers have strategic leadership characteristics in their positive values. Table 8 shows the descriptive statistics of the respondents' degree of agreement on strategic leadership characteristics. The overall mean for all items is 3.30, which means that respondents agreed that only certain SL characteristics were available to Qatari top-level managers. However, the responses do not show high levels of agreement. Further, the standard deviation for all items is 1.099, which means that the difference in the respondents' views about these items was relatively minimal. More specifically, the respondents agree that their top-level managers are respectful (which achieved the highest level of agreement, with an average score of 3.95), are committed to shared values, have integrity, have the passion to achieve strategic goals, and are ambitious. At the same time, respondents tend to disagree that they view their top-level managers as world-class warriors (which achieved the lowest level of agreement, with an average score of 2.93). They also disagree that their top-level managers act as champions of innovation, have mental agility and creativity, are visionary, and have a willingness to empower employees. In conclusion, hypothesis H2 was partially accepted.

Looking deeper into these results, it can be concluded that Qatari top-level managers partially demonstrate SL characteristics. These managers should be combatant commanders in the midst of the journey toward the future to move forward strategically and be champions of innovation and change. They must also be creative and visionary, and have the willingness to empower their employees. These findings conform well with Sotarauta' (2005), Bass's (2007), Coban, Ozdemir, and Pisapia's (2019), and Agyepong et al.'s (2018) proposition

Table 8. Descriptive statistics of the respondents' degree of agreement on strategic leadership characteristics of Qatari top-level managers.

	SL Characteristics of Qatari top-level managers	Mean	Std. Deviation
16	are respectful	3.95	0.60
20	are committed to shared trustworthy values	3.60	1.10
17	have integrity	3.58	1.01
18	have a passion to achieve strategic goals	3.53	1.09
19	are ambitious	3.45	1.01
11	have professional astuteness	3.35	1.10
13	are energized and motivated	3.35	1.08
3	are persistent	3.30	1.05
15	have willingness to engage employees	3.30	1.09
4	are resilient in facing difficulties and uncertainties	3.28	1.06
2	are resolute	3.25	1.08
12	are proactive	3.25	1.17
5	are brave	3.23	1.23
8	adapt and incubate new ideas	3.20	1.24
1	have inclusive personality	3.20	1.22
14	have a willingness to empower employees	3.18	1.15
6	are visionary	3.13	1.18
9	have mental agility and creativity	3.03	1.10
7	act as champions of innovation	3.00	1.28
10	are world-class warriors	2.93	1.14
		3.302	1.099

that strategic leaders should have a vision about the direction in which employees should go, inspire the organization, and be brave, visionary, and innovative, which, apparently, were not available to Qatari top-level managers as strategic leaders.

Validating H3:

This hypothesis states that there are no statistically significant differences at the significance level of ($\alpha \leq 0.05$) among respondents in terms of the two concepts of the study (strategic leadership behaviors and strategic leadership characteristics) attributed to their personal and occupational variables.

To measure differences in views among respondents toward the two concepts of the study (strategic leadership practiced behaviors and strategic leaders' characteristics) attributed to their personal and occupational variables, a variance analysis was conducted. To do so, an independent-sample t-test and a one-way between-groups ANOVA were applied. **Tables 9-11** display the results of the analysis.

Table 9. Strategic leadership behaviors and characteristics attributed to the respondents' personal and occupational variables.

T-Test for Testing the Means of Behavior and Characteristics					
H0: Mean (behavior) = Mean (characteristics)					
Summary Data					
	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	
Sample 1	120.000	3.302	1.099	0.174	
Sample 2	120.000	3.200	1.126	0.178	
Independent Samples Test					
	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Equal variances assumed	0.102	0.249	0.410	78.000	0.683
The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.					

Table 10. ANOVA test for SL behaviors.

ANOVA						
		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Gender	Between Groups	5.183	80	0.199	0.662	0.821
	Within Groups	3.917	40	0.301		
	Total	9.100	120			
Age	Between Groups	11.150	80	0.429	0.603	0.868
	Within Groups	9.250	40	0.712		
	Total	20.400	120			
Years of Service	Between Groups	40.150	80	1.544	0.828	0.672
	Within Groups	24.250	40	1.865		
	Total	64.400	120			
Qualification	Between Groups	9.083	80	0.349	0.708	0.781
	Within Groups	6.417	40	0.494		
	Total	15.500	120			
Job Level	Between Groups	39.650	80	1.525	1.844	0.124
	Within Groups	10.750	40	0.827		
	Total	50.400	120			
The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.						

Table 11. ANOVA test for SLs' characteristics mean with personal and occupational variables.

