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The Perspectives Of Saudi Arabian Professionals Regarding the Most Important Soft Skills for Leaders to Possess in Telecommuting Environments during Crisis: A Q Methodology Study

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The Perspectives of Saudi Arabian Professionals Regarding the Most Important Soft Skills

for Leaders to Possess in Telecommuting Environments during Crisis:

A Q Methodology Study

by

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DISSERTATION CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

This dissertation by Shatha Khalifah, The Perspectives of Saudi Arabian Professionals Regarding the Most Important Soft Skills for Leaders to Possess in Telecommuting Environments during Crisis: A Q Methodology Study, is approved.

_____   _____
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Dr. Amanda Pascale, Committee Member

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Dr. Sophie Filibert, Committee Member

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Dr. LaDonna Morris, External Committee Member

Dedication

To Almighty Allah

"Do Start with Bismillah. Do end with Alhamdulillah. Do appreciate with Subhan Allah.

Hope with Insha'Allah. And life will be blessed by Allah"

"And He gave you from all you asked of Him. And if you should count the favor of Allah, you

could not enumerate them. Indeed, mankind is [generally] most unjust and

ungrateful." Surah Ibrahim Ayat 34

"So remember me and I will remember you" Surah Baqarah Verse 152.

Acknowledgments

The last words have been written, the pens **have been lifted,** and the pages have **dried.** My face has lightened up with a smile when I realize that my long journey has come to an end. I start by expressing my sincere gratitude to my one and only God "Allah", for giving me the vision and determination to succeed in all aspects of my life.

Most importantly. I am deeply thankful to my chair Dr. Christopher for his immense support of my doctoral study, for his motivation, for his constructive feedback, and for his endless knowledge. He has been a great mentor and I am very grateful for the opportunity to have worked with him. He has made a lasting impact on my research and my career and has been a source of inspiration for me. His mentorship helped me to grow as a researcher and to develop the skills and knowledge I needed to succeed as a leader. I am truly thankful for all the help he has provided.

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My sincere gratitude goes out to my mother. Who loves me, nurtures me, cares for me, and supports me every day of my life. You have always encouraged me to dream big and guided me forward. I am proud to be your daughter, and it is now my turn to always keep your head high.

I am equally grateful to my father for raising me in a godly way and setting an example through his words and actions. Thank you for always pushing me to be the best version of myself.

To my soul mate, my second half, and what I truly call the light at the end of the tunnel, my husband Ayman. Your generous support, patience and pure, unconditional love have got me where I am today. You are my rock, my pillar of strength, and my biggest cheerleader. I'm so grateful you have been in my life, and I thank God for bringing us together and for being with me all these years and making them the best years of my life.

I would also like to extend my thanks to my two daughters, Jowanna and Afnan. Their love and support have been invaluable to me, and I am grateful for their joy and happiness. The opportunity to be their mother and watch them grow is one I will cherish forever. I hope to be

their role model and show them that anything is possible with hard work, commitment, and dedication. I am extremely proud of the young women they have become, and I consider myself blessed to have them.

I would like to honor the memory of my only son Abdul Rahman, whose untimely passing has left a deep void in my life. He was a kind and gentle soul whose warm smile lit up the room. We all knew him as a source of light and joy, who brought positivity and happiness to everyone around him. Abdul Rahman will always be remembered and missed by all who knew him. His gentle spirit and positive outlook on life will never be forgotten. In the hearts of all who were touched by him, his spirit will remain. I will strive to make him proud by continuing my development and becoming the leader he always envisioned.

I am grateful to my siblings, family members, and friends who have always been a constant source of strength and inspiration throughout my academic journey. Their love and support have always enriched and motivated me.

It is also my pleasure to express my sincere gratitude to Dr. Abdullah Sadiq Dahlan, Dean of the University of Business and Technology UBT, for his support and assistance in providing all that I needed during the data collection process which were instrumental in helping me achieve my research goals. I also extend my sincere appreciation to the faculty and staff of UBT for their cooperation and commitment to the success of this research.

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My final note of thanks goes out to all participants, as well as those who helped me seek out their perspectives. I would not have been able to accomplish this study without your generous contributions and support. I am very grateful for sharing your insights and knowledge with me. Your contributions have been crucial to the research's success.

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Abstract

The purpose of this Q methodology study was to explore Saudi Arabian business professionals' perspectives regarding the soft skills they considered most important for leaders to possess in telecommuting environments during crisis. Q methodology was developed to study human subjectivity and uses both quantitative and qualitative procedures to do so. As is the convention for a Q methodology study, a single question guided the research: What are the perspectives collectively held among Saudi Arabian professionals regarding the soft skills they consider most important for leaders to possess in telecommuting environments during crisis?

The researcher developed a 44-item Q sample of opinion statements, each reflecting an important soft skill. The researcher recruited 44 participants using a combination of purposeful and snowball sampling techniques. These 44 participants sorted the 44-item Q sample into a forced distribution in ways that reflected their individual perspectives. The researcher subjected the 44 Q sorts to a series of statistical procedures: first correlations were identified among the sorts and then those correlations were factor analyzed, rotated, and extracted. These procedures produced 6 distinct perspectives which were named Communicating Stability by Modeling Reliability, Honesty, and Credibility; Listening, Disclosing, Engaging, and Inviting Bidirectional Communication; Ethical Exemplars through Fairness, Goodness, and High Moral Values; Capable Solutions-Oriented Leadership; Future Orientation, Confidence, and Big Picture Leadership; and Leadership Skills that Convey Stability, Clarity, and Strength. Findings from this study hold implications that included how businesses and other organizations in Saudi

Arabia might incorporate efforts to facilitate leader development of soft skills to better prepare

organizations to respond to any future disruptive crises.

Operational Definitions

This study adopts the following concepts, which are explained below:

Professionals

Our understandings of what and whom "professionals" are is extensive, varied, and comprehensive. In everyday use, as demonstrated by various dictionary definitions, there is not uniformity but there is consistency among the components of the various definitions. For example, the word "professional," in dictionary.com is described as "following an occupation as a means of livelihood or for gain" (Dictionary.com, n.d.). In contrast to this definition, the Cambridge English Dictionary defines a professional as "a person who has a job that requires skill, education, or training" (Cambridge English Dictionary, n.d.). Next, the Oxford English Dictionary defines a professional as "a person who is suitable or appropriate for a particular profession." (Oxford Advanced English Dictionary, n.d.). Lastly, the Merriam-Webster dictionary defines a professional as a person who is engaged in a professional activity (Merriam-Webster, n.d.b). In addition to the various definitions of "professionals" in different dictionaries, professional organizations often have their own definitions. For example, according to the Australian Council of Professions, everyone who works is considered a professional. This organization states that a professional is a member of a profession and is governed by codes of ethics and profess commitment to competence, integrity and morality, altruism, and the promotion of the public good within their expert domain. This organization also notes that professionals are accountable to those they serve and to society. Within this perspective, "traditionally, a 'Professional' is someone who derives their income from their specific knowledge or experience" (Australian Council of Professions, 2023). Saudi Arabia defines

professionals as those with university degrees, extensive knowledge and experience in their fields, and who use their skills to advance their companies (tradingeconomics.com).

Given the array of overlapping, yet distinct definitions of "professional," the researcher determined that it would be useful to develop an operational definition for the purposes of this study. Thus, for the purposes of this research, a professional is defined as a member of a professional or any person who works in a specified professional occupation. The term also describes the standards of education and training that prepare members of the profession with the particular knowledge and skills necessary to perform their specific role within that profession. This study, participants included professionals (that are leaders and employees) who work in different fields such as business, medicine, and education.

Leaders

In 1974, Ralph Stogdill wrote that "there are almost as many definitions of leadership as there are persons who have attempted to define the concept" (p. 259). An individual who is considered a leader by Merriam-Webster dictionary is one who possesses authority or influence (Merriam-Webster, n.d.a). A leader is an individual who possesses the skills and experience to develop vision and guide followers toward goals (Gujral, 2012). As a result, a leader is someone who develops a vision, employs skills effectively, and makes the best use of other people's strengths. Leaders are often defined by characteristics of intelligence, toughness, determination, and vision (Sahyaja & Rao, 2018). For the purposes of this research, leaders included any employees of organizations who hold managerial, supervisory, or executive positions and who are actively involved in work with subordinate employees.

Employees

The word employee is defined as "One employed by another usually for wages or salary and in a position below the executive level" (Merriam-Webster, n.d.a). An employee is a person who works for another person in return for a financial or other compensation (Muhl, 2002). Whereas Black's Law Dictionary defines "employee" as "a person in the service of another under any contract of hire, express or implied, oral or written, where the employer has the power or right to control and direct the employee in the material details of how the work is to be performed." (Black, 1991). Accordingly, for the purposes of this study an employee is a worker whose work process and work product are controlled by the employer (referred to in this study as a leader).

Soft Skills

Just as the term "professionals" is defined in many different ways with common elements, the term "soft skills" is also defined and escribed in a rich variety of ways. The term soft skills also has a long history of use in many settings and contexts and its use can also be found in educational and business settings, in corporate meetings, as well as in curriculum development (Evenson, 1999). The term soft skill also shares similarities with the word "professional" as it too has evolved considerably over the years, to the point that it has become somewhat ambiguous in meaning (Hakopian, & Hakopian, 2023). As with the term "professional," there have also been some who question whether the term is useful in research contexts considering the variety of perspectives that exist regarding what soft skills are (Steph, 2023). Again, this uncertainty may be rooted in the subjective nature of the concept. The concept of soft skills is subjective and difficult to measure, which again leads to disagreement about what qualifies as a soft skill and what does not. As such, this term is sometimes seen as imprecise and

inaccurate. Finally, just as with the word "professional," despite these concerns over the usefulness and appropriateness of the term, including calls to retire the term soft skills entirely, it persists (Parlamis & Monnot, 2019).

The persistent use of the term "soft skills" is also evident within academic research and scholarship. Academic literature continues to produce scholarship and research using this term. For instance, at the time of the completion of this study and the writing of this dissertation, a quick search of peer-reviewed articles using the term "soft skills" in either the document titles, abstract, or subjects produced dozens of results. The continued presence of the term in academic literature contributed to the researcher's decision to use the construct and design this study around it. Additionally, the researcher considered the persisting uses of this term in everyday language by everyday people. As the focus of this study was human perspectives, using a methodology designed to honor people's unique distinctive viewpoints and learn about how they understand the concept of soft skills and the importance of leaders using them in their everyday lives, the researcher determined that using the term soft skills was appropriate for the study. Lastly, the researcher wanted to use language that participants were both familiar and comfortable with in order to gain accurate representations of their perspectives.

The concept of soft skills has been described and defined in innumerable ways both academically and colloquially. One basic conceptualization that reflects core ideas of most others is contained in the Collins English Dictionary definition which defines the term soft skills as "desirable qualities for certain forms of employment that do not depend on acquired knowledge: they include common sense, the ability to deal with people, and a positive flexible attitude" (Dictionary.com, n.d.). From the standpoint of academic literature, some have posited that the term "soft skills" refers to character traits, attitudes, and behaviors rather than technical aptitude

or knowledge (Nusrat & Sultana, 2019). Others have offered that soft skills are the intangible, nontechnical, personality-specific skills that determine one's strengths as a leader, facilitator, mediator, and negotiator (Robles, 2012; Singh & Jaykumar, 2019; Tsirkas et al., 2020). Other scholars have remarked that soft skills are character traits that enhance a person's interactions, job performance, and career prospects (Parsons, 2008). Given the multitude of distinct conceptions along with consensus around core ideas, for the purposes of this study, soft skills are defined as the nontechnical skills, abilities, and traits required to function in a specific employment environment and can be placed in categories, including problem solving and other cognitive skills involving identifying problems and formulating and evaluating alternative solutions by weighing risks and benefits. However, it should be noted that for a Q methodology study, the use of operational definitions is of questionable value altogether, at least as used here. This is because Q methodology was designed and is particularly useful in examining people's perspectives around topics and concepts in which there is murky understanding and lack of a clear consensus definition.

Emotional Intelligence

Emotional intelligence (EI) describes an individual's recognition and use of their own emotional states and the emotional states of others to problem-solve or manage behaviors (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). In order to understand what emotional intelligence refers to, it is first necessary to understand what intelligence is. Intelligence is defined as the unique ability of human beings to handle and analyze information (Mayer et al., 2004). In other words, emotional intelligence describes the ability to reason accurately about emotions and to use emotions and emotional knowledge to enhance thought (Mayer et al., 2004, p. 511). Almost three decades of research indicates that emotional intelligence arises from the interaction between intelligence and

emotion (Mayer et al., 2004). EI can also be thought of as the ability to use and reason about emotions as a strategy to enhance thinking (Mayer et al., 2004). It is therefore essential to cultivate and nurture emotional intelligence in order to build a successful and fulfilling life.

Chapter 1: Introduction

The purpose of this Q methodology investigation was to examine the soft skills that Saudi Arabian professionals perceived as most important for leaders to possess in telecommuting environments during crises. The context for this study was crucial. When the study was first conceived, much of the initial motivation was to understand how professionals were perceiving the importance of soft skills for leaders given the tremendous shift in the occupational landscape for professionals as a result of Saudi Vision 2030. The Saudi Vision 2030 strategic framework has a goal to reduce Saudi Arabia's dependence on oil, diversify the economy, and improve health, education, infrastructure, recreation, and tourism, as well as create jobs and improve the quality of life for Saudi citizens. According to this Vision, professionals need skills that allow them to anticipate and respond to rapidly changing economic environments, including skills such as communication, problem-solving, and teamwork. Furthermore, since Saudi Arabia's economy has been opened up to foreign investment, the importance of professionals with strong soft skills has increased. This is due to the influence of these skills on both individual and organizational success. According to Stanford Research Institute International's study, soft skills account for almost 75% of an employee's success, while technical skills account for only 25% (Bradford & Robin, 2004).

Prior to this research advancing to the data collection phase, the Covid-19 pandemic emerged and necessitated a rapid shift to telecommuting work environments in Saudi Arabia, as it did in many places throughout the world. Although remote work enabled Saudi Arabian professionals to continue working throughout the pandemic, telecommuting has been associated with several challenges, including poor communication, low motivation, increased stress, and difficulty adapting to technology (Sawitri & Rini, 2021). In this respect, leadership soft skills

have become increasingly important because they may assist in addressing or circumventing many of the challenges associated with telecommuting. This shift in context for this study necessitated a shift in how the study was framed and it became an examination of what soft skills professionals in Saudi Arabia viewed as being the most important for leaders to possess in telecommuting environments during times of crises. Having the appropriate soft skills for leaders in times of crisis is crucial, as these skills help them make important decisions and create an emotionally safe working environment where their team members can feel supported, valued, and respected in order to succeed during times of crisis, especially when working remotely.

Soft skills include a variety of personal qualities, habits, attitudes, and social graces which contribute to an employee's performance and compatibility with others. Others have defined "soft skills" as "desirable qualities for certain types of employment that do not require acquired knowledge: common sense, interpersonal skills, and the ability to deal with others" (Jane & Helen, 2008). Despite the difficulty of quantifying these skills, they are as important as hard skills, which are those skills that can be assessed and specific to the particular job or industry, such as programming, accounting, and data analysis. In short, soft skills describe capabilities and traits related to an individuals' behaviors, personalities, or attitudes, such as development, conflict resolution and ethical attitudes (Nusrat & Sultana, 2019; Robles, 2012; Singh & Jaykumar, 2019; Tsirkas et al., 2020).

In order to be successful in the workplace, soft skills are becoming increasingly important. A 2022 report found that 92% of hiring professionals say that soft skills are just as important as, or more important than, hard skills (Williams, 2022). In fact, the literature review for this study demonstrates that soft skills are competencies which can provide an individual with the ability to meet the demands of a particular job as well as advance in his or her career (Cobo,

2013; Robles, 2012; Zhang, 2012). It was also determined from the literature review that soft skills play a significant role in labor market outcomes (Williams, 2022). This growing value placed on soft skills is attributable to several factors, such as globalization, cultural diversity, and technology (AbuJbara & Worley, 2018). A large body of research focuses on the importance of soft skills (Abdul Karim et al., 2012; AbuJbara & Worley, 2018; Hong, 2016), with researchers focusing mainly on the possession of soft skills among leaders. However, less attention has been paid to the soft skills that leaders perceive as important or the soft skills that professionals value most from their leaders. Despite research indicating discrepancies between leaders and employees' perceptions of soft skills (Wesley et al., 2017), most of the existing research on soft skills in the workplace focuses on employee soft skills, from the perceptions of leaders, employees, or job applicants (Albandea & Giret, 2018; Taylor, 2016; Wesley et al., 2017). This is concerning since developing soft skills in the workplace should be a shared effort, and employees' and leaders' perceptions must align to gain the most benefit from leaders' soft skills.

As this study aimed to understand human perceptions, Q Methodology was used to understand the Saudi Arabian professionals' perspective regarding the most important soft skills for leaders to possess in the telecommuting environment during crisis. The researcher also sought to explore the implications of the shift to telecommuting on the soft skills Saudi Arabian professionals consider important for leaders to possess, and how these skills are necessary for successful remote leadership during times of uncertainty and crisis. Data were gathered in two phases. First, opinion statements reflecting important soft skills for leaders to possess given the study's context were collected through an online survey distributed to Saudi Arabian leaders and employees working in various firms and industries. This phase produced a 44-item Q sample of soft skills that 44 participants later sorted. These 44 sorts were then correlated and the

correlations, subsequently, factor analyzed. Six factors were extracted, each representing a distinct view of the most important soft skills leaders should possess in telecommuting environments during crises. Findings may increase awareness of the importance of soft skills within professional contexts. Furthermore, the findings may provide insights into possible discrepancies in the ways leaders and employees rank the importance of specific soft skills. Understanding leaders' views on soft skills importance may assist in providing relevant and exceptional programs that are unique for Saudi leaders, that facilitate a bespoke leadership journey towards learning, challenging conventions, leading the nation, and fruitfully realizing the Vision 2030 ideals.

Research Question

A single question guided this study: Among Saudi Arabian professionals, which soft skills are considered most important for leaders to possess in telecommuting environments during crises?

Theoretical Framework

The framework for this study was based on Goleman's (2005) theory of emotional intelligence (EI). This theory was selected because it posits that soft skills are indicative of EI (Wheeler, 2016). As previously discussed, soft skills include various non-technical social and emotional skills, such as conscientiousness, self-awareness, self-control, and positive attitude, all of which may be indicators of EI. As Wheeler (2016) explained, "a person who has a mastery of soft skills can be defined as being emotionally intelligent" (p. 29). Wisker and Poulis (2015) also argued that EI is an essential component of soft skills. The growing consensus that EI can be understood as the link between work performance and emotion has prompted corporate interest in the topic (Wheeler, 2016).

Emotional intelligence differs from cognitive intelligence in that it focuses on emotion rather than intellectual skills (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). According to Riggio (2010), EI describes an individual's ability to perceive, use, understand, and manage their emotions. Salovey and Mayer (1990) defined EI as an individual's recognition and use of their own emotional states and the emotional states of others to problem-solve or manage behaviors. The EI construct can also be thought of as the ability to use and reason about emotions as a strategy to enhance thinking (Mayer et al., 2004). An emotionally intelligent individual is aware of their emotions, understands the meaning of those emotions, and can manage their own emotions and the emotions of others (Mayer, 2004). Individuals who possess high levels of EI are often more agreeable and less likely to engage in problematic behaviors (Mayer et al., 2004). High EI is also associated with strong problem-solving skills and social awareness (Mayer, 2004).

Mayer and Salovey (1997) conceptualized EI as the possession of the following four skills: (a) ability to perceive information, (b) ability to use emotions to facilitate thinking, (c) ability to understand emotions, and (d) ability to manage emotions. The ability to perceive information describes how accurately an individual can perceive and understand the emotions of others. The ability to use emotions to facilitate thinking refers to how well individuals understand their own emotions and can use them to direct thought. The ability to understand emotions describes how well an individual understands emotional messages and their associated actions, while the ability to manage emotions explains how well an individual can regulate their own emotions and the emotions of others to achieve goals.

Emotional intelligence can be understood as an essential component to the development of soft skills. For example, the five tenets of EI include self-regulation, emotional awareness, motivation, empathy, and social skills, which align with common definitions of soft skills. While

conceptualizations of soft skills vary, most researchers agree they consist of self-awareness, conscientiousness, critical thinking, empathy, self-control, adaptability, and leadership (Wheeler, 2016). Accordingly, the theory of EI will provide a useful lens for examining Saudi Arabian leaders' and employees' perceptions of the soft skills most essential to leadership.

Purpose of Research

The purpose of this Q methodology investigation was to examine the soft skills that Saudi Arabian professionals perceive as most important for leaders to possess in telecommuting environments during crisis. The study was designed to increase awareness of the importance of soft skills within business contexts by identifying a range of collectively held perspectives regarding the importance of specific soft skills for leaders to possess during crises like the Covid-19 pandemic that necessitated movement toward online organizational operations. In this way, the researcher conjectured that findings would hold training and development implications in various Saudi professional sectors, something particularly important in order for professionals and leaders to help realize Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030.

Nature of the Study

This study utilized Q methodology to examine the soft skills that Saudi Arabian leaders and employees perceive as most important for leaders to possess. Q methodology combines the strengths of qualitative and quantitative research through the statistical examination of human participants' subjective ideas and experiences (Brown, 1993). Q methodology aligns well with this investigation because it incorporates and measure participants' subjective opinions, allowing for a statistical understanding of how Saudi Arabian leaders and employees value soft skills.

Participants consisted of Saudi Arabian leaders and employees (collectively referred to for the purposes of this study as professionals) who have adapted to telecommuting in the wake

of the Covid-19 pandemic. I recruited participants through my personal network, using snowball

sampling and gathered a sample of 44 leaders and employees. Each group (leaders and

employees) had both genders (males and females) per group. To be eligible for the study,

participants were required to be current employees or leaders working in Saudi Arabian

organizations and have adapted to telecommuting in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic. The

study did not focus on any particular industry or sector.

Data were collected online via a web-based platform for Q methodology called Q Method

Software. Online data collection allowed the researcher and all participants to practice social

distancing while gathering data from geographically distanced participants. Following data

collection, study data were analyzed through three processes: (a) correlation matrix to examine

relationships between Q sorts, (b) factor analysis of correlations, and (c) varimax factor rotation

and extraction.

Significance of the Research

This study was important for a few key reasons. First, this study was significant because

as more Saudi Arabian workers have shifted to telecommuting environments, soft skills from

leaders are essential to helping professionals and other employees overcome many of the

challenges associated with telecommuting. For leaders' soft skills to be most beneficial to their

respective organizations, there should be alignment between the employees' and leaders'

perceptions of the essential soft skills of leadership. Findings from this study elucidated

differences in perspectives among study participants, as evidenced by key distinctions between

the resultant factors in this Q methodological study. Findings may also help increase awareness

of the importance of soft skills among employees and leaders alike. The unprecedented

challenges of the global pandemic, which prompted movement to life online, precipitated an

increased focus on leadership in Saudi Arabia, with the crisis not only endangering individual lives but also private organizations' survival. Therefore, this research may help to inform the national priority of increasing the leadership positions of Saudi Arabian citizens and the open the door of leadership possibilities for women.

Study Delimitations

A few delimitations bind the scope of this study. First, the sample included only Saudi Arabian employees and leaders who were either telecommuting for work or reporting to physical workplaces. The study was also bounded by the specific soft skills which, although many were named by participants, were ultimately selected by the researcher. Participants were asked to rank the researcher-selected soft skills in order of importance. It is possible that skills and attributes not selected by the researcher may also have been considered important soft skills for leaders to possess. Given that a universally agreed-upon definition of soft skills does not exist, the researcher selected skills identified in the existing research as well as from the study participants themselves. Thus, the selected skills may not be an exhaustive list of all traits, characteristics, and skills that could have been considered as important soft skills by participants and thus limited their ability to fully express their perspectives through their Q sorts. Finally, this study focused on the perceptions of professionals working in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic. The researcher did not ask participants to recall their perceptions and experiences before the pandemic but solely focused on how soft skills are perceived in the current, changed settings.

Organization of the Dissertation

This chapter introduced the investigation on which soft skills Saudi Arabian leaders and employees consider most important for leaders to possess. The chapter began with the problem

statement and guiding research question, followed by the framework and study purpose. The nature of the study, significance, limitations, and delimitations were also described.

Chapter 2 consists of an analysis and synthesis of the existing research related to the problem and purpose of the study. In this way, Chapter 2 conceptualizes the study and exposes the literature gap that it addresses. Topics covered in Chapter 2 includes soft skills, leadership, emotional awareness, and telecommuting environments. Next, Chapter 3 provides details of the study's methodology. The chapter includes a discussion and rationale for the method and design, sample, recruitment, and instrumentation. Data collection and analysis procedures were also discussed.

Study results are presented in Chapter 4. A discussion of the analysis and findings are presented alongside supportive tables, figures, and charts. Finally, a discussion of the findings is provided in Chapter 5. The discussion includes an examination of study findings considering those reported by previous researchers. Practical and theoretical implications are discussed. Limitations are acknowledged, and recommendations for future investigation are provided.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The problem that this study addressed is the lack of an understanding of which soft skills Saudi Arabian professionals consider most important for leaders to possess. Although researchers have emphasized the importance of leaders' soft skills in the success of Saudi Arabian firms (Alfaadel et al., 2012; Al-Sharif & Khan, 2021), most of the existing investigations on soft skills are focused on skills possessed by employees (Albandea & Giret, 2018; Taylor, 2016; Wesley et al., 2017), not leaders. Further, research on the soft skills gap between leaders and employees is almost exclusively examined in the context of employees' skills, rather than the soft skills possessed by leaders. Little is known about the soft skills Saudi Arabian employees and leaders perceive as most essential to leadership. Accordingly, the purpose of this Q methodology investigation was to examine the soft skills that Saudi Arabian professionals (which includes both leaders and employees) perceive as most important for leaders to possess. This study was guided by a single question: *Among Saudi Arabian professionals, which soft skills are considered most important for leaders to possess in the telecommuting environment during crises?*

This chapter provides a review and analysis of the existing research on soft skills, leadership, and other scholarship relevant to this investigation. The chapter, as with the rest of the study, uses the operational definitions of terms and concepts as described in the front matter of this dissertation. This chapter begins with a discussion on leadership qualities, skills, and abilities. The importance of soft skills in leadership, as well as among Saudi Arabian workers, is then reviewed. Next, there is a discussion of leadership during crisis events, such as the recent Covid-19 pandemic, with an emphasis on the importance of soft skills during crisis events. This is followed by an analysis of literature concerning cultural challenges in Saudi Arabia, such as

cultural diversity and gender equality, alongside the development of the transformative *Agenda 2030* plan. Collectively, this review provides important context for this study, while highlighting the research perspectives that this study was designed to address.

Leaders and Leadership

Leadership is an elastic construct that is viewed in nearly as many ways as there are people who practice it. The ambiguity present in how leadership is viewed can be seen in the large volume of contradictory literature in recent years, a reality that can create much confusion for those seeking unanimity regarding the concept of leadership (Tzouramani, 2016). Many schools of thought on leadership exist from the trait theory to schools focused on behavioral, contingency, and charismatic theories. The ideas of ethical and cross-cultural leadership compound confusion on the topic. Thus, to begin this discussion on soft skills among leaders, it is important to first define leaders and leadership.

According to Gujral (2012), leaders are individuals who possess the skills and experience to develop vision and guide followers toward goals. Hence, a leader is anyone who develops a vision, effectively employs skills, and leverages others' strengths to achieve desired results. Leaders are often defined by characteristics of intelligence, toughness, determination, and vision (Sahyaja & Rao, 2018). A leader is someone who can develop joint objectives for teams and organizations, utilizing available resources to influence and coordinate the efforts of others. Leaders' abilities are often evaluated based on their abilities to influence others and actualize organizational goals (Gilley et al., 2008). Most organizations define leaders based on their roles within an organization. In addition to coordinating efforts and motivating followers, leaders must empathize and connect with others to achieve success (Tzouramani, 2016).

According to Morgan (2020), leadership describes one's ability to accomplish goals by influencing and directing the action of others. Organizations often implement checks to ensure leadership aligns with organizational visions and missions, and can guarantee cohesive working environments. In most cases, leadership is specifically designed to address inherent organizational problems and improve competitive advantage (Anning-Dorson, 2018). Leadership must integrate policies and strategies that sustain internal and external relationships to foster organizational success.

Qualities of a Good Leader

John Maxwell (2019), a prominent American author, motivational speaker, and religious leader, is famous for arguing that a leader is one who knows the way and leads by example. Good leaders must always strike a balance between organizational foresight, individual performance, and personal character. Effective leaders may also develop strategic plans for organizations while catalyzing cooperation among stakeholders (Lehmann-Willenbrock et al., 2017). Leadership qualities are usually unique attributes inherent to one's personality and behavior, which manifest through professional responsibilities. Leaders' behaviors should align with key features of an organization's culture. Before installing individuals in leadership positions, leaders should analyze individual qualities and performance concerning expected behaviors.

The initial attributes of a good leader are honesty and integrity. Zig Ziglar, another American author and motivational speaker, once said that with integrity one has nothing to hide (Ojayi et al., 2019). Ziglar further stated that with integrity, one will always do the right thing and be free of guilt (Kruse, 2013). Honesty and integrity require leaders to always remain truthful. According to Fries (2018), leaders rely on others to achieve organizational and personal

goals. Thus, leadership philosophies are often based on feedback that is assumed to be truthful. Just as leaders expect honest feedback and evaluations, they must demonstrate the positive qualities they expect of their followers. Good leadership requires leaders to remain honest, regardless of circumstances (Engelbrecht et al., 2017). For example, a good leader is expected to detect downward performance trends and identify causes without defending themselves. In the event of employee performance appraisal, honesty and integrity demands that leaders remain impartial and give true evaluations and appraisals of every employee. Such frank, candid, and honest conversations foster confidence and support from followers.

Good leaders are also effective communicators who are able to give and receive criticism (Gibert et al., 2017). Leaders often serve as the face of organizations and are responsible for communicating their expectations, timelines, and consequences for poor performance. Without effective communication, leaders may struggle to achieve goals. Similarly, when it comes to leadership communication, one must be always clear and concise. Clarity and conciseness can also help leaders achieve the support needed to implement intended policies. According to Gujral (2012) leaders motivate, instruct, and correct the people they lead; these responsibilities cannot be achieved without communication.

In addition to communication skills, effective leaders are expert at conflict management and resolution. Growing workforce diversity may increase risks for conflict among organizational members (Arbatl et al., 2015). Conflict resolution skills require a high degree of emotional intelligence (Baesu, 2018). Principally, good leaders tend to have a significantly high level of influence over the people they lead. However, to increase buy-in of organizational change and policies, leaders must connect with the emotions of their followers.

Emotional intelligence is another important trait of effective leaders. Emotional intelligence helps leaders prevent emotions from undermining decision-making and understand the emotions of others. For example, attributes such as the ability to empower and motivate, courage, passion, confidence, accountability, and emotional intelligence are all qualities of good leaders (Olanrewaju & Okorie, 2019). Emotional intelligence also helps leaders manage personal emotions, improve social awareness, communicate seamlessly, and solve conflicts (Zhang et al., 2018).

Effective leaders must also be able to delegate duties and responsibilities (Sostrin, 2017). Regardless of one's hierarchical position and power, leaders must understand they cannot do everything on their own. Good leaders embrace delegation as not just a way of passing tasks and responsibilities on to others, but also as a way to recognize, trust, and demonstrate belief in their followers. Hence, delegation fosters teamwork, autonomy, and improved decision-making. Effective delegation requires leaders to develop trust in their followers, signaling confidence and fostering positive morale within the organization (Vu, 2020). According to Hasan (2019), most organizations use delegation as a criterion for identifying and nurturing potential future leaders within an organization. Leaders who can effectively delegate help organizations maintain organizational culture and promote from within.

Finally, strong leaders are decisive visionaries. Most organizations do not assign leadership responsibilities based on role competency alone, but demonstration of the ability to plan and anticipate future directions. Leaders constantly evaluate current trends and anticipate future changes (Cote, 2017). Leaders must be able to make critical decisions and, in some cases, take risks when things do not work as expected. A good leader must be decisive and consistent

with their decisions (Mann, 2013). Mann (2013) further explained that decisiveness in leadership is considered a sign of commitment.

Soft Skills

There is a wide range of sometimes divergent perspectives within the academic literature on soft skills in workplace settings Despite this lack of consensus, there are several convergent definitions of soft skills. Kamin (2013) defined soft skills as a set of personal attributes that enhance situational awareness and support one's abilities to deliver their responsibilities. Unlike technical skills which are often referred to as hard skills, soft skills apply across different job sectors and professional engagements. For example, someone with excellent communication skills is likely to apply these soft skills regardless of the industry within they work. Soft skills are non-technical skills related to one's work.

It is important to verify which skills and abilities are necessary for job function. Abilities are the natural or innate competencies, whereas skills are behaviors that have been learned or acquired. Skills are proficiencies developed through training or hands-on experience and the practical application of theoretical knowledge. To further delineate the concepts, *job skills* can be defined as technical skills that can be learned through training or education to enable the performance of context-specific tasks, while *job abilities* can be classified as personal or interpersonal talents that affect job performance (Pearlman, 1997). Abilities are often confused with skills, yet there is an important difference between the two. Abilities are the innate qualities or talents that a person brings to a task or situation. Skills are improved through experience (Brannick & Levine, 2002). For example, many people can learn to negotiate competently by acquiring knowledge and practicing skills. Few are brilliant negotiators based on an innate ability to persuade (Brannick & Levine, 2002).

Soft skills describe how one interacts with others, solves personal problems, and manages individual work (Vasanthakumari, 2019). An individual with excellent job-related skills may exhibit technical competence but fail to work in a team setting or struggle with communication (Crowley, 2011). Based on this definition, soft skills complement technical or job-related skills; a balance of soft and hard skills helps develop complete professionals who are not only good at their respective roles but can also acclimate to diverse cultures and team settings.

Leonard and Maulding (2019) proposed a definition of soft skills based on the impact of soft skills on professional success. In this definition, "soft skills" is a collective reference to individual transversal competencies, such as language and communication competence, openness to feedback, teamwork, and other interpersonal skills (Leonard & Maulding, 2019). Hence, soft skills are important for both professional and social success. For example, an individual who is open to feedback is likely to experience professional success because they are able to receive and implement corrections and advice. Similarly, such a person is likely to acknowledge personal mistakes and leverage criticism to grow.

Hard skills concern an employee's ability to do a specific task, while soft skills are more about the way they adapt, collaborate, problem-solve, and make decisions (Hendarman & Cantner, 2017). Hard skills include specialized knowledge and technical abilities, such as software development, accounting, or patent law expertise. Hard skills are often easier to define and measure than soft skills. Wijan (2012) stated that today's leaders must combine hard skills and soft skills to increase efficiency and effectiveness of work practices. He further stressed that soft skills were vital to effective, innovative, and collaborative leadership (Wijan, 2012). Similarly, Tang (2019) argued that leaders must be experts in soft skills to competently increase organizational efficacy. According to Tang, leadership soft skills consist of teamwork,

communication, personal mastery, personal development, initiative, leadership ability, planning and organizing, and presentation skills.

The Importance of Soft Skills in Leadership

Due to the stiff competition in the current labor market, leaders must demonstrate skills and knowledge needed to grow their organizations. Soft skills are largely considered "extra qualifications" that help workers and leaders succeed in their positions (Bishop, 2017). A survey carried out by Brent and Dent (2012) revealed that almost 90% of recruitment consultants believed employees with strong soft skills were more likely to be promoted to leadership roles than more experienced individuals with weak soft skills.

According to Lucas (2019), soft skills are required by leaders for communication and adaptation. As a leader, one needs to communicate effectively to earn workplace respect. A leader who needs to implement a certain preferred leadership philosophy must express it in a manner that enhances employees' understandings and encourages approval of such intentions. Leaders are also expected to effectively transfer skills and teach employees. To effectively execute the above responsibilities, leaders must have good communication skills (Rao, 2018). Similarly, the modern workplace has evolved significantly and requires adaptable leadership. Conventional organizational structures are evolving to embrace globalization, so leaders must be increasingly adaptable (Höllerer et al., 2017).

Adaptability cannot be achieved without the emotional intelligence to process negative feedback and criticism (Maamari & Majdalani, 2017). In addition, adaptable leaders must possess the critical thinking skills to modify leadership styles to suit different scenarios. Job security requires broad skillsets, adaptability, and the desire to learn and develop new soft skills. Effective people management, which is essential to strong leadership, requires soft skills.

Employees possess different backgrounds, temperaments, and interaction styles, increasing risks for workplace conflict (Kelly & MacDonald, 2016). Despite the existence of an effective human resource department, it cannot solve every problem that occurs at the place of work. Good managers do not wait until the meeting with the employee relations manager to correct perceived negative behavior from employees but instead address such issues immediately as they occur (Wobodo et al., 2020). A leader with effective conflict resolution skills earns respect from the employees. On the contrary, leaders without good conflict resolution skills may inadvertently become part of the conflict.

Leaders also need soft skills for employee selection and training. A leader without soft skills may struggle to identify specific areas in which employees need to be trained to develop their efficiency and output (Weber et al., 2019). Such leaders may also struggle to deliver feedback, especially. Leaders must be understanding of others' perspectives and take active interest in their concerns, demonstrating empathy. Empathy is the ability to experience and relate to the thoughts, emotions, or experiences of others (Riess, 2017). Empathy is important for healthy workplace relationships, and is an essential trait of effective leadership (Goleman, 1998). Organizations that rely on technical expertise as the only metric and criterion for promotion are more likely to experience leadership-related issues than those that promote leaders who possess both hard and soft skills. The effectiveness of employee selection and training fundamentally depends on the soft skills of the leaders in charge (Majed, 2019). It is the leader who determines suitable personalities for different positions and identifies organizational needs that require employees to be trained. Leaders need soft skills for employee selection and training.

Soft Skills for People in Saudi Arabia

The Saudi workforce is unique in that it consists largely of immigrants and expatriates (Hannam & Paris, 2018). Most of the immigrants in the Saudi labor market are people who fled neighboring countries in search of employment opportunities. Another key feature of the Saudi workforce is that employees are more concerned about simply keeping their jobs rather than salary and advancement opportunities. Lastly, Saudi Arabia has the lowest employee turnover rates among the developing countries in the Middle East. The above characteristics of the Saudi workforce, therefore, call for unique soft skills that are specifically suited for healthy interpersonal relationships.

The Saudi economy is slowly transforming from an oil-dependent economy to an industrialized economy (Shafiee, 2021). Cognitive flexibility, therefore, is a key soft skill for people in Saudi Arabia. Elen et al. (2011) defined cognitive flexibility as the ability to change behavior and adapt to different economic, political, and social environments. The intended economic changes are bound to bring about adjustments in the ways people in Saudi Arabia interact with one another, the various components of social classes, and even the living standards in the country. Cognitive flexibility is an executive function that can help individuals cope in different situations by focusing less on stressors.

Whether one is in a leadership position or not, bilingual literacy is another key soft skill needed to sustain healthy relationships in Saudi Arabia. The major obstacle to cultural integration in Saudi Arabia, despite the cosmopolitan nature of Saudi society, is the lack of bilingual literacy. Similarly, foreigners find it hard to enroll in Saudi learning institutions due to the dominant use of Arabic as the official teaching and learning language. Hence, to embrace

cultural diversity as brought about by the increasing population of immigrants in Saudi Arabia, one must develop bilingual literacy.

Arabic is the most spoken language in Saudi Arabia and doubles as the official language of the country, which includes Saudi learning institutions (Louber & Troudi, 2019). While more than 30% of the Saudi population comes from different countries (Khraif et al., 2019), many of them put an effort learning Arabic, though they often find it somehow challenging and difficult to replicate because it contains a richness and depth (Al-khresheh et al., 2020). Because those from Saudi Arabia and other Arabic speakers form such a majority of the population, and because English skills are not as high as in other nations, learning Arabic is extremely useful. This is especially true when employees must deal with the police, government administrators, or other bureaucrats, as the Saudi employees may not speak English at a high enough level for foreigners to communicate their needs and have them met. With this being said, learning the Arabic language is still quite uncommon, because most foreigners see their stay in the Saudi Arabia as temporary.

Another important soft skill for people in Saudi Arabia is problem-solving (Al-Sharif & Khan, 2021). In Saudi Arabia, creativity and innovation are more valued than academic qualifications. In the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, the ability to be a creative problem-solver has become more important than ever (Loble, 2020). Problem-solving skills involve developing unique perspectives and completely different approaches to developing solutions to problems. Most employers in Saudi Arabia, therefore, concentrate more on the employees' abilities to deliver in their respective positions rather than their previous experience or level of academic attainment (Jeffreys, 2011).

Problem-solving skills do not only apply in the Saudi employment sector but also find application in social settings. For example, the integration of immigrants into the mainstream Saudi society comes about with several challenges. Cultural clashes are often reported where some people find it hard to embrace a new culture. Such social problems also present opportunities for the application of problem-solving skills where individuals with such skills come in to help the troubled personalities.

Soft Skills Preferred for Leaders

The essence of leadership is to provide direction and control (Smith, 2015). Many soft skills are considered essential to leadership, including emotional intelligence, communication skills, conflict resolution, and teamwork (Gunter, 2020). Emotional intelligence is a key soft skill for leaders due to the nature of their responsibilities and the need to balance between technical expertise and people management (Jena & Satpathy, 2017). Emotional intelligence can help leaders analyze responses and leadership approaches and subsequently modify certain aspects of the leadership philosophy to accommodate as many employees as possible. Emotional intelligence can also help leaders read and analyze emotions to detect impending conflicts, rebellion, or appreciation (Livesey, 2017). Finally, leaders require emotional intelligence to control their feelings and emotions so that they are not overwhelmed by professional pressure.

Many workplaces now emphasize teamwork over individual prowess. Leaders must possess teamwork attitudes and motivate employees to collaborate (Brock et al., 2019). Teamwork attitudes help leaders in two major ways. First, teamwork makes it easier for leaders to delegate. Second, when people work in teams, they learn from one another and are able to expand their skillsets while improving their efficiency. Having team members with similar abilities makes it easy for the leader to delegate because anyone within the team can be entrusted

with the responsibilities. Teamwork also makes management easier. According to Fleming (2020), working with small groups makes it easier for leaders to identify individual strengths and weaknesses. The level of interpersonal understanding and interaction within teams is often high, thus reducing incidences of interpersonal conflicts. As Covid-19 has resulted in the creation of more virtual teams, it is valuable for leaders to track and explore performance and opportunities for improvement. For example, leaders could consider how employees' emotions, such as anxiety and stress, can be identified and addressed in virtual workplaces where social and emotional cues are limited. For employees to be convinced to embrace teamwork, leaders must demonstrate teamwork attitudes.

Effective communication and conflict resolution are additional soft skills that most hiring experts seek when recruiting for leadership roles. The operations of any given organization revolve around the leadership of the organization and leaders' abilities to address emerging issues among employees. Whether a leader is being outsourced or promoted from within, they must be prepared to introduce and communicate their leadership philosophy to all stakeholders.