ANOVA						
		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Gender	Between Groups	6.600	86	0.236	1.037	0.501
	Within Groups	2.500	34	0.227		
	Total	9.100	120			

Continued

Age	Between Groups	13.567	86	0.485	0.780	0.715
	Within Groups	6.833	34	0.621		
	Total	20.400	120			
Years of Service	Between Groups	47.067	86	1.681	1.067	0.479
	Within Groups	17.333	34	1.576		
	Total	64.400	120			
Qualification	Between Groups	11.500	86	0.411	1.129	0.435
	Within Groups	4.000	34	0.364		
	Total	15.500	120			
Job Level	Between Groups	39.067	86	1.395	1.354	0.306
	Within Groups	11.333	34	1.030		
	Total	50.400	120			

The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

In summary, the study revealed that there are no statistically significant differences (at the significance level of $\alpha \leq 0.05$) among respondents regarding the two main concepts of the study (strategic leadership behaviors and strategic leadership characteristics) attributed to their personal and occupational variables (mean = 3.302 and 3.200, respectively); standard deviation = 1.099 and 1.126, respectively). The value of $P = 0.683$ ($P < 0.05$). Therefore, hypothesis H03 is accepted.

To conclude, the findings of this study revealed that Qatari top-level managers are not fully engaged in determining their organizations' strategic direction and do *not* exercise all strategic leadership behaviors. Instead, they are more engaged in the operational activities of leadership. Further, Qatari top-level managers partially demonstrate SL characteristics, while they should be combatant commanders and champions of innovation and change in the midst of future strategic directions. They must also be creative and visionary, and be willing to empower their employees. Additionally, the study revealed that there are no statistically significant differences (at the significance level of $\alpha \leq 0.05$) among respondents toward the two main study concepts (strategic leadership behaviors and strategic leadership characteristics) attributed to their personal and occupational variables.

5. Conclusion and Implications

Leading in environments characterized by being chaotic with frequent crisis and surprises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, with the newly emerging challenges of transworld migrations of capital and labor, cyber employment, and virtual workplaces (see Farazmand, 2007, 2009), demands special strategic leadership (SL) competencies. The aim of this research was to identify a specific SL set of competencies that should be available to strategic leaders and verify their availa-

bility to top-level public sector managers in the Qatari context. This research revealed that Qatari top-level managers were more engaged in the operational level activities of leadership and less engaged in determining their organizations' strategic direction. They should also be combatant commanders and champions of innovation and change in the midst of future strategic directions of their organizations.

5.1. Theoretical Implications

Drawing from the extant strategic leadership literature, this study identified the most "universally common" competency requirements for effective strategic leadership (and/or strategic leaders). Yet, the literature review revealed voluminous mixes and overlaps between and among certain competency components, resulting in difficulty establishing a clear-cut line between one and the other. One example is mixing SL "trait or a characteristic" with "behavior" in the work of [Guillot \(2003\)](#). Another example is using "attitudes" and "skills" interchangeably in the work of [Coban, Ozdemir, and Pisapia \(2019\)](#). To solve this, this research has established a distinction between those competencies that are related to the actual practiced "behaviors" and "characteristics" demonstrated by strategic leaders which can easily be judged by others, on the one side, and those competencies that can mainly be judged by the SLs themselves, such as personal "knowledge" and self "awareness" about a particular issue or subject, and the "skill" level they need to perform a particular task, on the other side. This research has also contributed the scholarship in developing an instrument to measure the availability of SL competencies to top-level managers in different organizational settings.

5.2. Practical Implications

On the practical level, it is anticipated that the framework of strategic leadership competencies that this research has developed will significantly contribute to enhancing and building human resources capacities while aimed at helping to achieve National Development Agendas and strategic goals in Qatar and globally. Specifically, the proposed framework can serve as a frame of reference for designing strategic leadership training and development programs and can be used for further development of evidence-based curricula on strategic leadership. In this vein, this research has taken a further step in collecting field-based evidence from the public sector organizations in the State of Qatar to examine the availability of two SL competencies (behaviors and characteristics) to their top-level managers. It is highly recommended that public sector policy and decision makers must bridge competency gaps and deficiencies relating to the top-level public sector managers whom this study explored, to help them lead their organizations more effectively. Specifically, the capacity to lead in the age of recently more chaotic environments demands special attention for building strategic leadership capacity through specialized training programs and workshops aimed at helping top-level executives practice and demonstrate strategic leadership competencies.

5.3. Limitations and Future Research Directions

This research has mainly focused on strategic leadership competences demonstrated by strategic leaders in their organizations. Therefore, SL *functions* (e.g., the work of Rokonuzzaman and Rahman, 2011), *roles* (e.g., the work of Burnes, 2004), or *responsibilities* (e.g., the work of Serfontein and Hough, 2011), were not deemed to be relevant to this research, as these are more related to the organization's structure and design aspects and, by default, are allocated to the SLs.

Empirically, this research has limited its scope to address strategic leaders' *behaviors* and *characteristics*, leaving other competency aspects (i.e., knowledge and skills) to further research and discovery endeavors. Further, to avoid the possibility of bias, the findings of this research are based on the perspectives and views of middle-level managers toward their top-level managers, based on their daily interactions and dealings with them. Future research must consider the views of SLs themselves in all KSABO competency components.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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