Conflicts can also be personal, as explained by Waller et al. (2017). A leader may be confronted by situations that require conflict resolution skills, which could include the following approaches:

- Growth mindset: An ability to learn continuously and willingness to adapt to change
- Creativity: Developing new ideas, applying new solutions to address existing problems
- Focus mastery: Harnessing concentration to make better short- and long-term decisions

- Innovation: Improving upon an existing idea, concept, process or method to achieve a desired outcome

- Communication skills: Interpreting information though speaking, listening and observing

- Storytelling: Organizing thoughts and data points into a comprehensive, holistic narrative

- Culture awareness: Ability to effectively interact, work and develop meaningful relationships with those of various cultural backgrounds within the organization

- Critical thinking: Objective analysis and evaluation in order to form a judgment on a topic

- Leadership: Providing guidance within an organization

- Emotional intelligence: Practicing control, expression, and observation of interpersonal relationships among people in a workplace

Additionally, a report from IBM (LaPrade et al., 2019), specified that the most important skills in the workforce, according to executives, were:

- Willingness to be flexible, agile, and adaptable to change;

- Time management skills and ability to prioritize;

- Ability to work effectively in team environments;

- Ability to communicate effectively in business context;

- Analytics skills and business acumen;

- Technical core capabilities for STEM;

- Capacity for innovation and creativity;

- Basic computer and software/application skills;

- Ethics and integrity;

- Foreign language proficiency;

- Fundamental core capabilities around reading, writing, and arithmetic; and

- Industry- or occupation-specific skills.

Leadership During Crisis

The skills of leaders become even more essential during crisis events. A crisis is defined as an event whose occurrence is expected to produce a dangerous outcome that can affect individuals, groups, societies, or entire nations. A crisis often requires tough decisions and unprecedented risks. For an event to qualify as a crisis, it must have negative effects on the economy, political environment, the natural environment, or of other aspects of human existence, and must also occur abruptly with little or no warning (Alvinius, 2017). Based on the above definition, there are three basic types of crises: immediate, emerging, and sustained. Importantly, an event can fall simultaneously into one or more types of crises categories.

An immediate crisis refers to unpredictable situations that often affect many people. Despite plans to mitigate predicted risks, immediate crises happen. This type of crisis has the greatest impact on leaders because it provides opportunities to evaluate the effectiveness of one's leadership; weak leadership often collapses when immediate crises occur (Mitroff & Alpaslan, 2014). A perfect example of an immediate crisis was the initial Covid-19 pandemic, which devastated the world. Despite measures to mitigate disease outbreaks, no one could have predicted the emergence of the Covid-19 pandemic and the resulting social distancing requirements. Especially that, for many organizations, remote work is still the norm for the foreseen future and many industries believe a significant percentage of work will continue to be performed remotely in the years ahead, even after the coronavirus threat is contained. That

means individuals' attitudes and expectations about their ability to quickly adapt to this growing shift to digital technologies and interference will be demanding. Other natural catastrophes such as typhoons, earthquakes, and hurricanes also fall in this category of crises.

Emerging crises refer to events that are anticipated and therefore can be prevented or significantly reduced. For example, if someone threatens to commit suicide, counseling may be provided to prevent the death of the individual. Finally, a sustained crisis is one that can take years to resolve, and is hence considered the most dangerous type of crisis.

Impact of Crisis on Leadership

Many leadership counselors regard crisis as the nursery of leadership. The above rationale arises from the fact that crises have not only created new leaders but also provided testing grounds for existing leaders, often eliminating inefficient leaders (Blythe et al., 2014). Leader effectiveness is highlighted when important crisis events threaten to halt organizational operations and survival, requiring the implementation of creative and innovative solutions. During critical situations, leaders are expected to be decisive while managing risks (Blythe et al., 2014). Reacting too quickly at the onset of a crisis may lead to the implementation of decisions and strategies based on either false or inexhaustive information. On the other hand, waiting too long to gather all the relevant information and failing to make quick decisions may result in worsening of the crisis. Hence, crises, whether emerging, sustained, or immediate, have profound impacts on leaders and leadership.

According to Holla et al. (2020), the uncertainty of crises demands that leaders be sufficiently prepared to handle emergencies and other related incidences within the organization. The initial impact of crises can lead to changes in leadership philosophies and styles. Principally, every leader has a preferred leadership philosophy, often aligned to the individual leadership

goals and the overall organizational objectives. Such philosophies are also developed based on available resources such as budgetary allocations, human capital, and current performance trends. However, the occurrence of crises brings in extra leadership responsibilities which then prompt changes in leadership philosophies as the organization navigates through the crisis. When the Covid-19 pandemic started, leaders who had never been accustomed to remote working were at a big disadvantage; they had to adjust their leadership approaches to incorporate remote supervision. The pandemic also brought about a need for organizational leaders to psychologically and emotionally support employees who had been affected by the pandemic.

Crises have also helped strengthen existing leadership by replacing ineffective leaders with more dynamic, visionary, and innovative personalities. One of the key responsibilities of leadership is to change visions into reality. Irrespective of the authority and power that comes with any given leadership role, a good leader must have the vision to think beyond the present. According to Firestone (2020), nothing tests a leader more than a crisis. The highly charged and dramatic events that characterize most crises can either build or destroy a leader. Principally, the actions of a leader before the onset of a crisis, during the crisis, and after the crisis may either reduce the duration of the crisis and hence save the organization from more adverse effects or prolong the crisis and endanger the organization. Based on the effectiveness of the leader's actions, crises can be either averted, thwarted at the onset, or extend beyond the management's control. The concept of strategic crisis leadership also emerged due to the impact of crises on leaders. In most organizations, the initial step of crisis management is to assign responsibility to a leader to oversee the event. That leader is then responsible for communicating information and managing the crisis (Blythe et al., 2014).

A strategic crisis leader, according to Rao (2018), is one with a certain set of personal attributes and behaviors associated with the ability to analyze performance and anticipate outcomes. Strategic crisis leadership calls for extraordinary leadership skills that define the crisis beyond the obviously conceivable scopes, provide a forecast of potential intended and intended consequences, and prepares organizations for future crises. Soft skills are essential to strategic leadership during crisis events.

Soft Skills and Leadership During Covid-19

The Covid-19 pandemic is a unique crisis situation that has affected people from all walks of life, all over the world. Alongside panic over the spread of the virus, deaths and sickness among those stricken with it, and health mandates put in place to help curb the effects of Covid-19, people across the globe have also grappled with economic uncertainty, isolation, and rising mental health issues (Druss, 2020; Reger et al., 2020; Zalsman et al., 2020). The long-term effects on the psychological and emotional health of individuals are unknown, but some predict the effects may manifest in tragic ways, such as through increased suicide rates (Reger et al., 2020). To help workers contend with the outside challenges caused by the virus, while also transitioning to virtual workplaces and adapting to a completely new way of working, leaders must possess a number of valuable soft skills. As Contreras et al. (2020) explained, the successful transition to remote workplaces requires organizational support and e-leadership practices focused on helping workers learn to effectively use digital technologies.

Importantly, the move to virtual work settings requires leaders to transition from traditional leadership modes. In this way, e-leadership represents a significant shift in how organizations, employees, and stakeholders relate to one another. The traditional social skills and characteristics that are adequate when working in a traditional office are often inadequate in

virtual settings (Contreras et al., 2020). E-leaders have to facilitate the technical competencies of followers, while also monitoring, coordinating, and aligning work tasks and individuals through communicative technology. Contreras et al. (2020) referred to e-leadership as a "multidimensional phenomenon" (p. 5) that should be studied within a variety of contexts and administrative levels to avoid fragmented knowledge.

Key Soft Skills for Teamwork

In the wake of Covid-19, many workers and leaders found themselves suddenly working from home, grappling with remote settings, new applications, and profoundly different strategies for communication. To comply with governmental regulations, virtual teams have increasingly emerged as a strategy to help organizations maintain operations and workflow (Scherling & Lind, 2021). Remote or virtual work is a "flexible working method that is not limited by time, location, type of communication technology, and the use of information" (Contreras et al., 2020, p. 1). Through digital solutions, such as screenshare and video chat, many organizations have been able to transition to digital environments (Mehtab et al., 2017). As Scherling and Lind (2021) explained, "To minimize the spread of the virus, the home office concept was developed and implemented on a greater scale than ever seen before from a global perspective" (p. 2). The shift to digital technologies was catalyzed by the organizational changes imposed by Covid-19 restrictions, and this shift has challenged the ways previously co-located workers and teams communicate (Scherling & Lind, 2021).

With the end date of the pandemic unknown, it is likely that virtual teams and remote work settings will continue to be leveraged for the foreseeable future (Madero Gomez et al., 2020). Even after the pandemic ends, some scholars believe virtual workplaces are here to stay (Contreras et al., 2020; Scherling & Lind, 2021). As disruptive as the shift to virtual workplaces

has been, indications that workers and employers desire to maintain these arrangements after the pandemic ends make it increasingly important to identify the challenges of these arrangements and develop effective solutions to address them.

The rapid shift to virtual teams was difficult and tumultuous for many workers. As Winter (2020) explained, "Managers and employees are clueless about how projects can be continued in full-time virtual teams" or "what new advantages or problems hinder/improve project execution" (p. 2). Leaders have often found themselves relying more on soft skills, as they now had to be more empathetic, understanding, communicative, adaptable, and interpersonal because of the widespread effects of the pandemic. A comprehensive meta-analysis conducted by Chazdon (2011) focused on the soft skills most essential to teamwork. Common among the skills reported across the studies were communication, adaptability, interpersonal, problem-solving, decision-making, creative thinking, working with diverse groups, leadership, and teamwork skills. Soft skills that are particularly salient to leadership in the rapidly changing environment of Covid-19 include adaptability, conflict resolution, and communication. Each of these three important soft skills is discussed in more detail in the following sections.

Adaptability

A key soft skill to help leaders manage virtual teams during the Covid-19 crisis is adaptability. Arnoldsson and Malak (2021) found that managers of teams that transitioned to virtual settings after the Covid-19 outbreak reported adaptability was essential to success. When leaders or workers struggle to transition to virtual workplaces, productivity slows, and challenges emerge. Whillans et al.'s (2021) study on adaptability among teams who shifted to virtual settings because of the Covid-19 pandemic revealed team members struggled with the transition. Failure to adapt or prepare for changes associated with virtual work undermined team

performance; however, Whillans et al. also found workers used the transition as an opportunity to improve their abilities to adapt to virtual settings.

Communication

A major challenge for individuals throughout the pandemic, both in their professional and personal lives, has been social isolation and lack of interaction. Forced social distancing naturally complicates individuals' abilities to communicate in a variety of contexts, including the workplace (Shingler-Nace, 2020). Communication skills are essential to any interpersonal relationships, and the importance of strong communication skills increases in virtual settings. When infrastructure and training are in place, virtual workplaces can be very productive and satisfying for employees (Wolor et al., 2020). However, poorly implemented technology, inadequately trained workers, weak signals, and poor communication from leaders can create stressful communicative barriers for workers (Jones & Graham, 2015). Arredal and Axelsson (2021) point out the dangers of virtual communication, explaining that overreliance on virtual communication tools can create misunderstandings and overreliance on technology that ultimately undermine productivity. Marlow et al. (2017) cautioned that digital tools used to communicate in virtual teams can undermine real-time communication, creating lapses and delays.

Emerging research indicates that communication has been one of the biggest barriers for workers and leaders who have shifted to remote workspaces in the era of Covid-19. Scherling and Lind (2021) studied the ways Covid-19 affected workers who had transitioned to remote settings, and found that communication was one of the most pressing challenges. Although the use of videoconferencing and digital meetings have attempted to replicate in-person settings, participants in Scherling and Lind's study pointed to the loss of body language, especially when

video was not used in communication. In addition, participants lamented the loss of social interactions. Working remotely led many to feel lonely and isolated. The researchers noted that videoconferencing was not enough to make up for the social interactions lost during the transition to remote settings. Prior to the pandemic, colleagues would go to lunch together, chat at the water cooler, and have other experiences of social bonding.

Arredal and Axelsson (2021) also studied the effects of transitioning to a virtual team in the wake of Covid-19. Similar to participants in Scherling and Lind's (2021) study, Arredal and Axelsson's participants lamented the lack of social interaction that had resulted from remote work. Participants also mentioned communication challenges and difficulties understanding how tasks were being divided up among the team.

Conflict Resolution

Conflict resolution is another important soft skill for virtual leaders in the wake of Covid-19. Research indicates conflict resolution is essential to the productivity of virtual teams (Arnoldsson & Malak, 2021). Virtual workers are more apt to experience conflict because of communicative challenges that can create miscommunication. Researchers have reported that the use of videoconference applications can actually increase the likelihood of relational conflict among members of virtual teams because of the lack of nonverbal cues and increases in interruption (Martínez-Moreno et al., 2012). Further, conflict is more likely to go undetected and unaddressed in remote work settings than among teams that are co-located (Bosch-Sijtsema et al., 2009). Arnoldsson and Malak's (2021) study on managers' perceptions of the way Covid-19 impacted productivity after moving from co-located workspaces to virtual settings revealed overall negative effects, which managers blamed largely on conflicts caused by virtual communications.

Leadership Challenges in Saudi Arabia

Life transitions are often characterized by challenges, some of which are anticipated and others which are unplanned. Saudi Arabia is in a transition period, moving from an oil-dependent economy to an industrial economy. The local economy is plagued by high unemployment and an exorbitant cost of living. Saudis are excited about the industrial economy, anxious about impending job opportunities, and worried about employment competition with foreigners. Citizens are hopeful that new political leadership and economic projections will increase the country's peace, stability, and security (Majed, 2019). As a result of the cultural and social shifts in Saudi Arabia, leaders face a number of unique challenges, such as cultural diversity, gender inequality, and rapid economic shifts.

Cultural Diversity

The perennial challenge that has faced the leadership in Saudi Arabia is developing leaders who embrace cultural diversity. Saudi's rich oil deposits and extensive oil sector has been a major attraction for job seekers across the world, with thousands of foreigners moving to the country in search of job opportunities. However, despite the cultural diversity of job seekers, Saudi Arabia has been criticized for forcing the country's Islamic culture on all foreigners in the country (Jeffreys, 2011). For example, women seeking job opportunities must wear hijabs regardless of their religious backgrounds and stay separated from men. These aspects of the Saudi culture are deeply rooted in the Islamic religion.

Women in Leadership

Another challenging shift within Saudi Arabian leadership has been the increased presence of women. During the last 10 years, Saudi Arabian women have become increasingly educated and prominent members of the workforce. The participation of women in senior

leadership positions, in both public and private sectors, has increased significantly. Recent developments indicate plans for increased female participation in Saudi Arabia. Women in Saudi Arabia are taking on larger roles in public spheres and occupying higher positions within organizations (Alchoui, 2009). Despite the considerable role of women in Saudi society, women in leadership positions have different experiences from their male counterparts due to organizational, personal, and cultural challenges that impede their effectiveness as leaders. Working women face role conflict related to work/life balance and poor organizational support (Al-Halawani, 2002).

Female leaders in this context face many challenges that limit their effectiveness and prevent them from achieving their leadership potential. These challenges include organizational structure, culture, policies, and practices, as well as individual factors such as personal skills, capabilities, confidence, support, ability to achieve balance, and a sense of empowerment. Saudi women also lack opportunities to learn through mentorship and guidance because of the limited experience of women leaders, the lack of female role models, and the isolation of women's sectors due to cultural and social barriers (Al-Ahmadi, 2011).

Another challenge facing Saudi's leaders is the need for gender equality in leadership positions. When King Salman Bin Abdul-Aziz Al Saud became king of Saudi Arabia, he promised equal representation of women in the country's leadership. As a result, more Saudi women are enrolling in all levels education and entering various professional industries. Over the last three years, Saudi Arabia has experienced increasing participation of women in senior management positions as well as decision-making processes, in both the public and private sectors.

Despite advances within female leadership, Saudi female leaders are often victimized by the dominantly Muslim cultures that embrace Islamic teachings regarding the traditional roles of women. For example, although women can work in Saudi Arabia, their offices must have separate security systems, lunchrooms, and prayer rooms (Al-Ahmadi, 2011). In some situations, female leaders find it hard to delegate work to male employees. For a country embarked on an ambitious and progressive trajectory, gender-biased leadership could derail development in Saudi Arabia. The country's leadership faces the major challenge of overturning patriarchal policies that segregate women in leadership roles and prevent them from equally contributing toward the goals of Vision 2030.

Discouraging Oil Dependence

The next challenge facing Saudi leaders is sustaining the move from dependence on oil to an industrialized economy. In April 2016, the Saudi Council of Ministers approved Vision 2030, which not only seeks to transform the country into a global investment hub but to also strengthen the country's position in the Islamic and Arab world. A challenge for leaders has been convincing citizens to embrace Vision 2030. The goal to remove oil subsidies and increase taxes has already attracted public opposition. Recently, the country's minister of water and electricity was fired after a public uproar over a surge in prices (Fattouh & Sen, 2016). Saudi Arabia's leadership face significant challenges convincing the public that such decisions are part of the implementation of Vision 2030, which will transform the country and provide much-anticipated jobs.

Changes in Saudi Arabian Leadership

Saudi King Salman surprised many Saudis after he fired two members of the royal family from the Saudi Arabia minister's council. Through a royal decree, the king relieved Prince Fahad

bin Turki of his role as the head of joint forces in the Saudi-led coalition in Yemen while his son, Prince Abdul-Aziz was removed as the deputy governor of the Al Jawf region. In the wake of these events, King Salman appointed his son, Mohammed bin Salman, as the new crown prince (Kerr, 2020). The king argued the removed ministers had allegedly been involved in acts of corruption and failed the requirements for integrity. Irrespective of the political environment that led to the removal of these members of the royal family, the message from the king was very clear: the kingdom had embarked on a transformative journey that required the right leadership to promote a new agenda. Belonging to the royal family no longer guaranteed leadership; rather, leadership would be chosen and installed based on individual attributes and competencies.

In the context of Saudi Arabia, leadership has slowly developed into an integral component in the management of organizations, societies, and the entire nation. The support for transformative leadership has trickled down from the top leadership within the kingdom. The changing business and economic environments have pushed most Saudi Arabian organizations to embrace flexibility, innovation, and adaptability to meet changing demands. Culture plays an important role in shaping the relevant leadership qualities among Saudi managers. The uncertainty around the Covid-19 pandemic requires resilient, visionary, and flexible leadership to help organizations persevere through tough times. Adopting and sharpening leadership skills has often been associated with transformative leadership in Saudi Arabia, in which more emphasis is placed on the collective achievement of the country's greater goals (Quilliam, 2020). In the Saudi Kingdom, efforts to redefine national leadership are evident in the incorporation of leadership studies into most academic curriculums across the country, as well as the growing number of leadership training institutions.

The concept of leadership has found significant importance in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, serving as a driving force behind the kingdom's transformative agenda. There is an evident emphasis on leadership skills over managerial skills in Saudi Arabia (Hoole & Bonnema, 2015). The country boasts of a large foreign employee population due to its expansive oil sector and available jobs. Managing such a diverse population requires complex leadership philosophies and styles intentionally designed to maximize economic productivity. Alaqil et al. (2019) explained that expatriates and other foreigners in Saudi Arabia were historically subjected to leadership that concentrated on economic productivity above all else. The increasing numbers of foreigners in Saudi Arabia may be attributed to changes in leadership philosophies from productivity-focused leadership to people-centered leadership policies. Leaders in Saudi Arabia have slowly moved away from dominant responsibilities as supervisors and managers to transformative responsibilities focused on creating and achieving common organizational goals.

Saudi Arabian leadership has been largely approached from a managerial perspective. Most organizations in Saudi Arabia have historically preferred leaders who understood Saudi culture and politics, and were positioned to safeguard the interests of the various stakeholders. These perspectives have largely favored managers who were more concerned about resource utilization and profits while segregating leaders who were more likely to implement holistic policies to steer such organizations in the future. Despite previous successes, circumstances and perspectives have changed. For example, while expatriates and foreigners in Saudi Arabia were previously hired for their job skills and technical expertise, growing numbers of foreigners exist in leadership positions in private organizations within Saudi Arabia. Globalization and growing opportunities for international business within Saudi Arabian organizations have also prompted a shift to more modern leadership perspectives (Saudi Gazette, 2010).

Saudi Arabia is an absolute monarchy, committed to the preservation of traditions and norms. However, efforts are occurring to gradually transform the kingdom to a more egalitarian nature (Minevich, 2020). Similarly, The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia ascended to the World Trade Organization in 2005 in what was largely considered as a revolutionary step aimed at positioning the kingdom at the center of the Middle East's economy. The expected economic changes alongside the transformation of society cannot be realized without the right leadership, both at the national and organizational levels. For such aspirations to materialize, the kingdom must be equipped with the appropriate schools aligned to the intended changes and empower these learning institutions to continuously develop leaders who can implement the transformative agenda.

Saudi schools and institutions have been criticized for consistently failing to impart leadership skills at various levels (Male, 2015). The growing shifts in preferences from technical skills to soft skills and leadership qualities amongst Saudi employers have pushed for the incorporation of leadership studies in institutions of higher learning in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. As opposed to situations where learning institutions were mainly concerned about imparting learners with job skills, the focus has shifted to certain qualities and behaviors that prepare learners for leadership roles from an early age. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia further implements compulsory leadership studies policies aimed at redefining the roles of leadership and developing leadership skills required to succeed in the job market. The overriding aim of these policies is to equip learners with 21st century leadership skills and attitudes that will transform them into effective global leaders who can positively engage with the rest of the world. The policies not only focus on academic attainment but seek to encourage the development of

other leadership dimensions, such as mental predispositions, global citizenship, and soft skills (Smith, 2015).

Besides institutions of higher learning, there are other several learning centers dedicated to training Saudi Arabia's current and future leaders. For example, the Medina Institute for Leadership and Entrepreneurship (MILE), The Leaders Preparation Institute in Riyadh, Orient Leaders International School in Dammanm, and others have been established to address the current leadership gaps and emphasize holistic leadership for a global workforce. The curriculum at most of these institutions focuses on strengthening leadership skills through training on soft skills, interpersonal relations, and adaptability. As for future leaders, training focuses on learning leadership philosophies for different situations and developing a wide range of skills and competencies for exceptional leadership. The core objective for these institutions is to align students' leadership qualities with global trends, as exhibited in the increasing demand for multicultural and crisis leadership. Potential leaders graduating from these institutions should not be rushed to the helm of organizational leadership but slowly integrated into systems and allowed time to implement their natural and learned leadership skills (Despoina & Anthony, 2018). Leadership is a dynamic concept; training does not make one perfect but can improve upon existing competencies.

The research on soft skills required for the success of new leaders is extensive. Soft skills are essential to the development of productive environment for leaders' success (Malik & Ahmad, 2020). Similarly, soft skills are an essential requirement for providing and preparing individuals for the job market. However, research is needed on the soft skills perceived to be most important among workers in the current Saudi workplace (Al Abduwani, 2012). Soft skills

can improve one's ability to complete in the labor market, reduce unemployment, and drive economic growth.

Conclusion

The purpose of this Q methodology investigation was to examine the soft skills that Saudi Arabian leaders and employees perceive as most important for leaders to possess. Existing research on the soft skills gap between leaders and employees has been mostly examined within the context of employees' skills, rather than the soft skills possessed by leaders. This chapter provided a review of the existing literature needed to conceptualize the proposed study and highlight the gap it will address. While leadership and soft skills have been examined in the context of crisis situations, such as the Covid-19 pandemic, information is lacking on the soft skills employees and leaders perceive as most essential for leaders during crises. It is important to explore both employees' and leaders' perceptions, especially in the rapidly changing economy and society of Saudi Arabia. Findings from this study helped elucidate a skills gap between employees and leaders, in terms of how specific soft skills are ranked by both groups. In addition, the findings help increase awareness of the importance of soft skills among employees and employers alike.

Chapter 3: Methodology

As this research was focused on the subjective perspectives of Saudi professionals regarding the soft skills they view as most important for leaders to possess during times of crisis that necessitate movement to online work environments, the researcher selected and used Q methodology. Q methodology was developed as an empirical examination of human subjectivity: our perspectives, attitudes, and perceptions. In a Q methodology study, participants sort a group of stimulus items on a topic, often opinion statements as was the case here, in ways that represent their perspectives. Researchers can then use these perspectives performed by participants, called Q sorts, to examine their points of view (Coogan & Herrington, 2011).

Further, the researcher selected Q methodology to examine participant perspectives as it produces multiple perspectives shared by participants in a study. This seemed to make it appropriate for this study as existing research indicates discrepancies between employees and leaders' perceptions of the importance of soft skills (Wesley et al., 2017). In sum, these gaps in perspectives related to soft skills, both in terms of perceived importance and how they are enacted, describe an important *skills perception gap*. Q methodology seemed particularly useful for understanding gaps in perceptions regarding soft skills.

Despite discrepancies between employers' and employees' perceptions of soft skills (Wesley et al., 2017), most of the existing research on soft skills in the workplace focuses only on employees' soft skills (Albandea & Giret, 2018; Taylor, 2016; Wesley et al., 2017). Discrepancies in the soft skills that leaders and employees perceive as most essential to leadership may lead to unmet needs and poor job satisfaction among workers. To advance understandings of this problem, the skills gap must be examined not just in terms of insufficiencies among employees, but also in terms of the soft skills possessed by leaders.

The problem that this study addressed was the lack of understanding of which soft skills Saudi Arabian professionals consider most important for leaders to possess. This study leveraged Q methodology and data were collected via a web-based platform called Q Method Software. This chapter provides details of the methodology, beginning with the research question, method, design, population, and sample. Details of the procedures, including participant recruitment, data collection, and data analysis are also provided. Ethical procedures and researcher positionality are described. The chapter closes with a brief summary of methods and procedures used for the study.

Research Question

Per the standard convention of Q methodology, this study was guided by a single question: What are the collectively held perspectives among Saudi Arabian professionals regarding which soft skills they considered to be most important for leaders to possess in telecommuting environments during crisis?

Method and Design

This study leveraged Q methodology to examine the soft skills that Saudi Arabian leaders and employees perceive as most important for leaders to possess. Q methodology involves an empirical examination of subjective, opinion-based statements from the perspectives of respondents. In this way, researchers can use Q methodology to examine points of view (Coogan & Herrington, 2011). As Zabala (2014) explained, "Q is a clearly structured, systematic, and increasingly-used methodology designed specifically" (p. 163) to examine perspectives or attitudes toward topics of public concern. In issues where human subjectivity is inherent, Q methodology can be a powerful investigative tool (Zabala, 2014).

Q methodology combines the strengths of qualitative and quantitative research through statistical examination of the subjective ideas and experiences of human participants (Brown, 1993). This type of design is often considered mixed method because data are quantitatively examined, but qualitatively interpreted (Ramlo, 2011). As Brown (1993) explained, this design provides a "basis for a science of subjectivity" (p. 95). The objective examination of subjective thoughts, opinions, and ideas is where the strength and novelty of Q methodology lie. Rather than imposing *a priori* meanings, Q methodology allows participants to determine significance from their individual perspectives (Coogan & Herrington, 2011). Because patterns of Q-sorts emerge from the study, rather than through pre-determined assumptions, Q methodology can be considered an exploratory research design (Zabala, 2014).

Q methodology was first introduced in the 1930s by William Stephenson, out of a desire to scientifically examine complex subjectivities (McKeown & Thomas, 1998). The fundamental aspect of this research approach is the consideration of data in terms of patterned responses among individuals (Coogan & Herrington, 2011). Participants are asked to rank the significance of statements, typically based on the degree to which they agree or disagree with them, in a process known as a Q-sort. The statements must represent all possible opinions and perspectives to allow participants to fully express their points of view. As Watts and Stenner (2012) explained, a total of 40 to 80 statements typically comprises the final list. These statements are generated from what Brown (1993) referred to as the *concourse.* In Q methodology, concourse describes "the flow of communicability surrounding any topic" (Brown, 1993, p. 96).

The ideas, narrative, and dialogue surrounding a research topic comprise the concourse. Researchers typically develop a concourse through qualitative approaches, such as interviews, focus groups, or questionnaires. From textual data (such as transcribed interviews), researchers

identify possible statements surrounding the research subject until all possibilities have been

identified (Coogan & Herrington, 2011). Next, statements are sorted into categories and

subcategories, and duplications are removed. As Coogan and Herrington (2011) recommended,

pilot studies may be conducted to determine how easily participants are able to understand and

sort statements to ensure accurate interpretation and assignment of meaning.

Through the sorting of statements, the subjective opinions and perspectives of

participants are utilized and valued. Participants sort statements using a Q-grid, in which they

place statements they most agree or disagree with on each end of the grid, and those they feel

most neutral about in the center. The grid was symmetrical, such that if the column for "most

agreed" must have the same number of rows as the column for "most disagreed." Participants

were directed to begin at both ends of the Q-grid and filled in each column with the required

number of statements. For example, if there is one space for the "most agreed" column,

respondents would select the statement they most strongly agree with and place it in that box.

After the grid is filled out, the product is referred to as the participant's Q-sort.

Figure 1

Sample Q-Grid

The configurations of patterned responses are then inter-correlated, and factor analyzed (Coogan & Herrington, 2011). The analysis process begins with a multivariate data reduction technique. The second phase of analysis consists of flagging Q-sorts that define components, calculating scores of statements for each factor, and identifying consensus and distinguishing statements (Zabala, 2014). Q methodology aligned well with this investigation because it incorporated and measured participants' subjective opinions, allowing for a statistical understanding of how soft skills are valued by Saudi Arabian leaders and employees.

Study Procedures

As outlined by Manasia and Macoei (2018), this Q methodology study employed the following six sequential steps:

1. develop the concourse,

2. develop a Q sample of representative statements from concourse,

3. recruit participants for the P set,

4. have participants perform Q-sort,

5. statistically analyze Q-sort data, and

6. interpret and make meaning of the resultant factors.

Each of these steps are detailed below.

Developing the Concourse

The first major step of the study procedures involved the development of the concourse. For this study, the concourse consisted of written statements and the researcher sought to compile concourse items that comprised the range or statements related to the topic (Watts & Stenner, 2012). The concourse consists of the complete volume of ideas and discussion around a research topic (Manasia & Macoei, 2018). In this study, the concourse represented the range of

soft skills that leaders and employees viewed as most and least important for leaders to possess. To develop the concourse for this study, statements were derived from two sources: the existing literature and semi-structured interviews.

I began developing the study's concourse through a review of the existing literature. During this process, I systematically identified a range of soft skills that were viewed as valuable or useful for leaders to possess. This literature review indicated many soft skills are considered essential to leadership, and some notable soft skills identified in the literature were emotional intelligence, communication skills, conflict resolution, and teamwork (Gunter, 2020). This review of the literature allowed me to identify the range of other soft skills that employees and leaders viewed as valuable within the context of the pandemic and produced 23 concourse statements.

In addition to the concourse items produced by the literature review, I also used brief, open-ended interview questions with 16 participants to produce still more soft skills believed by Saudi Arabian participants to be important soft skills for leaders to possess while working during the Covid-19 pandemic. I performed sixteen interviews to add to the concourse. These sixteen semi-structured interviews were performed with eight male and eight female working professionals in Saudi Arabia and some of these participants considered themselves to be leaders within their organizations, while others did not. To be eligible for interviews, participants met the previously stated inclusion criteria: be current professionals working in Saudi Arabian organizations which had adapted to telecommuting environments and modalities in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic. During the interviews, I began by inviting participants to discuss their current professional role/position. Next, participants were asked to provide their own definitions of soft skills and why they may be important for leaders to possess – particularly within

telecommuting environments necessitated by crises like the Covid-19 pandemic. I then asked participants to name as many soft skills as they viewed important for leaders to possess, particularly in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic and the changes to their work environment the pandemic necessitated. The aim of the interviews was to build upon the collection of concourse statements identified in the existing literature to create an exhaustive concourse. These interviews produced 77 more concourse statements. Combined with the 23 concourse statements that were derived from the professional literature, these 77 concourse statements developed from the 16 interviews produced a final concourse of 100 items.

Development of the Q Sample Statements from Concourse

After developing the 100-item concourse, I then created the Q Sample, or Q-set. The Q-set is the final list of statements from which participants performed the Q-sort. This process involved the elimination of repetitive statements, the combining of statements expressing similar and overlapping ideas, and eliminating irrelevant statements. I used this process to cull the 100-item concourse to a final Q-set, or Q Sample, of 44 items (Appendix G).

Recruitment of the P set

For this Q methodology study aimed at understanding the perspectives and viewpoints of professionals in Saudi Arabia, I undertook a careful and strategic recruitment of the P-set (the participants). The first step involved identifying the target population, which consisted of professionals from diverse sectors such as finance, healthcare, engineering, education, and technology, all of which had been impacted by the shift to virtual environments during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Through online platforms, social media, email lists, and professional networks, I disseminated information about the study and invited professionals to take part voluntarily.

Before involving any participant, informed consent was obtained, ensuring they were fully aware of the study's purpose, procedures, and potential risks. Ultimately, a sample size of 44 participants was achieved, allowing me to gain valuable insights into the perspectives of professionals in Saudi Arabia.

Collecting Q-Sorts Data from Participants

After the P set had been recruited, participants were asked to perform the Q-sort. For this process, the researcher used a web-based platform designed for Q methodology named Q Method Software. Online data collection allowed the researcher and all participants to practice social distancing, while gathering data from participants who are geographically distanced. This application allowed participants to sort statements in order to complete the Q-grid. The first step involved participants sorting the 44 soft skills into three groups. The first group was for soft skills participants believed were the most important for Saudi Arabian leaders to possess in the context of remote work and Covid-19. The second group was for soft skills participants felt were neither important nor unimportant or that they were unsure about. The third group was for soft skills participants felt were the least important for leaders to possess. Following this initial sort, participants were asked to make further distinctions by taking soft skills from the three aforementioned groups in order to sort each item into a Q-grid shaped symmetrically and allowing one space for each soft skill. For this study, there were 44 statements representing soft skills, one for each of the 44 spaces of the Q grid. The grid consisted of 11 columns ranging from -4 (least important skills) to +4 (most important skills). The prompt for the Q-grid asked sorters: What are the most important soft skills that Saudi Arabian leaders should have when telecommuting after the Covid-19 pandemic?

Figure 2

Study Q Grid
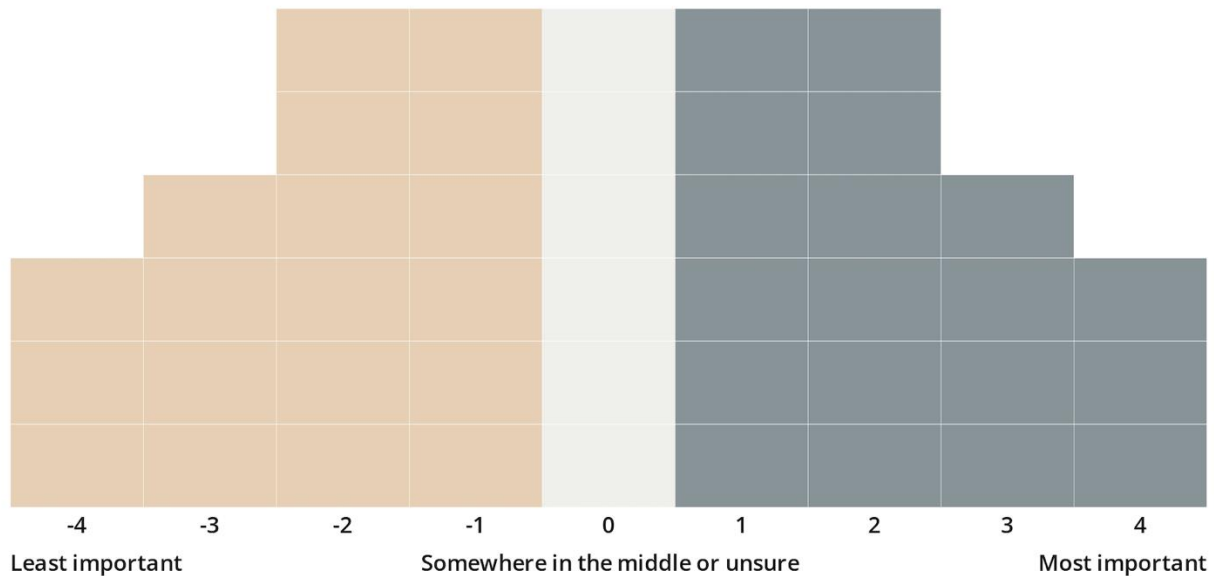
Statistical Analyses of Q-Sort Data

There are three main statistical procedures associated with Q-methodology studies: correlation of Q sorts, factor analysis of those correlations, and factor rotation and extraction. The researcher analyzed the Q sorts based on the results using a software package called Q Method Software (Schmolck, 2008). Basically, factor analysis provides a statistical means for participants to group themselves based on their responses in a Q-methodological study (McKeown & Thomas, 1998). As soon as the correlation matrix is computed, the factoring process begins (McKeown & Thomas, 1998). The following procedure was used to analyze the data:

1. Analyze the relationship between individual Q sorts using a correlation matrix.

2. Analyze the correlations using principal component analysis and extract the appropriate number of factors.

3. Maximize the distinction between extracted factors by using varimax rotation.

Correlation Matrix. Developing the correlation matrix was the first step in the data analysis. This matrix is the first data reduction technique employed in the analysis and is usually considered a transitional phase on the way to factor analysis. Generating the correlation matrix is basically determining the degree of similarity or dissimilarity between various sets of Q sorts and a composite factor array (McKeown & Thomas, 1998). As Watts and Stenner (2012) point out, a correlation matrix is one of the tools used in the Q methodology in order to measure the nature and extent of the relationship between any two Q sorts in order to identify similarities between them. Correlation coefficients can range from -1.00 to +1.00, with the lower bound indication a 100% negative correlation between two sorts, and the higher bound indicating a 100% positive correlation between two sorts. A correlation coefficient of 0.00 indicates no correlation between two sorts.

Factor Analysis. The concept of factor analysis can be described as a data reduction technique that facilitates the interpretation of data by creating smaller clusters of perspectives or meanings that share a common meaning with each other (factors), which are easier to interpret than the bigger data set (Watts & Stenner, 2012). In order to conduct a factor analysis on a Q methodology study, the first step is to extract factors or groups of participants who configured their Q sorts in a similar way. The process of extraction involved identifying distinct regularities in the patterns that existed between Q sort configurations (Watts & Stenner, 2012, p. 100). These factors are derived from "… [Q sort] factor loadings, expressed as correlations, that indicate the extent to which each Q sort is associated with each extracted factor" (Watts & Stenner, 2012, p. 114). For this study, I used Q Method Software with principal component analysis (PCA) as a

data reduction method which grouped similar Q sorts into factors, then extracted those factors, thus representing groups of individuals who share similar perspectives regarding soft skills.

Factor Rotation. A factor analysis continues by rotating the factors, with the aim of rotation to find an observation angle that best aligns the factor with the factor loadings. In other words, factor rotation aims to maximize the number of Q sorts that significantly load onto a particular factor. When multiple sorts significantly load on a factor, we can be confident that that factor accurately reflects the shared perspective of the study participants. Varimax was used in the current study to rotate the extent to which each Q sort exemplifies the factor pattern, referred to as a factor loading (Watts & Stenner, 2012). To maximize significant loads on each fact, Varimax was used in this study. Six factors were rotated using this process.

Factor Extraction. In Q methodology studies, there is no single rule for determining which factors to extract, but there are several methods available. In the Kaiser-Guttman criterion, for instance, eigenvalues are used to determine how many factors need to be extracted since they represent the statistical strength and explanatory power of each of the factors (Watts & Stenner, 2012). It is important to note that the purpose of this chapter section will be to describe these guidelines in more detail, as well as how they were applied to the current study in order to choose a factor solution for rotation and further interpretation. These guidelines were applied to the unrotated factor matrix generated by the Q Method Software.

A common and often first method to determine the number of factors to extract and retain from data is the eigenvalue criterion. Using this criterion, factors with eigenvalues over one are retained and those with eigenvalues below one are removed. For the current study, 6 un-rotated factors qualified for extraction (Factor 1 EV: 7.04; Factor 2 EV: 3.60; Factor 3 EV: 2.89; Factor 4 EV: 2.69; Factor 5 EV: 2.60; Factor 6 EV: 2.09) because all of the eigenvalues (EV)

were greater than one. According to Watts and Stenner (2012), factor analytic community members accept the Kaiser-Guttman criterion for determining the number of factors to be extracted, however, it often results in a large number of factors being extracted (Watts & Stenner, 2012). Data that is extracted this way could be meaningless and superfluous (Watts & Stenner, 2012).

Next, the amount of significant Q sort loadings contained in each factor as another criterion for choosing a factor solution for rotation was used. This method involves setting a mathematical definition for what qualifies as a significant factor load. This criterion dictates only accepting factors that has two or more significant factor loadings superfluous (Watts & Stenner, 2012). To determine the significance level of the factor loadings, the following equation must be used in order to determine the significance level:

Significant Factor Loading=2.58 x $(1/\sqrt{}$(number of items in Q set)

The threshold for the current study was calculated to be 0.39 (2.58 x $(1/\sqrt{44}$). Based on this formula, factor loadings that have values 0.39 or greater on two or more Q sorts within a single factor are considered significant. The un-rotated factor matrix in Table 1 indicates that factor 1 has 10 significant factor loadings (Qsort3 = 0.5052, Qsort11 = 0.6557, Qsort12 = 0.6358, Qsort15 = 0.5966, Qsort19 = 0.5526, Qsort22 = 0.5342, Qsort38 = 0.5440, Qsort39 = 0.5932, Qsort43 = 0.6645, Qsort44 = 0.5154). Using this method, Factors 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 & 6 had two or more significant factor loadings (0.393) that could be extracted using this method. As a result, the researcher decided to extract six factors.

Table 1

Unrotated Factor Matrix

Participant	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4	Factor 5	Factor 6	Factor 7	Factor 8
031M	-0.18302	-0.03572	-0.01951	-0.04621	-0.23818	0.14971	0.19257	0.56668
AB46	0.74907	-0.03465	-0.37861	-0.16598	0.0075	-0.04217	0.02251	-0.10023
2IOL	0.33664	-0.23782	0.13907	0.34965	-0.02027	-0.0234	0.10814	-0.35365
49M5	0.50774	0.27862	0.12571	0.34931	-0.05967	0.19207	0.05552	-0.09557
4ECK	0.08267	0.02711	0.29341	-0.02853	0.23938	0.31053	-0.12248	0.15411
5G93	0.44096	0.31297	0.1365	-0.1268	0.16082	0.32851	-0.15076	-0.31895
67UE	0.21319	0.62862	-0.01638	-0.27165	-0.1008	0.04995	-0.00221	0.11426
6KV6	0.23928	0.58563	0.39705	0.10981	-0.20917	0.24732	0.03264	-0.0907
6QGS	0.325	0.39644	-0.22433	-0.01957	0.38741	0.46809	0.00836	0.19615
7EY3	0.3126	0.43081	-0.07041	0.21942	-0.13123	0.08632	0.08324	0.18018
7PBI	0.58564	-0.17928	0.09357	0.28892	0.0388	0.2013	0.20706	0.27026
9CH6	-0.28769	0.57499	-0.24184	-0.0867	0.26592	-0.04562	-0.04988	-0.23761
ACZU	0.15986	-0.01945	-0.14354	-0.02845	0.24886	0.07813	-0.32806	0.0624
BTDR	0.42387	-0.00354	0.40157	-0.25502	-0.14096	-0.05409	0.19958	-0.07921
COP8	0.49679	-0.24691	0.41216	0.03001	-0.15334	-0.09397	-0.01539	0.16499
CQ86	-0.01802	0.3514	0.42166	0.13884	0.35462	-0.39202	-0.09892	0.10524
DDZL	0.14632	0.23422	0.08212	-0.55916	-0.26254	-0.01401	-0.25345	0.34731
FB4V	0.72432	0.08412	0.36246	-0.01078	0.10015	-0.29731	-0.00707	-0.16162
FBRC	0.42857	-0.53177	-0.09471	-0.14381	-0.01386	0.32876	0.22439	-0.10459
G56F	0.34484	-0.10852	0.28429	-0.34788	0.42605	-0.28241	-0.06586	0.28373
GE19	0.25163	-0.1221	0.47421	-0.18028	0.26623	-0.12411	0.09061	-0.04285
IECQ	0.47849	-0.20561	0.14023	0.15914	0.0668	0.10277	0.02891	-0.04224
IGHL	0.00949	0.28027	0.45471	-0.1879	0.4238	0.27219	-0.17834	0.21072
IK2Q	0.19278	0.58439	-0.23634	0.35731	0.10472	-0.2253	0.12041	-0.02685
J0GK	0.20065	0.42077	-0.14283	-0.15482	-0.47903	0.28636	-0.06959	0.05965
L0IY	0.14795	0.05719	-0.09413	0.14612	0.36197	-0.42806	0.30956	-0.03891
NE91	0.32403	-0.28915	0.0948	-0.25646	0.15352	-0.16255	-0.28966	0.14341
OCKK	0.52537	0.06493	-0.08703	0.23523	0.11636	-0.1062	-0.50593	0.09865
OVKU	0.5936	0.0597	-0.0081	-0.39352	-0.1009	-0.20159	0.27912	-0.01195
OYIR	0.31008	0.10829	-0.12477	-0.28415	0.10416	-0.03488	-0.19597	-0.30515
P2BL	-0.22641	0.1877	0.20749	-0.0299	0.07266	-0.14401	0.73958	0.13869
P570	0.22363	0.16616	0.23096	0.04739	-0.50558	-0.27253	-0.03465	0.04558
PV93	0.30525	-0.19153	-0.49817	0.04502	-0.15509	-0.14404	-0.16878	0.36518
R1Q8	0.46809	0.04381	-0.27887	-0.15523	0.25905	0.14832	0.0567	-0.44699
T8H8	0.68142	-0.20403	-0.37393	-0.13771	0.03132	-0.17549	0.10984	-0.00314
THGK	0.20443	-0.00469	-0.07025	0.34048	0.43624	0.24567	0.17396	0.18372
TNZU	0.59026	0.28995	-0.43142	0.20429	-0.00262	-0.30619	-0.01481	0.1151
TWV7	0.2792	-0.06613	0.3059	0.42367	-0.367	0.05581	-0.01218	-0.13802
V1BY	0.67173	-0.16625	0.09301	0.06103	0.10982	0.10745	0.07221	0.1337
VIZU	0.49529	0.3737	-0.08123	0.16874	-0.28573	-0.2787	-0.01654	0.12275

Participant	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4	Factor 5	Factor 6	Factor 7	Factor 8
WHFM	0.13991	0.05131	-0.32836	-0.27041	0.23297	0.17607	0.51096	0.20085
YVAE	-0.08429	-0.23081	-0.13823	0.46345	0.31893	-0.12381	-0.22976	0.22728
Z2Y8	0.42444	-0.21188	0.07719	0.45267	-0.1258	0.2836	-0.05607	0.10827
ZNK5	0.61317	-0.34873	-0.09937	-0.3169	-0.21903	0.09514	-0.0645	-0.06247

Study Participants

The 44 participants for this study were recruited and selected using both purposeful and snowball sampling techniques. The researcher was purposeful in recruiting Saudi Arabian professionals who had varying types of leadership responsibilities within their respective organizations. Further, participants for this study were delimited to those who self-reported working for organizations that adapted to telecommuting environments and modalities in wake of the Covid-19 pandemic. For the purposes of the research, professionals included any workers (middle management or below) and leaders who adapted to telecommuting in wake of the Covid-19 pandemic. As previously defined, leaders are individuals who possess the skills and experiences to develop vision and organizational positionality needed to guide followers toward goals (Gujral, 2012). For the purposes of this research, leaders included any employees of organizations who hold managerial, supervisory, or executive positions and who are actively involved in work with subordinate employees and who have adapted to telecommuting in wake of the Covid-19 pandemic.

I recruited participants through my personal network, using purposeful and snowball sampling at two different phases of the research. For the first phase, in which opinion statements were gathered from participants responding to open-ended questionnaire items about what they believed were the most important soft skills for Saudi leaders to possess during crises that necessitate the migration to telecommuting work settings, 16 participants were successfully recruited. Later, after the Q sample was developed and data collection shifted to participant

performances of online Q sorts, I recruited 44 participants (both leaders and employees). The number of participants in Q methodology is typically fewer than in other quantitative examinations, as statistical factors begin developing after relatively few participants. (Brown, 1993). Thus, the number of participants within Q methodology studies do not need to be large, but they should be diverse in terms of the variables that might influence the perspectives participants hold on the topic at hand (Zabala, 2014). Participants for this study were drawn from those who self-identified as leaders as well as those who did not. Likewise, both men and women participated in this study and they represented a wide range of current jobs and occupations (See Table 2). To be eligible for the study, individuals were current employees or leaders working in Saudi Arabian organizations and have adapted to telecommuting in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic. The study did not focus on any single industry or sector.

Table 2

Participant Demographics

Participant ID	Gender	Age	Education	Job Title	
J0GK	Female	46-55	PhD or EdD	graduate student	< 5 years
4ECK	Male	36-45	Bachelors	CEO	< 5 years
ACZU	Male	46-55	Masters	Supply chain VP	< 5 years
MXB4	Male	46-55	Masters	CEO	< 5 years
VL48	Male	56 +	PhD or EdD	Intentional HR Consultant-Trainer	10 +
1.00E+75	Female	36-45	PhD or EdD	Family and trauma therapist	5-10 years
OVKU	Female	36-45	Masters	Director - Head of Sector	< 5 years
TNZU	Male	56 +	Masters	Chief Technology Officer	< 5 years
PB94	Male	36-45	Masters	CFO	10 +
XQMI	Male	36-45	Bachelors	VP data	< 5 years
T8H8	Female	36-45	PhD or EdD	Family and trauma therapist	5-10 years
PV93	Male	36-45	Masters	Chief of Business Excellence	< 5 years
IK2Q	Male	56 +	Masters	Group CEO	< 5 years
58T1	Male	36-45	Masters	Regional Director	< 5 years
P570	Male	46-55	Bachelors	CEO - SCAI.	< 5 years
TWV7	Female	36-45	PhD or EdD	Head of Department	< 5 years
031M	Male	36-45	Masters	CFO	< 5 years
XI12	Male	36-45	Masters	Accounts Executive	5-10 years

Participant ID	Gender	Age	Education	Job Title	
CQ86	Male	46-55	Masters	Vice president	5-10 years
FB4V	Male	36-45	Masters	Corporate Development VP	< 5 years
7EY3	Female	36-45	Masters	Executive advisor	< 5 years
G56F	Female	26 - 35	Masters	lecturer	5-10 years
5G93	Male	46-55	Masters	Founder and CEO	< 5 years
IGHL	Male	46-55	Masters	Founder and CEO	< 5 years
OCKK	Male	36-45	Bachelors	CEO	< 5 years
WHFM	Male	36-45	Bachelors	Business Head	5-10 years
L0IY	Male	36-45	Masters	CEO	< 5 years
ZNK5	Male	46-55	Masters	VP	< 5 years
Z2Y8	Female	26 - 35	Masters	Risk manager	< 5 years
6KV6	Male	36-45	Bachelors	Chief Strategy Officer	< 5 years
6QGS	Female	36-45	PhD or EdD	Educational administrator	< 5 years
COP8	Female	26 - 35	Masters	Risk Manager	< 5 years
KI02	Male	36-45	Masters	Chief Commercial Officer	< 5 years
7PBI	Male	36-45	Bachelors	Collection Manager	5-10 years
P2BL	Male	36-45	Masters	Managerial Level	5-10 years
THGK	Male	36-45	Bachelors	vice president	5-10 years
4ELB	Female	36-45	PhD or EdD	Program Director	< 5 years
49M5	Female	36-45	PhD or EdD	Program Director	< 5 years
R1Q8	Male	36-45	Masters	Governance, risk and compliance Manager	< 5 years
FBRC	Male	36-45	Bachelors	Collection Team Leader	10 +
OYIR	Female	36-45	Masters	Product Manager	5-10 years
2IOL	Male	46-55	Masters	Collection Supervisor	5-10 years
NE91	Male	36-45	Masters	Operational Planning Manager	< 5 years
V1BY	Male	46-55	Masters	Manager	10 +
QNRJ	Male	36-45	Bachelors	VP	< 5 years
YVAE	Male	36-45	Bachelors	Executive	< 5 years
IECQ	Male	36-45	Masters	CFO at Tech Industry & Chairman at Petrochemical	< 5 years
67UE	Male	46-55	Masters	General Manager, Strategy & Performance	< 5 years
DDZL	Female	36-45	PhD or EdD	Dentist	10 +
GE19	Male	46-55	Bachelors	Head of IT Department	< 5 years
CLTU	Female	36-45	PhD or EdD	Lecturer	10 +
VIZU	Male	36-45	Masters	Lecturer	5-10 years
BTDR	Male	36-45	Bachelors	Consultant	10 +
3HNY	Female	56 +	Medical Doctor	professor\consultant	5-10 years
9CH6	Female	46-55	Masters	Human Resources Professional	10 +
Z0OB	Female	26 - 35	Masters	Manager	< 5 years

Ethical Procedures

To ensure the fair and ethical treatment of all participants, several ethical procedures were followed. First, Institutional Review Board approval was obtained from the University of North Florida prior to any participant recruitment or data collection. The identities of all participants were protected, and no information which could link respondents with their identities was published. Pseudonyms were used for all interview participants and the data collected online for the Q-sort procedures was completely anonymous. To ensure participant autonomy, informed consent was obtained from all participants. Informed consent advised participants of this study's purpose, participation requirements, risks, benefits, the researcher's contact information, and the voluntary nature of participation. No incentives were provided to ensure no possible coercion.

Study participation was accompanied by no significant risks, other than the minor stress or discomfort that may occur from participation in interviews or completing the Q-sort. Only the researcher had access to raw data, and all study data was stored on a personal, password-protected computer. Data analyses were conducted on the researcher's personal computer. Data was stored as required by the University of North Florida, and after the prescribed amount of time will be permanently deleted.

Researcher Positionality Statement

As the principal investigator for this study, I understand that my interest in the Saudi Arabian workforce and the importance of leaders' soft skills during the Covid-19 pandemic stems from my own experiences as a Saudi Arabian. I am particularly interested in this topic because I think cultural shifts in Saudi Arabia, including leadership, industrial, and economic changes, have resulted in an increased need for leadership soft skills; yet this need seems to be

largely unaddressed. Further, shifts in terms of gender equality and the growing presence of women in the workforce, both as leaders and workers, has created changes in the ways leaders must be able to respond and adapt to the needs of employees. These changes and the growing importance of soft skills were becoming evident prior to the Covid-19 pandemic. However, the rapid workplace evolution that took place in an attempt to practice social distancing and slow the spread of the virus created increased stress, anxiety, and confusion among many workers who were forced to shift to remote work. Consequently, it is essential that Saudi Arabian leaders and managers who supervise remote workers possess important soft skills such as empathy and communication.

This topic is dear to me, but I appreciate the opportunity to objectively examine the opinions and perspectives of Saudi Arabian leaders and employees through a Q methodology design. I believe the Q methodology approach helped reduce potential bias while leveraging the valuable perspectives of Saudi Arabian professionals, both leaders and employees, who have been thrust into remote work settings in the wake of the Covid-19 outbreak. It is my hope that findings will bring light to the importance and value of soft skills among Saudi Arabian leaders.

Chapter Summary

This chapter provided details of this study's methodology. The chapter began with a discussion of the method, design, population, and sample. Next, study procedures were fully detailed. A discussion of ethical procedures was followed by the researcher positionality statement. In the next two chapters, study findings are presented in Chapter 4 and a discussion of the results and implications can be found in Chapter 5.

Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Results

This study was situated around the following research question: *Among Saudi Arabian professionals, which soft skills are considered most important for leaders to possess in telecommuting environments during crises?* This study was conducted using Q Methodology due to the exploratory nature of the research question and my aim to elucidate the perspectives of study perspectives, or subjectivity, in a systematic way.

This chapter describes, discusses, and explores the factor groups, or shared perspectives, that were produced from the statistical procedures, or factor analytic techniques, used to discern patterns among participant Q sorts. Specifically, the researcher engaged in a systematic qualitative analysis of the resultant six factors for this study by examining the factor arrays (or idealized shared Q sort) for each perspective, the post-sort responses participants provided explaining the decisions they made sorting, and the demographic or background information affiliated with the participants who loaded on each factor. In order to develop a description of each factor, the researcher analyzed the data from the factor arrays and extracted the post-sort statements from participants who represented each collective perspective, particularly their thoughts on the soft skills they considered "most important" and "least important" for leaders to possess in a telecommuting environment during a crisis. These data, along with the contextual background information for those participants, were used by the researcher in order to create a narrative description of each factor.

Factor Descriptions

In order to develop the descriptions of each of the six factors below, the researcher used three data elements. First, I analyzed the data from each factor's factor array as the primary data sources. Factor arrays are examined within the same forced distribution in which participants

originally sorted the Q sample items representing soft skills. The researcher analyzed the unique

distribution of the Q sample items, looking for patterns and themes in each distribution pattern.

Secondary to the unique distribution of the Q sample items for each factor, the researcher also

used the data collected from participants' post-sort responses to questions related to the choices

they made while sorting. Specifically, participants were asked to elaborate on why they ranked

the soft skills they determined to be the most and least important for leaders to possess in

telecommuting environments during crises. Participant responses to the post-sort questions were

used to thicken the description of each factor and help the researcher better understand how each

factor's participants understood the topic as a whole as well as some items individually. Lastly,

the researcher considered the background information related to participants who loaded on each

factor. In sum, the researcher used each of these three data sources: factor arrays, participant

responses to post-sort questions, and participant background information. Of these three, the data

from the factor arrays contributed most to the descriptions of the factors. Using this process, I

described the six factors named: Communicating Stability by Modeling Reliability, Honesty, and

Credibility (Factor 1); Listening, Disclosing, Engaging, and Inviting Bidirectional

Communication (Factor 2); Ethical Exemplars through Fairness, Goodness, and High Moral

Values (Factor 3); Capable Solutions-Oriented Leadership (Factor 4); Future Orientation,

Confidence, and Big Picture Leadership (Factor 5); and Leadership Skills that Convey Stability,

Clarity, and Strength (Factor 6).

Factor 1: Communicating Stability by Modeling Reliability, Honesty, and Credibility.

Factor 1 had an eigenvalue of 7.046 and accounted for 16% of the explained variance in

the study. Out of the 44 participants, 10 loaded significantly on Factor 1. It is important to note

that one participant had a negative load on Factor 1, making this factor bipolar, and as such this

factor description will include an additional description of this related, but inverted perspective within Factor 1. Out the 10 participants who loaded significantly on this factor, six were males and four were females. Three of the participants indicated that their age range was between 46-55 years-old, four between 35-46 years-old, and two participants between 26-35 years-old. Regarding their educational levels, seven participants reported holding a master's degree, two have a Bachelor's degree and one had a Ph.D. degree. Factor 1 participants held a variety of different professional positions, including two risk managers, one collection supervisor, one collection team leader, one collection manager, one chief financial officer, one human resources professional, one head of department, one manager, and one vice president. Five participants in this group indicated that they have been in their current position for less than five years, three participants for 10 years or more, and two between five and ten years (Table 3).

Table 3

Factor 1 Participant Demographics

Sex/Gender	Age Range	Education Level	Position	Experience in Current Position
Male	46-55	Masters	Collection Supervisor	5-10 years
Male	36-45	Bachelors	Collection Manager	5-10 years
Female	46-55	Masters	Human Resources	10 or more years
Female	26-35	Masters	Risk Manager	Less than 5 years
Female	26-35	Masters	Risk Manager	Less than 5 years
Male	36-45	Masters	CFO and Chairman	Less than 5 years
Female	36-45	Doctorate	Department Head	Less than 5 years
Male	46-55	Masters	Manager	10 or more years
Female	26-35	Masters	Risk Manager	Less than 5 years
Male	46-55	Masters	Vice President	Less than 5 years

These participants were also asked questions regarding their general perceptions. Nine participants of the 10 responded that it is very important for leaders in Saudi Arabia to possess soft skills and one responded that its somewhat important. Seven participants from this group "strongly agreed" that soft skills are more important for leaders during times of crisis, while three "somewhat agreed" with this statement. Lastly, four indicated they "strongly agreed" that soft skills are more important for leaders to possess in telecommuting environments, five indicated that they "somewhat agreed" with it, and only one neither agreed nor disagreed.

The Factor 1 viewpoint focused on the importance of leaders in telecommuting environments during crises, such as the Covid-19 pandemic, demonstrating soft skills that communicate honesty and reliability both directly and through modeling in order to instill a sense of stability. Secondary, but still of great importance to the Factor 1 viewpoint, were soft skills and characteristics also being perceived to be important for navigating crises that necessitated moving to telecommuting environments. These included strong problem-solving skills, time management skills, being innovative and creative, and having strong critical thinking skills. The importance of these soft skills for participants who comprised the Factor 1 perspective were represented by Q sample statements that occupied either a +4 or +3 in factor array (Figure 3). The theme of communication threaded throughout this factor was expressed by the prominent position of a number of items representing soft skills involving elements of effective communication. Further, the Factor 1 perspective exemplified an understanding that organization members or followers are watching their leaders carefully in telecommuting environments amidst crises like the Covid-19 pandemic, so there is a great importance for soft skills that enable leaders to communicate to them both directly and through modeling. Therefore, Factor 1 was named Communicating Stability by Modeling Reliability, Honesty, and Credibility.

Figure 3

Factor 1 Q Sample Distribution

-4	-3	-2	-1	0	1	2	3	4
			36. Being able to receive feedback from others.	27. Able to share or delegate work tasks and responsibilities.	29. Being supportive.	40. Optimism.	25. Having vision and seeing "the big picture."	
		1. Emotional self-regulation.	33. Being open-minded.	35. Ability to help resolve conflicts with and among others.	39. Being focused on the future.	7. The ability to focus or concentrate on relevant topics, issues, or challenges.		
	11. Engaging others.	10. Empathy.	37. Helping others develop toward their own potential.	44. Being able to tolerate ambiguity and uncertainty.	24. A growth mindset.	9. Being respectful.	30. Strong problem-solving skills.	
26. Being authentic.	31. Being a good judge of others.	23. Demonstrating passion and enthusiasm.	16. Demonstrating consistent ethical character in all settings and places.	8. Confidence.	22. Being highly motivated.	19. Being able to work well under pressure.	28. Time management skills or ability to prioritize one's time appropriately.	21. Honesty.
32. Making others feel acknowledged and recognized.	43. Being attentive to detail.	42. Generosity.	17. Understanding and effectively demonstrating appropriate professional etiquette including online.	2. Being flexible and comfortable with change.	15. Having a win-win attitude.	5. Being trustworthy.	34. Being innovative and creative.	3. Being a good communicator.
6. Humility.	41. Vulnerability.	4. Ability and willingness to empower others.	12. Able to work effectively with people from diverse backgrounds.	38. Patience.	13. Being a good listener.	18. Ability to make decisions even when those decisions are difficult.	14. Strong critical thinking skills.	20. Being reliable and responsible.

-4	-3	-2	-1	0	1	2	3	4
Least important				Somewhere in the middle or unsure				Most important

The Factor 1 perspective emphasized soft skills that could be used to establish stability and credibility during the uncertainty that arises during times of crisis that necessitate moving to telecommuting environments. The most important soft skills identified among this perspective were being honest, being reliable and responsible, and being a good communicator. The relationship among those soft skills seems to be complex and multidirectional. For example, for this perspective, the conditions of being a good communicator (Statement 3: +4) seemed to be associated with honesty (Statement 21: +4) as well as reliable and responsible (Statement 20: +4). Alternately, just as honesty, reliability, and responsibility seemed to frame what the Factor 1 perspective viewed as effective communication, effective communication also seemed to be the vehicle for leaders to express that they are honest, reliable, and responsible. Regardless of the

directionality of the relationship among these soft skills, or which ones support the others, the Factor 1 perspective seemed constructed within the context of crises and telecommuting environments requiring leaders who are good communicators as well as honest, reliable, and responsible people.

Secondary to the importance of good communication, honesty, and reliability and responsibility as core soft skills for leaders during crises and in telecommuting environments; the Factor 1 perspective next emphasized soft skills, including the ability to problem-solve (Statement 30: +3), think critically (Statement 14: +3), innovate (14: +3), and manage their time appropriately (28: +3). Having first established credibility through their honesty, reliability and responsibility, and effective communication, leaders in the Factor 1 perspective must then be able to navigate the complexities and uncertainties that crises present to organizations and that navigation is perceived to require critical and creative thinkers who can solve problems and organize their time in order to do so. One Factor 1 participant, an experienced manager with more than 10 years of experience in his role, wrote that "Prioritizing, decision making, and a win-win mind set are very critical because you need to identify your tasks quickly and arrange them, make direct decisions, and help the organization to achieve the required outcomes on all levels." His sentiment reflected this perspective's view that crises seem to demand an urgency for leaders which, in turn, require the ability to prioritize and creatively arrange and direct organizational tasks. Like this participant, other Factor 1 sorters occupied relatively high levels within their organizational hierarchies and were also experienced leaders. As such, they expressed an understanding that other leaders have capability and the freedom to manage themselves and their time with strong problem-solving skills. Additionally, they seemed to be communicating that the role-freedom of leaders during times of crisis necessitate that they make

decisions even when they are difficult (18: +2), work well under pressure (19:+2), and utilize

their positionality in the organization that allows them to have a "big picture" understanding of

the organization, the crisis at hand, and the challenges inherent in it (25:+2).

The Factor 1 perspective placed great importance on soft skills that signify and

demonstrate that leaders are responsible for and have insight of their organization, thus, they

need to communicate with their employees to inform them about the difficulties of the crisis

through the prism of their strong critical thinking skills. This factor perspective valued leaders

who emphasize soft skills that support strong communication, particularly communication that is

conveyed with honesty. For this perspective difficult conversations necessitated by both crises

and telecommuting environments require honesty, and because of leaders' important positions

and status within organization, being viewed as honest and responsible are essential.

Just as the soft skills that Factor 1 perceived as the most important help inform an

understanding of this viewpoint, the soft skills perceived as least important add still more

meaning. The soft skills the Factor 1 perspective viewed as being least important for leaders to

possess in telecommuting environments during crises were authentic (26: -4), being humble (6:

-4), and making others feel acknowledged (32: -4). In their elaborations around these "least

important" soft skills, Factor 1 participants noted that the conditions of crisis and the

telecommuting environment demanded a prioritization of leadership soft skills and that these

were less central to the leadership work at hand. For example, one participant, a collection

manager, wrote that "we have to focus on the main job." For him, the main job involved using

soft skills such as effective communication; being honest, reliable, and trustworthy; and

creatively solving the problems at hand. Another participant on this factor, a male manager with

considerable experience in his role, seemed to express that the urgency in this work context

required a directness as leaders that was more important than more relational soft skills. He wrote that "Authenticity, humility, and etiquette are least important as during time of crisis you need to demonstrate stronger diverse and sometimes harsh skills."

Within the Factor 1 perspective, leaders are here to act, perform, and command a presence. In other words, they must cultivate a persona which is needed right now in the crisis to get everyone through. They are indicating that when there is a crisis there is no time for vulnerability (41: -3) and humility (6: -4). As another Factor 1 participant, a risk manager, expressed, "A leader should work and think logically, not emotionally." She elaborated further that a leader's character is best demonstrated not through attending to emotions, but through taking action, writing that "Decision-making is critical and requires encouragement which is a leader's character."

As noted previously, these participants might place importance on different soft skills for leaders if they were not viewed through the contexts of a crisis and a telecommuting environment. Additionally, as with any Q factor perspective, although Factor 1 participants share statistically similar perspectives, there can still be diversity within that perspective. For instance, individual participants who loaded on Factor 1 seemed to have placed similar importance on certain soft skills but for different reasons. For example, the female risk manager on this factor placed little importance on the soft skill of demonstrating vulnerability elaborating that "A leader should work and think logically not emotionally." Here, her demographic background might be important. As a female in Saudi Arabia, working in a profession only opened to her and other women relatively recently, placing less importance on expressing vulnerability may be because she does not want to lose legitimacy among men in the organization. Similarly, for her, humility might be confused for weakness, which might undergird her statement that "Decision making is

critical and requires encouragement which is a leader's character." It may be that this female leader, who has less than five years' experience, might be putting on this command presence persona for a very different reason that simply being in the context of the Covid-19 crisis and the telecommuting environment it forced.

Aside from the unique circumstances that might influence individual sorters' perspectives, in aggregate, the Factor 1 perspective seemed to place less importance on certain soft skills because their title and high-ranking positions meant that other people in the organization are tasked to attend to them. The Factor 1 perspective expresses an understanding that leaders should be making big decisions that require important analysis, which during crises might even involve the survival of the company. Therefore, skills like vulnerability (41: -3), engaging others (43: -3), and being attentive to detail (11: -3) are relegated for subordinates. This seemed to be in keeping with this perspective's emphasis on the importance of time-management and decision-making. The Factor 1 perspective on leader soft skills during crisis prioritized the ability for leaders to manage their time and make corresponding decisions to engage in more advanced institutional leadership tasks. Notably in this factor two sorters listed their current work role as risk managers. Those roles are particularly constructed around identifying, evaluating, and prioritizing risks and then addressing them. In some ways, this role encapsulates some of the collective viewpoint characterized by Factor 1, with a primary emphasis on the soft skills needed to direct their workforce to achieve most of the relevant and necessary goals of the organization. These collective perspectives placed little importance on soft skills focused on people in the organization, but rather emphasized soft skills reflecting more task orientation.

In sum, the Factor 1 perspective, when considering contexts of crisis that necessitate working in telecommuting environments, placed the most importance on Saudi leaders

possessing soft skills of being a good communicator, particularly when coupled with the qualities of honesty, reliability, and responsibility. Also, given this telecommuting and crisis-laden context, this perspective placed little importance on empathy, authenticity, and attending to others in the organization. During their post sort-comments, the participants on this perspective emphasized that their perspectives were informed by a belief that the challenges presented by the Covid-19 pandemic and resultant shift to telecommuting work environments requires "sometime harsh skills" in order to focus on at-the-moment organizational needs in order to reach the most desirable outcomes for their organizations and the employees within them. As a result of the analysis of the holistic positioning of the soft skills by importance to the Factor 1 perspective, as well as participants' post-sort responses and background information, Factor 1 was named *Communicating Stability by Modeling Reliability, Honesty, and Credibility*.

Factor 2: Listening, Disclosing, Engaging, and Inviting Bidirectional Communication.

Factor 2 had an eigenvalue of 3.602 and accounted for 8% of the explained variance. Out of the 44 participants, six loaded significantly on this factor. This factor was composed of four males and two females. Four of the participants indicated that their age range was between 36 to 45 years old and two participants are 56 years or older. Regarding their educational level, four participants reported holding a master's degree, one Bachelor's degree, and one with a Ph.D. degree. In terms of their current work position, one classified as Program Director, one as Chief Strategy Officer, one as Executive advisor, one as Group CEO, one as Chief Technology Officer, and one as Lecturer. In this group four participant indicated that they have been in their current position for less than five years, and only one between five to 10 years. The demographic information for this factor is presented in Table 4. All six participants in this factor responded that it is very important for leaders in Saudi Arabia to possess soft skills. Five participants of this

group answered that they strongly agree that soft skills are more important for leaders during times of crisis, and one answered that they somewhat agree with this statement. Lastly, all six participants replied that they strongly agree that soft skills are more important for leaders to possess in telecommuting environments.

Table 4

Factor 2 Demographic Information

Sex/Gender	Age Range	Education Level	Position	Experience in Current Position
Female	36-45	Doctorate	Program director	Less than 5 years
Male	36-45	Bachelors	Chief strategy officer	Less than 5 years
Female	36-45	Masters	Executive advisor	Less than 5 years
Male	56 years +	Masters	Group CEO	Less than 5 years
Male	56 years +	Masters	Chief technology officer	Less than 5 years
Male	36-45	Masters	Lecturer	5-10 years

For leaders in telecommuting environments during a crisis, the Factor 2 viewpoint placed most importance (+4s) on softs skills involving good communication (Statement 3), good listening (Statement 13), and having a vision for seeing the big picture (Statement 25). Second most important soft skills (+3s) for the Factor 2 perspective included emotional self-regulation (Statement 1), engaging others (Statement 11), empowering others (Statement 4), and being respectful (Statement 9). When viewed in relationship with each other, these soft skills and the descriptive comments made by participants in this factor paint a portrait of a leadership style that

places great emphasis on understanding the team's active capacity. For this perspective, understanding "the big picture" means that leaders are focused on others in their organizations and the contributions they can make to it. The sorters in this factor believed that when leaders within this study's context focus on listening well and communicating effectively, they empower people.

Figure 4

Factor 2 Q Sample Distribution

-4	-3	-2	-1	0	1	2	3	4
			31. Being a good judge of others.	34. Being innovative and creative.	20. Being reliable and responsible.	18. Ability to make decisions even when those decisions are difficult.	10. Empathy.	
			17. Understanding and effectively demonstrating appropriate professional etiquette including online.	19. Being able to work well under pressure.	15. Having a win-win attitude.	28. Time management skills or ability to prioritize one's time appropriately.	16. Demonstrating consistent ethical character in all settings and places.	
	44. Being able to tolerate ambiguity and uncertainty.	39. Being focused on the future.	2. Being flexible and comfortable with change.	40. Optimism.	5. Being trustworthy.	14. Strong critical thinking skills.	1. Emotional self-regulation.	
41. Vulnerability.	6. Humility.	22. Being highly motivated.	23. Demonstrating passion and enthusiasm.	33. Being open-minded.	27. Able to share or delegate work tasks and responsibilities.	32. Making others feel acknowledged and recognized.	11. Engaging others.	3. Being a good communicator.
42. Generosity.	30. Strong problem-solving skills.	24. A growth mindset.	35. Ability to help resolve conflicts with and among others.	21. Honesty.	7. The ability to focus or concentrate on relevant topics, issues, or challenges.	29. Being supportive.	4. Ability and willingness to empower others.	13. Being a good listener.
43. Being attentive to detail.	38. Patience.	26. Being authentic.	12. Able to work effectively with people from diverse backgrounds.	8. Confidence.	37. Helping others develop toward their own potential.	36. Being able to receive feedback from others.	9. Being respectful.	25. Having vision and seeing "the big picture."

Least important   Somewhere in the middle or unsure   Most important

This belief of communication as a tool for empowerment extended deep into the sorters' factor array. For example, it also included an emphasis on the soft skill of having the ability to listen respectfully and accept feedback (Statement 36: +2) and to exhibit empathy (Statement 10: +2). One of the participants who loaded on this factor, a Group CEO with a Master's degree, wrote that:

When the work environment is remote and under pressure (crisis), focusing on promoting

the best possible potential of the team is a priority. I personally feel that communicating

over the phone or using a virtual conferencing platform does not hide feelings or

emotions. The tone, the sequence, the wording, propagate a lot of feelings like

confidence, assertiveness, and so on.

Here, this Factor 2 participant is emphasizing and reiterating the importance of, and

relationships between, good communication, empathy, and empowerment.

The Factor 2 perspective placed further emphasis on extending empathy by

acknowledging that crises create stress for employees, so supporting them is an important skill

(statement 29: +2). One of the men who loaded on Factor 2 elaborated by noting that:

Crisis times and telecommunicating environments mean that there is already a lot of

pressure on all the employees. Taking this into consideration is very important. I believe

that…soft skills are…important to make sure no additional pressure is added to the

employee, which leads to a healthy work environment.

This empathy seemed to be viewed by Factor 2 participants as, at least in part, tactical.

Their logic seemed to be that the more employees could be supported and empowered, the

stronger they would become, and the stronger the organization becomes. The Factor 2

perspective of leadership leverages soft skills that put people first, that help them feel

appreciated (statement 32: +2), so that they can grow and achieve their full potential (Statement

37: +1).

Notably, the Factor 2 perspective's focus on leaders putting people first seemed to leave

little room on soft skills pertaining to leaders' personal characteristics. This perspective placed

the least important soft skills to be humility (Statement 6: -3), patience (Statement 38: -3),

generosity Statement 42: -4), and vulnerability (Statement 41: -4). Rather than leaders focusing on their own personal qualities, this factor perspective instead saw the importance of putting employees in the right positions to contribute to the organization, and be given the time, space, and attention they need to succeed in in innovatively implementing the organization's mission, particularly in a telecommuting environment during crises. As a male Chief Technology Officer on this perspective phrased it, "In a telecommuting environment, it is very critical for the leaders not to lose sight of the big picture and the driving vision while engaging key stakeholders to participate and innovate."

Despite humility being ranked of little importance (-3) in this factor, the sorters nonetheless seemed to demonstrate some humility, believing that leadership is best achieved when people engaged (statement 11: +3). This seemed to be a different kind of humility through action and enacted leadership. This humility may come from placing importance on the understanding that because leaders have more of the "big picture," they should use that positionality to help get the most significant contributions from their employees and that requires a belief in their essential roles for the organization to succeed. Another way of putting this is that the sorters believe that accomplishing the mission is more likely to be successful when everyone contributes to it, especially during a crisis. It is therefore important to value all voices, which can be accomplished by optimizing and allowing others to contribute. This point was well expressed by the Chief Technology Officer when he stated, "The leader has to be a good listener to ensure that the best and optimal decision has been chosen".

Factor 2 emphasized the importance of soft skills that demonstrate and support an empathetic understanding of employees. For this perspective, empathy begins with an acknowledgement that, during a crisis that necessitated a move to telecommuting environments,

employees are likely having difficult times emotionally (statement 10: +2). Such leadership is ultimately undergirded by the ability to focus on others, which in this perspective required the skill of emotional self-regulation (Statement 1: +4). Alternately, for the Factor 2 perspective, personal characteristics such as vulnerability and humility are less important skills, at least when applied directly for their own sake. For instance, the Chief Technology Officer wrote that "Humility is a double-edged sword that might be viewed by others as a weakness, particularly in a telecommuting environment. Showing vulnerability is also not a key requirement for a strong leader." This comment illustrates the nuance within this perspective regarding soft skills that embody personal characteristics, that they are useful within an organization, but not necessarily for the leaders in the organization.

The acknowledgement of employees' emotions during trying circumstances is important enough that such leaders must first regulate their own emotions. In this perspective, leaders should focus on others in the organization and by doing so create the conditions for others to express soft skills such as vulnerability and humility more directly. As the Group CEO put it, "Some skills are needed in my team a lot more than they are needed in me." Inherent in this prioritization of soft skills is the idea that others can attend to individual employee needs, particularly when the leader has sufficient composite understanding of the organization to empower others to do so. The Group CEO reflected on this when he stated that "I hire the best to do what they do best, I do not need to copy that." As a result of the analysis of the holistic positioning of the soft skills by importance to the Factor 2 perspective, as well participants' post-sort responses, Factor 2 was named *Listening, Disclosing, Engaging, and Inviting Bidirectional Communication*.

Factor 3: Ethical Exemplars through Fairness, Goodness, and High Moral Values.

Factor 3 had an eigenvalue of 2.894 and accounted for 7% of the explained variance for the study. Out of the 44 participants, three loaded significantly on this factor. This factor was comprised of three males, all of whom indicated they had been in their current positions for less than five years. Two of the participants indicated that their age range was between 36 to 45 years old, and one participant is between 46-55 years old. Regarding their educational level, two reported holding a master's degree, and one held a bachelor's degree. In terms of their current work positions, one listed his as Founder and CEO, one as CEO, and one as Chief of Business Excellence. All three participants in this factor responded that it is "Very Important" for leaders in Saudi Arabia to possess soft skills. All three participants of this group answered that they "Somewhat Agree" that soft skills are more important for leaders during times of crisis. Lastly, all three participants replied that they "Strongly Agree" that soft skills are more important for leaders to possess in telecommuting environments.

Table 5

Factor 3 Participant Demographics

Sex/Gender	Age Range	Education Level	Position	Experience in Current Position
Male	36-45	Bachelors	CEO	Less than 5 years
Male	46-55	Masters	Founder, CEO	Less than 5 years
Male	36-45	Masters	Chief of Business Excellence	Less than 5 years

Overall, the Factor 3 viewpoint focused on the importance of leaders in telecommuting environments during a crisis being ethical exemplars who express and model virtues including

honesty, patience, and a disposition toward growth and possibility. This perspective represented leadership that is confident and even bold, but one that is clear about there being distinctions between leaders and others in an organization. While these role definitions are an important component of the Factor 3 perspective, it also includes a belief in others in the organization, placing great importance on positioning others to succeed.
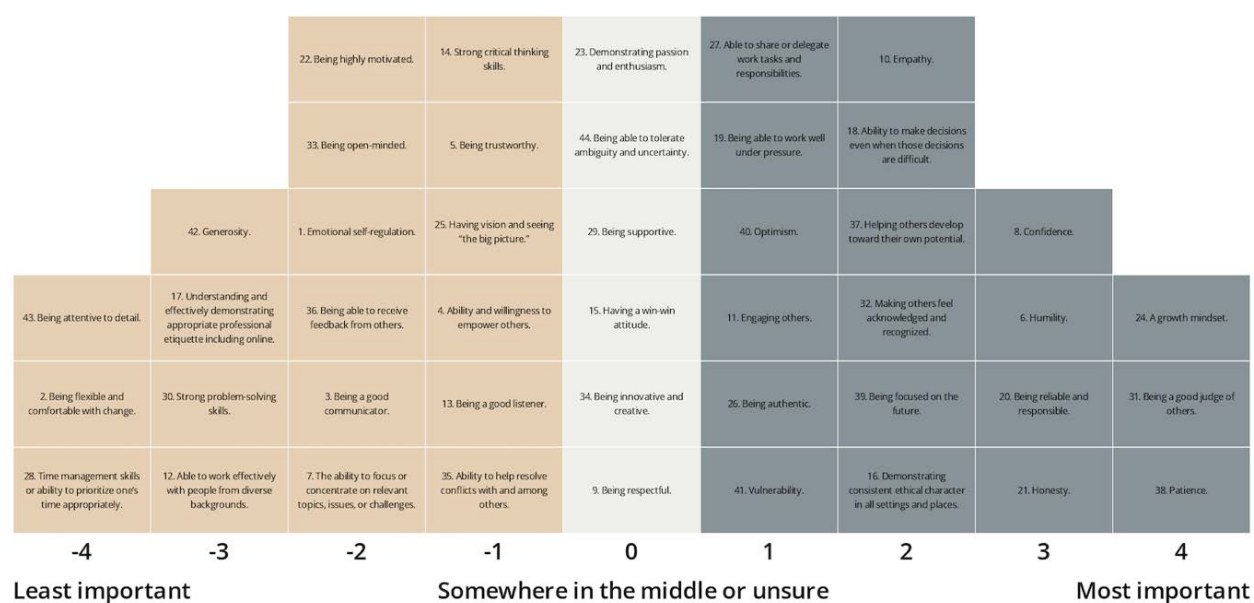
The most important soft skills to the Factor 3 perspective were having a growth mindset (Statement 24: +4), being a good judge of others (Statement 31: +4), and demonstrating patience (Statement 38: +4). Taken together, these three soft skills highlight this perspective's emphasis on the crucial leadership task of staffing the organization with people who can grow and excel. For the Factor 3 viewpoint, it is important for leaders to be good judges of others when hiring and managing, because this perspective placed great importance on people being ethical and virtuous. It is also important from this perspective that the organization and those in it are ethical and virtuous, so hiring employees who can fit into that culture is essential. Once these employees are in place, then the leader models the companion soft skills of having a growth mindset and being patient with others' growth.

The next most important soft skills for this perspective were all personal attributes or virtues. These attributes were confidence (Statement 8: +3), humility (Statement 6: +3), being reliable and responsible (Statement 20: +3), and honesty (Statement 21: +3). For the Factor 3 perspective, these attributes are important for leaders to have, but also model. As one of the Factor 3 participants put it, "They are mostly needed for leaders to be perceived as role models." It is notable that of the three participants on this factor, two were CEOs and one was in a position identified as Chief of Business Excellence. Their positions likely do mean that others are looking to them and their leadership. For this perspective, being role models provides opportunities to

help establish a work culture and environment that allows for excellence to be fostered. This was expressed by one of the two CEOs who wrote that "A leader in any position shall create a healthy environment for employees to innovate and unleash their potential rather than showing them how to do their job."

Figure 5

Factor 3 Q Sample Distribution

The Factor 3 perspective on the most important soft skills for leaders to possess in telecommuting environments during crises seemed to be informed by considering what soft skills were more likely to be universally held within an organization, including by those who do not hold leadership positions. Soft skills that were viewed by this perspective as least important were being attentive to detail (Statement 44: -4), being flexible and comfortable with change (Statement 2: -4), and managing one's time well (Statement 28: -4). It is important to consider

that sorters did not reject the importance of these soft skills, but rather seemed to view them as essential skills that everyone in their organizations already possess. The Chief of Business Excellence expressed this when we wrote that "They could be demonstrated by people who are not leaders." The Factor 3 perspective, having placed most importance on being good judges of others, and then providing employees with a work culture focused on growth and development, seemed to count on those employees enacting soft skills so that leaders could focus on other skills.

In addition to the soft skills deemed least important for leaders (-4s), this perspective placed the next least importance on leaders in the study's context having strong problem-solving skills (Statement 30: -3), being able to work with people from diverse backgrounds (Statement 12: -3), understanding and demonstrating appropriate professional etiquette online (Statement 17: -3), and showing generosity (Statement 42: -3). One of the CEOs in this factor noted that "Critical thinking and attention to details are skills that can be possessed by anyone of the team. It also can be delegated." Again, this perspective confined some soft skills exclusively to the domain of leaders, while soft skills they believed to be more universal were viewed as less important for leaders as they could be delegated or distributed to others. This CEO summed up this element of the Factor 3 perspective by stating, "As a leader, I will hire someone who can do what I cannot do, and he/she will tell me how to do it."

One exception to the idea that the Factor 3 perspective believed each of the soft skills to be important, if not important for leaders in particular, was generosity (Statement 42: -3). To the Factor 3 sorters, generosity appeared to have been interpreted as an act of bestowing an unearned benefit or privilege on someone else. One of the CEOs on this factor elaborated on this by writing, "Regarding Generosity, it's not a must and will cause unfairness if not regulated. I

believe judging based on performance and outcomes is vital while Generosity is an option that will be demonstrated in certain occasions." Here he seemed to be expressing that to him, the idea of generosity means extending benefits or rewards to employees for reasons other than the merits of their performance. This focus on fairness seemed to fit within this perspective's general preoccupation with virtue and ethics. Here there seems to be a belief amongst them that generosity ought to be a meritocracy based on performance and outcomes, so that it should occur "every once in a while" because it will cause disappointments if inherently unfair or is done too frequently. This group is concerned about promoting fairness and high ethical standards.

In this group, goodness is a virtue that is highly valued. In an interesting way, they were able to compare goodness with fairness, as one of the CEOs on this factor stated, "Ethics are the core base that will be demonstrated by the leader through fairness."

On the whole, the Factor 3 perspective placed the most importance on skills viewed as being more befitting if not exclusive to leaders, while they seemed to express the belief that leaders should have transcended other skills in the workplace and, in particular, skills that represent virtuous qualities. This perspective placed importance on the capacity of leaders to model by example. It should be noted again that the Factor 3 sorters all held elevated leadership positions and who likely believe they obtained this status through their own hard work and force of will. Further, they seemed to associate those virtues with others, including the idea that individuals with character can also grow and evolve to this point, a key component to having a growth mindset. Further, this perspective holds that leaders are the arbiters of fairness through the development of a fair system within their own companies. Consequently, they are going to try to create such a system within their own work environment so that others can benefit from it as well. This group who sorted out the skills for Saudi Arabia leaders within a telecommuting

environment during a crisis focused on leaders who held and could demonstrate virtues such as honesty, humility, patience, and a growth mindset in order to become role models for others. There is a sense of confidence in their ethics and their values, which seems to have fueled their belief that as people with high moral standings, others will wish to emulate them, which would in turn create the best opportunities for everyone in the organization (and the organization itself) to thrive and grow.

Factor 4: Capable Solutions-Oriented Leadership.

Factor 4 had an eigenvalue of 2.690 and accounted for 6% of the explained variance in the study. Out of the 44 participants, six loaded significantly on this factor. It is important to note that sort 42 has a negative load, making Factor 4 bipolar. Out of the six participants two were males and four were females. Five of the participants indicated that their age range was between 36-45 years, and only one was between 46-55 years old. Regarding their educational level, one participant reported holding a master's degree, two Bachelor's degree, and two with a Ph. D or Ed.D. degree. In terms of their current work position, one identified as a Consultant, one as a Dentist, one as Graduate Student, one as Director - Head of Sector, and one as Executive. In this group three participant indicated that they have been in their current position for less than five years, and two of them have been for 10 years or more. All five participants responded that it is very important for leaders in Saudi Arabia to possess soft skills. Also, four participants of this group answered as Strongly Agree that soft skills are more important for leaders during times of crisis, versus only one answered somewhat agree with this statement. Lastly, four participants replied as Strongly agree that soft skills are more important for leaders to possess in telecommuting environments, and one replied somewhat agree with the statement.

Table 6

Factor 4 Participant Demographics

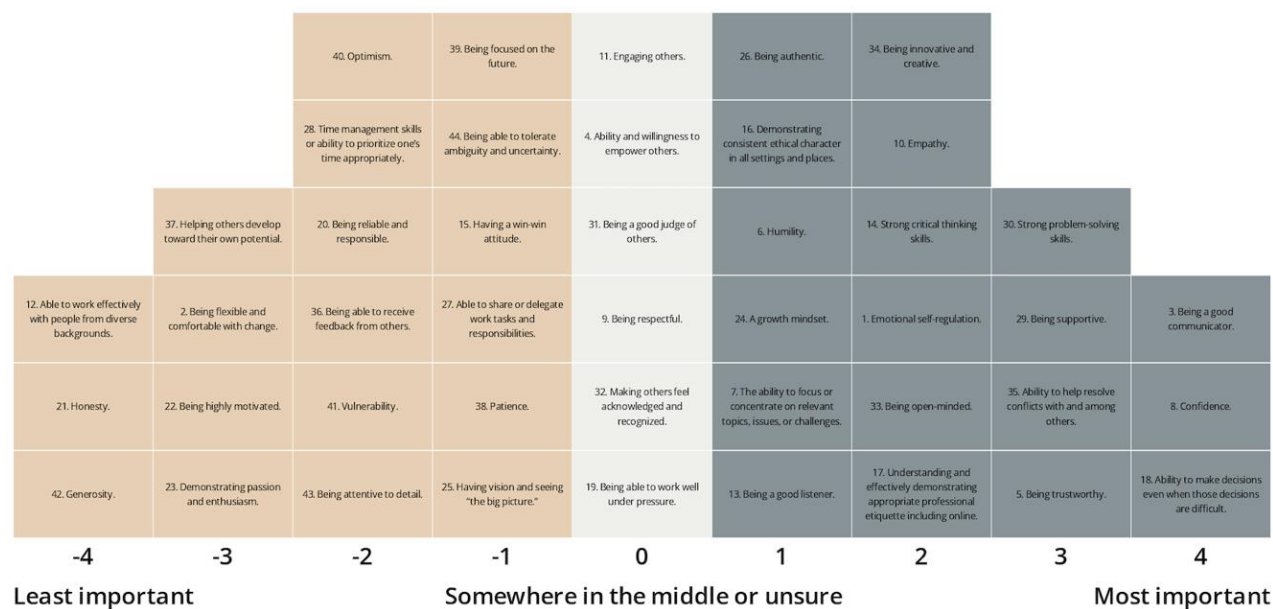| Sex/Gender	Age Range	Education Level	Position	Experience in Current Position
Male	36-45	Bachelors	Consultant	10 years or more
Female	36-45	Doctorate	Dentist	10 years or more
Female	46-55	Masters	Graduate student	Less than 5 years
Female	36-45	Masters	Director/Head of Sector	Less than 5 years
Male	36-45	Bachelors	Executive	Less than 5 years

The Factor 4 viewpoint represented leaders with soft skills that would allow them to generate solutions, but also enact strategies to accompany those solutions for challenges in the organization created by crises. The most important soft skills affiliated with this approach to leadership were being an effective communicator (Statement 3: +4), being confident (Statement 8: +4), and the ability to make decisions even when those decisions are difficult (Statements 18: +4). The next most important softs skills to the Factor 4 perspective included strong problem-solving (Statement 30: +3), being supportive (Statement 29: +3), having the ability to help resolve conflicts with and among others (Statement 30: +3), and being trustworthy (Statement 5: +3). Conversely, the softs skills viewed as being least important to the Factor 4 perspective seemed to be filtered through a shared lens that focused on the immediacy caused by the Covid-19 crisis. Expressed otherwise, the least important soft skills in this perspective seemed less relevant to its sorters because of the crisis they had experienced.

Problem-solving (Statement 30: +3) during crises and the other skills which support it in an organization were central to this factor. One of this factor's participants, a woman who held a

director position titled "Head of Sector," wrote that "in crisis it is important for leaders to control the pressure from higher management to normalize the situation and be able to analyze the possible solutions and further make the correct decisions." This emphasis on problem-solving can also be seen in the importance this perspective placed on making decisions even when they are difficult (Statements 18: +4). Similarly, to Factor 4, resolving conflicts (Statement 30: +3) is about solving problems. Notably, whether it is resolving conflicts or making difficult decisions, such acts of problem solving here viewed as being supported by being an effective communicator (Statement 3: +4) and being confident (Statement 8: +4). For this perspective, a leader's effectiveness as a problem-solver depends on having the confidence to engage in it and then having the ability to communicate it. For Factor 4, the importance of communication is a key to mediating attribute, or soft skill, as the confidence required to believe in yourself as an excellent decision maker, a good problem solver, and a good thinker. Two participants on this factor elaborated on this understanding. The first, a Saudi graduate student pursing a doctorate, wrote for leaders, being a "good listener [is] the most important skills a leader can master in this online era because it shows the ability to hear what isn't said from people." Here, this sorter demonstrated this perspectives' emphasis on the study's context influencing their prioritization of soft skills in this study. This was echoed by another Factor 4 participant, the Head of Sector, who wrote that:

> being a good listener, I think is the number one required quality, which also means the ability to read emails and memos carefully, as not all work is conducted in face-to-face meetings. A lot of people are still not used to virtual meetings and listening and reading emails and memos very well.

Factor 4 Q Sample Distribution

Figure 6

Factor 4 Q Sample Distribution

-4	-3	-2	-1	0	1	2	3	4
				40. Optimism.	39. Being focused on the future.	11. Engaging others.	26. Being authentic.	34. Being innovative and creative.
			28. Time management skills or ability to prioritize one's time appropriately.	44. Being able to tolerate ambiguity and uncertainty.	4. Ability and willingness to empower others.	16. Demonstrating consistent ethical character in all settings and places.	10. Empathy.	
		37. Helping others develop toward their own potential.	20. Being reliable and responsible.	15. Having a win-win attitude.	31. Being a good judge of others.	6. Humility.	14. Strong critical thinking skills.	30. Strong problem-solving skills.
12. Able to work effectively with people from diverse backgrounds.	2. Being flexible and comfortable with change.	36. Being able to receive feedback from others.	27. Able to share or delegate work tasks and responsibilities.	9. Being respectful.	24. A growth mindset.	1. Emotional self-regulation.	29. Being supportive.	3. Being a good communicator.
21. Honesty.	22. Being highly motivated.	41. Vulnerability.	38. Patience.	32. Making others feel acknowledged and recognized.	7. The ability to focus or concentrate on relevant topics, issues, or challenges.	33. Being open-minded.	35. Ability to help resolve conflicts with and among others.	8. Confidence.
42. Generosity.	23. Demonstrating passion and enthusiasm.	43. Being attentive to detail.	25. Having vision and seeing "the big picture."	19. Being able to work well under pressure.	13. Being a good listener.	17. Understanding and effectively demonstrating appropriate professional etiquette including online.	5. Being trustworthy.	18. Ability to make decisions even when those decisions are difficult.

-4	-3	-2	-1	0	1	2	3	4
Least important				**Somewhere in the middle or unsure**				**Most important**

Statements that the Factor 4 perspective viewed as the least important soft skills for Saudi Arabia leaders within a telecommuting environment during a crisis included working effectively with people from diverse backgrounds (Statement12: -4), being honest (Statement 21: -4), or showing generosity (Statement 42: -4). The doctoral student among the Factor 4 sorters explained: "I rank them as least important because in my view there were more important skills for leaders to possess in this era." She was expressing the influence of the study's context, the Covid-19 crisis necessitating a move to an online work environment, on how she prioritized these softs skills for leaders.

Another Factor 4 participant, the Head of Sector, noted that for her, the soft skills viewed as least important were perhaps unnecessary for top-tier leaders. She wrote that she considered soft skills like "Receiving feedback" (Statement 36: -2) and "working with diversity" (Statement

12: -4) as "important qualities but maybe more important for working-level and second-level leadership, but for top leadership I think it is possible to succeed without them."

The Factor 4 participants again drew attention to the study's context of the most important soft skills for leaders upon moving to a telecommuting environment due to a crisis. For instance, while exploring why he ranked items such as helping others develop toward their own potential (Statement 37: -3), being flexible and comfortable with change (Statement 2: -3), being highly motivated (Statement 22: -3), and demonstrating passion and enthusiasm (Statement 23: -3) as being least important, an executive on Factor 4 wrote that "these skills related more to long term planning."

In keeping with the Factor 4 emphasis on direct problem-solving and the skills that support it, this perspective seemed to view the least important skills as those relating to people rather than problems (e.g. "working with people from diverse backgrounds"). They may view such people-centered soft skills as necessary, but not essential to solving problems that arose during a crisis. These people-centered soft skills seemed to be less important because they were not seen as essential for solving problems. In keeping with this viewpoint, soft skills such as generosity and honesty, which are best characterized as personal characteristics, were viewed as less important for leaders than soft skills such as problem-solving skills, which are better characterized as practices rather than characteristics.

In summary, the Factor 4 perspective included participants who were clear that they made meaning around the most important soft skills for leaders based on assumptions or considerations regarding the problems and uncertainty organizations faced during the Covid-19 crisis that necessitated many workers and leaders move rapidly to telecommuting environments. This perspective, named *Solutions-oriented leadership, capable of enacting strategies to create those*

solutions, focused on soft skills that more resembled practices and skills that could be marshalled to cohesively resolve the crisis in the short term. Such problem-solving and solution-seeking was supported by the importance of effective communication, confidence, making difficult decisions, and having the trust of those in the organization.

Factor 5: Future Orientation, Confidence, and Big Picture Leadership

Factor 5 had an eigenvalue of 2.60 and accounted for 6% of the explained variance in the study. Out of the 44 participants, six loaded significantly on this factor. Of the six participants, two were females and four were males. Four of the participants indicated that their age range was between 36-45 years old, and two were between 46-55 years old. Regarding their educational level, two participants reported holding a master's degree, two hold Bachelor's degree and two have a Ph. D or Ed.D. degree. In terms of their current work position, one classified as a family and trauma therapist, one as an Educational Administrator, one as Supply Chain VP, one as CEO, one as Chief of Business Excellence, and one as Business Head. In this group, four participants indicated that they have been in their current position for less than five years, and two of them have been in their current position between five and 10 years. All six participants responded that it is very important for leaders in Saudi Arabia to possess soft skills. Additionally, four participants of this group answered as Strongly agree that soft skills are more important for leaders during times of crisis, versus two who answered that they somewhat agree with this statement. Lastly, four participants replied as Strongly agree that soft skills are more important for leaders to possess in telecommuting environments, as opposed to two participants who replied that they somewhat agree with the statement.

Table 7

Factor 5 Participant Demographics

Sex/Gender	Age Range	Education Level	Position	Experience in Current Position
Female	36-45	Doctorate	Family and trauma therapist	5-10 years
Female	36-45	Doctorate	Educational administrator	Less than 5 years
Female	36-55	Masters	Supply chain Vice President	Less than 5 years
Male	46-55	Bachelors	CEO	Less than 5 years
Male	36-45	Masters	Chief of Business Excellence	Less than 5 years
Male	36-45	Bachelors	Business head	5-10 years

The Factor 5 viewpoint represented a view of leadership in telecommuting environments during crises that is constructed around personal confidence that allows the leader to work well under pressure for the survival of the organization, including orienting toward the future and understanding the "big picture" facing the organization and employees in it. The most important soft skills corresponding with the Factor 5 perspective were working well under pressure (Statement 19: +4), having the ability to make difficult decisions (Statement 18: +4), and focused on the future (Statement 39: +4).

For the Factor 5 perspective, undergirding these soft skills is the importance of leaders being confident (Statement 9: +3). An educational administrator with a doctorate who loaded on Factor 5 elaborated on the fundamental importance of confidence. She wrote:

I believe that leaders who are self-confident are able to deal with problems and conflicts immediately, rather than ignoring, or passing problems to others. This because

confidence is the foundation of leadership. Leaders first must believe in him/herself in order to accomplish their goals. Without self-confidence, it is going to be tough or maybe impossible to lead and gain followers.

This Factor 5 participant described how Saudi leaders during times of crisis must be confident before all else. That confidence, through this perspective, then supports still other important leader soft skills including making difficult decisions and honestly and bravely facing problems directly, rather than deferring to others or another time. The central importance of confidence was echoed by another Factor 5 participant, a Supply Chain Vice President, who wrote that, to him:

> Basically, you have to have confidence in yourself and your team to deliver upon commitment…. This will help to build the bond relationship with your team and with that level of trust they will strive to do more and more.

The prism of leader confidence provides a useful lens for viewing the next most important softs skills for leaders within the Factor 5 perspective. These softs skills, like confidence (Statement 9), were all +3s in this perspective's factor array and included time management (Statement 28), sharing or delegating work tasks and responsibilities (Statement 27), and having vision and seeing the big picture (Statement 25). Just as the Educational Administrator in this perspective stated that "Leaders first must believe in him/herself in order to accomplish their goals," leaders in the Factor 5 perspective must lean into their confidence in order to effectively determine the best use of their time, delegate work and responsibilities, and trust the vision they have for the organization and moving it beyond the difficulty caused by the pandemic and online work.

Figure 7

Factor 5 Q Sample Distribution
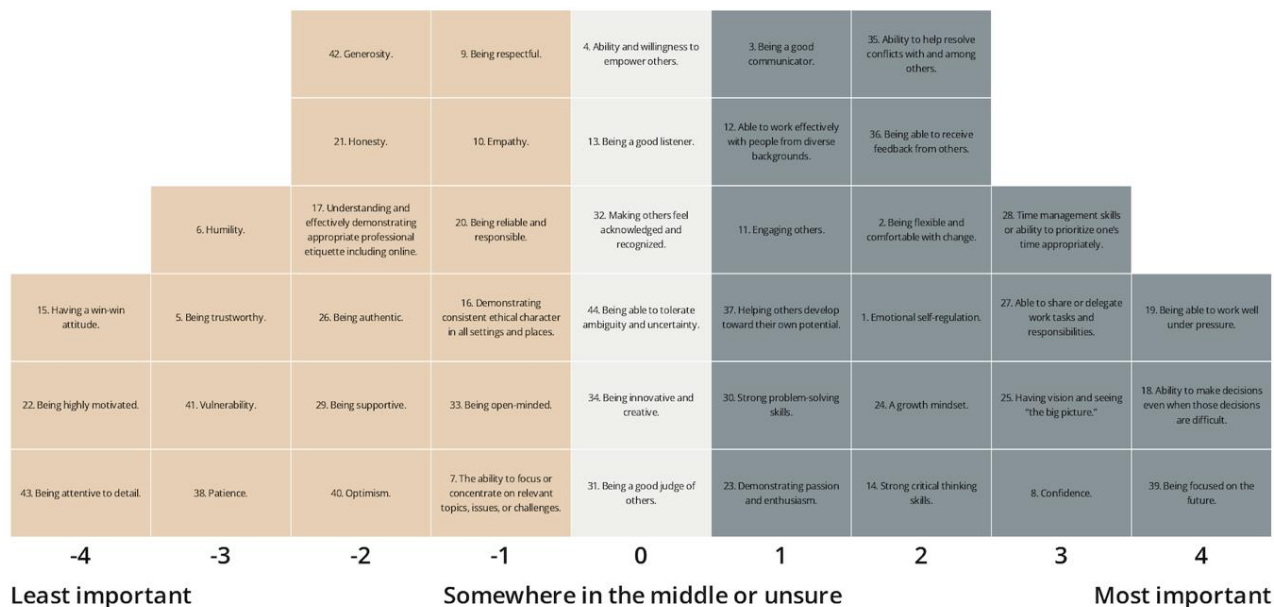
Sorters in this factor seemed to believe that while being in a high-level position can cause a lot of pressure, during a crisis there will be even more stress and difficulty. That is why making hard decisions in the telecommuting environment during a crisis were considered one of the most crucial skills that Saudi Arabia leaders could possess (statement 18: +4). A well-expressed statement regarding this point was made by a Business Head who said, "The higher in hierarchy you are, the higher the responsibilities. Hence pressure." Leadership brings with it pressure. The Factor 5 perspective expressed that such pressures are intensified during times of crises and overcoming such pressure takes confidence.

Another key component to the Factor 5 perspective was the soft skill of seeing "the big picture." For this perspective, having the vision to see the big picture was affiliated with another soft skill, having an orientation toward the future. The Educational Administrator on Factor Five

observed that "many leaders are not naturally detail-focused and are more interested in the big picture." In exploring her thinking around the importance of leaders seeing the big picture, this Factor 5 sorter associated it with another important soft skill in this perspective: time management skills (statement 28: +3). She wrote that "The benefit of being a leader is that sometimes you can delegate important tasks to people who can do them better than you can." The sorters on this factor seemed to believe that getting the most out of their time involves delegating effectively and supervising minimally, and not micromanaging through a focus on details (Statement 43: -4). This point was clearly expressed by her as she elaborated: "As a leader, you should care about the details. But that doesn't mean you need to be the one focusing on them all day, especially if that is not your natural strength".

In addition to finding the attention to detail as being among the least important soft skills in the Factor 5 perspective, the other least important soft skills (ranked -3 or -4 in the factor array) included having a win-win attribute (Statement 15: -4), being highly motivated (Statement 22: -4), being humble (Statement 6: -3), being trustworthy (Statement 5: -3), vulnerability (Statement 41: -3), and patience (Statement 38: -3). Again, it is important to understand that these Factor 5 perspective holders were not making general statements about the importance of these soft skills, but rather they were communicating that they are simply less valuable to leaders in telecommuting environments during crises. As the Educational Administrator phrased it, "they are not unnecessary, but the least required in my opinion."

Digging further into this perspective's least important soft skills, it seemed that being attentive to detail (statement 43: -4) stood in contrast to being able to manage time and delegate work tasks and responsibilities effectively. After all, as a leader you can't attend to details or micromanage everything if you are looking at the big picture, therefore, you need to delegate and

share work tasks with your team. Similarly, for this perspective, humility (Statement 6: -3) could be seen as a counterpoint to confidence (Statement 8: +3). In this perspective it is very important to believe in yourself, and that your employees believe in you as well. Thus, humility could be misinterpreted quite easily. Humility could be viewed as a quality that could endanger what to this perspective is the most important expression of character during a crisis period: confidence. Moreover, because it is a time of crisis, there will be a great deal of pressure and emphasis on navigating out of the crisis in the future, which may mean there will be little time left for patience (Statement 38: -3).

Overall, the Factor 5 perspective seemed to represent an understanding about how leadership roles are distinguishable from other roles that may not necessarily have leadership components within an organization. Through this perspective, leaders must confidently manage their time differently in order to focus on the future and their vision for the "big picture." Finally, leaders must depend on their confidence when delegating tasks and sharing responsibilities with others in order for them to assume even more of the roles required of leaders during crises.

Factor 6: Leadership Skills that Convey Stability, Clarity, and Strength.

Factor 6 had an eigenvalue of 2.60 and accounted for 5% of the explained variance in the study. Out of the 44 participants, five loaded significantly on this factor. Of the five participants, four were males and one was female. Two of the participants indicated that their age range was between 36-45 years, two participants were between 46-55 years, and one participant was between 26 to 35 years old. Regarding their educational level, four of the participants reported holding a master's degree, and only one with a bachelor's degree. In terms of their current work position, one classified as Vice president, one as Corporate Development VP, one as lecturer, one as the Head of IT Department, and one as CEO. In this group, three participants indicated

that they have been in their current position for less than five years, and two of them between

five and 10 years. Four participants responded that it is very important for leaders in Saudi

Arabia to possess soft skills, versus one responded Somewhat agree. Also, three participants of

this group answered as Strongly agree that soft skills are more important for leaders during times

of crisis, as opposed to two answered somewhat agree with this statement. Lastly, four

participants replied as Strongly agree that soft skills are more important for leaders to possess in

telecommuting environments, as opposed to one replied neither agree nor disagree.

Table 8

Factor 6 Participant Demographics

Sex/Gender	Age Range	Education Level	Position	Experience in Current Position
Male	46-55	Masters	Vice president	5-10 years
Male	36-45	Bachelors	Corporate Development Vice President	Less than 5 years
Female	36-45	Masters	Lecturer	5-10 years
Male	26 - 35	Bachelors	Head of IT Department	Less than 5 years
Female	36 - 45	Masters	CEO	Less than 5 years

The Factor 6 viewpoint focused on leaders in telecommuting environments during crises

possessing soft skills that convey stability, clarity, and strength. For the Factor 6 perspective,

times of crisis create great uncertainty, instability, and confusion. These conditions must be met

by leaders who possess and can demonstrate soft skills that address and counter them. Similarly,

the soft skills least important to the Factor 6 perspective reflect qualities and skills that

participants on this factor viewed as being least crucial for addressing the negative conditions during crises.

For the Factor 6 perspective, the most important soft skills for leaders to possess during crises that required organizations to move to telecommuting environments were being reliable and responsible (Statement 20: +4), being able to make hard decisions (Statement 18: +4), and being confident (Statement 8: +4). A lecturer who loaded on this factor wrote that "leaders are responsible for helping the organizations and employees pass the crisis with the best solution and least losses." Her point was that navigating through challenges created by crises like the Covid-19 pandemic should be the primary objective of leaders. In order to navigate through these challenges, the Factor 6 perspective placed the greatest importance on the leader soft skills perceived to bring the most stability and clarity. As such, this perspective perceived that most clarity and stability could be brought by leaders who are viewed as being reliable and responsible, being viewed as being able to make good decisions, and being viewed as confident. The Factor 6 perspective expressed the view that leaders should model those soft skills to others in the organization. The VP of Corporate Development who loaded on this factor wrote elaborated that, "As a leader, your team/organization is looking up to you to guide and steer how should the crisis be managed and resolved."

In addition to the three most important soft skills to the Factor 6 perspective, the next most important soft skills also represented characteristics and skills that would contribute to the reduction of uncertainty and instability for employees. These soft skills that were next most important to the Factor 6 perspective were honesty (Statement 21: +3), having vision and seeing the big picture (Statement 25: +3), being trustworthy (Statement 5: +3), and being able to tolerate ambiguity and uncertainty (Statement 44: +3). A Vice President who loaded on Factor 6 wrote

that, "It's important followers feel confidence, stability with clarity." This factor perspective's acknowledgment of the inherit instability and ambiguity during crises seemed to include the belief that leaders must take on that instability and ambiguity to relieve the affiliated pressure on other members of the organization.

Figure 8

Factor 6 Q Sample Distribution

The ability to tolerate ambiguity and uncertainty was a key element in this factor's perspective. A Vice President who loaded on Factor 6 discussed this soft skill by stating that

> In times of crisis, or where we need the best, it's important to get the most trust and loyalty where individuals will get out of their way to contribute. I believe this can be done when…a trusted leader [has] a clear agenda and mission especially when they are recognized.

For Factor 6 participants, the leader must contend with and tolerate ambiguity and uncertainty so that other employees will not have to do so themselves. Similarly, the Factor 6 perspective maintained that leaders who embody honesty, have the capacity for organizational vision, and are trustworthy contribute to a work environment in which employees feel more secure and confident themselves. A head of an IT department who loaded on Factor 6 wrote that "There are only certain soft skills needs for such environment to be productive. So, a leader to influence needs specific skills during crisis."

For the Factor 6 perspective, the soft skills that were viewed as being least important for leaders to possess during crises were those believed to be less useful or needed to address the core organizational challenges of uncertainty and instability. The soft skills that were viewed by Factor 6 as being the least important for Saudi Arabian leaders during a crisis in a telecommuting environment were being able to receive feedback from others (Statement 36: -4), being innovative and creative (Statement 34: -4), and being a good judge of others (Statement 31: -4).

The Vice President who loaded on Factor 6 described how some of these soft skills might not only lack utility during crisis, but could actually contribute to the crisis. Discussing creativity, he wrote, "Creativity always good…but may be destructive during crises. It's important followers feel confidence, stability with clarity." Like this Vice President, the Lecturer who loaded on Factor 6 also elaborated on creativity, writing that "being creative [is] important and very needed when there is time, but not during crises."

While there is no doubt innovation and creativity are viewed by most as useful soft skills for any employee, the Factor 6 perspective expressed an understanding that they may be problematic in times of crisis since they might impede clarity. These sorters appeared to be

communicating concerns with creativity during times of duress, explaining that there may be inherent instability that could worsen problems in the organization.

Similarly, the soft skills that were second least important to the Factor 6 perspective should be viewed through the lens of whether they contribute to or lessen uncertainty and instability. These soft skills included being attentive to details (Statement 43: -3) having a win-win attitude (Statement 15: -3), helping others develop toward their own potential (Statement 37: -3), and showing generosity (Statement 42: -3). As a CEO on this factor stated, "Those are good to have," however, not as important for the demands of the immediate crisis and the telecommuting issue. Sorters seem to understand the general importance of those soft skills they ranked as less important, and perhaps under normal circumstances they would have ranked them higher, but not during the challenging times and circumstances of the pandemic.

In summary, the Factor 6 perspective expressed a belief that the most important soft skills for Saudi leaders during crises that necessitate moving to telecommuting environments are those that can best reduce the ambiguity, the uncertainty, and the difficulty inherent in it. Conversely, those soft skills that do not reduce these negative impacts of crises as fully, or may even contribute to them, are the least important. For Factor 6, the soft skills of being responsible, having confidence in their abilities, and being able to make the right decisions regardless of how difficult they are were viewed as being the most effective during crises because they were viewed as being best able to address the uncertainty employees experienced. Thus, the Factor 6 perspective was named Leadership skills that convey stability, clarity, and strength.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to explore Saudi Arabian working professionals' perceptions about what they perceived to be the most important soft skills for leaders to possess in a telecommuting environment during a crisis. This study was initially conceived as a more general investigation into the perceptions of soft skills among leaders, however, this study and the world were interrupted by the Covid-19 pandemic. As a result of this global crisis, I integrated the additional contextual components to the study to acknowledge the new working and leadership realities participants were experiencing. The changes to the world of work and leadership seemed to render the use of leadership soft skills even more important. As more Saudi Arabian workplaces continue to work via telecommuting, leaders' soft skills seemed to be required, even crucial, to overcoming the many challenges related to the telecommuting environments necessitated by Covid.

Even with these sudden shifts, some of the early foundational conjectures for this study remained. One was that in order for leaders' soft skills to be most effective, professionals' perceptions must be aligned with those of the leadership within their organizations. Most studies focused on workplace soft skills have examined employees' use of skills rather than those skills exhibited by leaders. Additionally, while there has been some focus on useful soft skills during crisis situations such as the Covid-19 epidemic, little is known about how professionals with varying leadership responsibilities perceive those skills. Finally, there was and is a need for research exploring perceptions of soft skills within Saudi workplaces as Saudi Arabia's economy and society rapidly change. There is a likelihood that soft skills are conceived and described differently by different role holders in organizations. This study may shed some light on these differences by providing empirical evidence of the nature of soft skills by examining Saudi

professionals' views on the subject through the use of Q Methodology (QM). QM was chosen because it is a systematic method to study human subjectivity holistically and provides insights into the varied, yet finite, diversity of viewpoints surrounding a topic (Brown, 1993; McKeown & Thomas, 1998; Stephenson, 1953; van Exel & de Graaf, 2005; Watts & Stenner, 2012).

In a QM study, those determinate viewpoints are expressed as factors. Therefore, Chapter 5 begins with a deeper discussion of the six factors identified in this study beyond the descriptions as presented in Chapter 4. This chapter was written in order to examine the patterns and themes that emerged across the six factors. In order to establish themes, I compared the positioning of Q sample statements across all of the factor arrays in order to identify patterns. Next, this chapter revisits the study's conceptual framework in light of its findings. In addition, this chapter presents the implications of the findings from this study and explores the study's strengths and limitations. Lastly, I present future research recommendation, reflections on lessons learned as a researcher and leader, and offer some final conclusions.

Themes and Patterns in the Results

This study produced six factors, each representing a distinct perspective shared among groups of study participants. The primary purpose of a QM study is to identify and understand the distinct perspectives that emerge from the statistical analyses of participant sorts. However, there were additional patterns of meaning. The researcher examined this study's six factors looking for patterns among the soft skills and how they were viewed across factors. In some QM studies, data analyses identifies what are referred to as "consensus items." These are Q sample items or statements that were viewed similarly across all resultant factors as demonstrated by the statistically similar positions of those statements across each of the factor arrays. For this study, there were no consensus statements. Despite there not being any consensus items or statements,

from a statistical standpoint, there were four Q sample statements that were viewed similarly by all or most of the perspectives. Two of these statements were viewed across the six factors as being more important than others, as they occupied places in the factor arrays either in the middle or on the right side of the forced distribution grid. Two of these statements were viewed across the factors as being less important than others, as they occupied places in the factor arrays either in the middle or on the left side of the forced distribution grid. These statements and their meaning are explored below.

Statement 17: Ability to make decisions even when those decisions are difficult.

Among all 44 statements comprising the Q sample for this study, only Statement 17 was viewed as "more important" across each of the six factors. This soft skill, the "ability to make decisions even when those decisions are difficult," was a +2 for Factor 1, a +1 for Factor 2, a +2 for Factor 3, and a +4 for Factors 4, 5, and 6. The importance of this soft skill to participants is not surprising given the contexts in which the participants were asked to consider its importance. The shift to telecommuting work environments necessitated by the Covid-19 pandemic was likely in and of itself a difficult decision for many organizational leaders and presumably was just the first of many difficult decisions required to navigate and even survive the new climate and reality for those organizations and the people working in them. In addition to the contextual realities study participants considered while expressing their perspectives through their Q sorts, they also shared their views on the more general importance of decision-making as a soft skill.

The realities of the post-Covid environment not only informed participant sorting behavior, but was also reflected by the participants' descriptive comments. For instance, one study participant emphasized the numerous decisions leaders must make in their roles while noting that decision-making does not pause or stop, even though the world at large seemed to for

a time during the pandemic. She wrote that "As a leader many decisions needed to be made at all times, including tough times." Her more general statement was echoed with greater specificity by another participant who not only invoked the context of crisis, but also broke down the importance of leaders making good decisions during them. He wrote, "in crisis it is important for leaders to control the pressure from higher management to normalize the situation and be able to analyze the possible solutions and further make the correct decisions."

In addition to the importance of leader decision-making during a crisis, participants also reflected more generally on its importance and value within organizations. Another participant emphasized how decision-making is one of the most critical soft skills leaders can possess and use. He wrote that "Prioritizing, decision making, and a win-win mind set are very critical because you need to identify your tasks quickly and arrange them, make direct decisions and help the organization to achieve the required on all levels." For some, leader decision-making seemed to elevate the importance of this soft skill as a key indicator of the character of a leader. This was emphasized by still another participant who wrote that "Decision making is critical and requires encouragement which is a leader's character."

Thus, across all factors identified in this study, the soft skill of decision-making was viewed as important. This importance was based on its general utility under more typical work contexts, but was also emphasized within the context of the Covid-19 pandemic and the telecommuting work environments it demanded of many organizations. Lastly, for some participants in this study, decision-making was viewed as such an important soft skill that they viewed it as being a key indicator of the overall character of a leader.

Statements 7: Confidence

Q sample Statement 7 in this study was viewed as "more important" across four of the six factors and fell into the middle of the forced distribution for two others. This soft skill, "Confidence," was a 0 for Factor 1, a 0 for Factor 2, a +3 for Factor 3, a +4 for Factor 4, a +3 for Factor 5, and a +4 for Factor 6. The importance of this soft skill to participants is not surprising given the context in which they were asked to consider its importance. For study participants, the soft skill of confidence was viewed as something that undergirded leader decision-making, a precondition of leadership, and an important element of communication.

For some study participants, leader confidence was a critical skill that supports effective decision-making, the one soft skill viewed as important across all factors. This was expressed by a participant who noted that "A leader will do his or her best to come up with the best outcomes for the team and firm and will be confident enough to make the best decision based on available resources." For this participant, decision-making contains two components. When making decisions, leaders need to determine suitable outcomes for their team or organization, but after those determinations are made, leaders must possess the confidence needed to make decisions based on them.

For other participants, confidence is a skill that must be in place for leaders to contend effectively with problems and conflicts that arise within organizations and their missions. A study participant elaborated on this point, writing that:

I believe that leaders who are self-confident are able to deal with problems and conflicts immediately, rather than ignoring or passing problems to others. This is because confidence is the foundation of leadership. Leaders first must believe in him/herself in

order to accomplish their goals. Without self-confidence, it is going to be tough or maybe impossible to lead and gain followers.

For this participant and others, leader confidence is not only foundational, but it is a necessary precondition in order to be effective and accountable.

Finally, some study participants associated confidence with other leader soft skills related to communication. For instance, one study participant wrote, "I believe being able to continuously communicate, with preciseness and confidence, allows the team/organization to have a holistic view of what is being thought of, the thinking process and the trust in the leader's judgment." Here again, confidence was perceived by participants to be closely tied to another soft skill, here communication.

In sum, the leadership soft skill of confidence was viewed as "more important" by four of the factors in this study and was not viewed as "less important" by the remaining two factors. There were numerous nuances to why participants viewed confidence as an important soft skill for leaders. These included the idea that confidence serves as companion of sorts to other soft skills such as decision-making and communication, as well as the idea that confidence is a preconditional foundation to leadership itself.

Statement 41: Generosity

Among all 44 statements comprising the Q sample for this study, Statement 41 was one of only two that were viewed as "less important" across each of the six factors. This soft skill, the "Generosity," was a -2 for Factor 1, a -4 for Factor 2, a -3 for Factor 3, and a -4 for Factor 4, a -2 for Factor 5, and a -3 for Factor 6. As the researcher, this result was initially puzzling until a deeper examination of participant descriptive comments revealed some indication as to how participants interpreted this soft skill.

On one hand, some study participants seemed to view generosity as a leadership soft skill that, while important, was not necessarily important for leaders, particularly for leaders occupying higher levels within organizational structures. On the other hand, other study participants seemed to view the idea or term of "generosity" as a threat to fairness in the workplace. In terms of the questionable importance of generosity as a skill for leaders, one participant explained, "Generosity, receiving feedback, and working with diversity are important qualities but maybe more important for working level and second level leadership, but for top leadership I think it is possible to succeed without them." Here, this participant did not dismiss the overall importance and value of generosity but seemed instead to question its importance relevant to higher-level leaders. Alternately, this sentiment could also be reflective of the realities that leaders are simply unable to express or use all soft skills available to them, but must instead prioritize the ones they use based on the leadership challenges and tasks at hand.

The other view of "generosity" expressed by study participants was perhaps more critical. To some participants, generosity seemed to be associated with unearned organizational privileges or rewards, a dynamic that might in fact do harm to organizational cultures. One participant expressed this by writing, "Regarding Generosity. It's not a must and will cause unfairness if not regulated. I believe judging based on performance and outcomes is vital while Generosity is an option that will be demonstrated in certain occasions." For this participant, generosity was viewed as a reward uncoupled from performance or something akin to an act of charity that should be distributed sparingly and cautiously.

Given the interpretation of generosity as a soft skill that was either unessential for leaders or as a threat to fairness within organizations, it became understandable why this soft skill was

viewed as less important to participants in this study. Particularly in times of crisis, any skill viewed as either superfluous or potentially harmful would be of limited importance to leaders.

Statement 42: Being Attentive to Detail

The other Q statement for this study that was viewed as "less important" across each of the six factors in this study was Statement 42. This soft skill, "Being attentive to detail," was a -3 for Factor 1, a -4 for Factor 2, a -4 for Factor 3, and a -2 for Factor 4, a -4 for Factor 5, and a -3 for Factor 6. Study participants seemed to be of two minds for why this soft skill was less important than most others in this study. The first rationale was that it was a skill that all professionals can and should possess, rendering it either a priori or less important for leaders. The second line of reasoning was that leaders are, or should be, more focused on the larger vision or "big picture" of the organization and that focus may be incompatible with also attending to more minute details.

The idea that attending to details is a soft skill common to most, if not all, professionals or employees, thereby rendering it less important to leaders was expressed by numerous participants. For instance, one simply stated that it, "could be demonstrated by people who are not leaders." Another participant elaborated more extensively on this idea, explaining that:

> Critical thinking and attention to details are skills that can be possessed by anyone of the team. It is also can be delegated. A leader in any position shall create a healthy environment for employees to innovate and unleash their potential rather than showing them how to do their job. As a leader, I will hire someone who can do what I cannot do, and he/she will tell me how to do it.

For this participant and others, paying attention to details would represent an underutilization, even a distraction, for leaders and the value they bring to organizations. Instead, paying attention

to details is a skill that should be employed and expected of lower-tiered workers in an organization. In this view, a leader should delegate this leadership skill to others as leaders themselves may have more demands on their time that do not always leave room for attending to organizational details.

This distancing between paying attention to details and important leadership soft skills was extended still further by other study participants who agreed that it should perhaps be best delegated but also seemed to question whether it was something most leaders possess by their very nature. This sentiment was exemplified by a study participant who wrote that:

> Many leaders are not naturally detail-focused and more interested in the big picture. The benefit of being a leader is that sometimes you can delegate important tasks to people who can do them better than you can. As a leader, you should care about the details. But that doesn't mean you need to be the one focusing on them all day, especially if that is not your natural strength.

This participant toggled between the idea that paying attention should be delegated to others and that it might be a skill that comes less "naturally" to leaders. Regardless of the particular rationale study participants employed for placing less importance on the leadership soft skill of paying attention to details, there was overall agreement among participants that it was one of the least important soft skills for leaders to use, particularly during crisis and telecommuting environments.

Revisiting the Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study was derived from the professional literature and, when considered with the analysis of the study findings and other data patterns within and across the resultant factors, contributed to a deeper understanding. The conceptual framework from the

literature suggested that leadership skills are becoming significantly important in Saudi Arabia, as soft skills are part of the driving force behind the country's 2030 vision for its transformative agenda. Clearly, Saudi Arabia places a lot of emphasis on the development of leadership skills (Hoole & Bonnema, 2015). Taking into consideration the globalization of the economy and the growing opportunities for international business within the country itself, it has also become necessary for Saudi Arabia to adapt to more modern leadership styles (Saudi Gazette, 2010). This study produced six distinct factors, or shared perspectives, on soft skills from the 44 Q sorts completed by Saudi professionals. This array of rich and nuanced perspectives seemed to validate and support the general emphasis placed on leadership development in Saudi Arabia and the value of better understanding what skills professionals view as most important.

The conceptual framework derived from the professional literature helped to clarify and support many of my initial suppositions about what soft skills leaders should possess. Soft skills such as adaptability, conflict resolution, emotional intelligence, and communication were identified as part of this group (Chazdon, 2011). Furthermore, according to Cortellazzo et al. (2019), for leaders overseeing remote work, it is essential to cultivate a positive organizational environment by promoting autonomy, collaboration, and responsibility. Encouraging an open communication environment, where employees feel comfortable expressing their ideas, is also crucial in this context. As a result of this new work environment, employees are more independent because information is more accessible and easier to share. Consequently, companies profit not only from their employees' good performance, but also reduce the need to supervise them (Schwarzmuller et al., 2018). And, when examining the themes and connections in the data, it appears that all factors' participants, both leaders and employees, identified communication as a primary soft skill for leaders to possess in crisis, though the perspectives

differed between them. For example, participants who were leaders in upper management believe that communication should be delivered in a direct, honest manner, while leaders who are entrepreneurs and the owners of corporations believe that communication needs to be delivered with empathy and respect since they see themselves as examples for others. Employees' perspective on the other hand indicate that they believe that although communication by leaders is a very important soft skill, this communication should be accompanied by good listening, employee participation, and engagement.

Additionally, the conceptual framework generated from the professional literature also suggested that adaptability is another essential skill for leaders to possess in virtual environments during a crisis. In this study, statements such as being flexible and comfortable with change, being able to tolerate ambiguity and uncertainty, and concentrating on relevant issues and challenges were viewed by participants as part of adaptability. When reviewing the flexibility and comfort with change statement, it was notable that all participants, whether leaders or employees, perceived this skill to be less important to leadership during a crisis. Also, while all leaders and employees view tolerating ambiguity and uncertainty as somewhat important (0), only leaders with a high sense of responsibility and reliability viewed this skill as very important (+4), especially in crisis and telework situations. There were some observations from participants about the importance of the ability to concentrate on relevant topics, issues, and challenges during a crisis. Leaders and employees both rated this skill as important (+2) for leaders to demonstrate in a telecommuting environment during a crisis, and both employees and leaders indicated an equal value for this skill.

The conceptual framework generated from the professional literature also suggested that conflict resolution is another essential soft skill that leaders should possess during a crisis.

Problem solving, hard decision making, and having confidence were viewed as part of conflict resolution. When looking at strong problem-solving skills, leaders view this skill as very important (+3), however employees viewed this skill as least important (-3), indicating that leaders value this skill more than employees, especially in a time of crisis. Leaders and employees both viewed hard decision making as important skills, but their perception of its importance differed significantly. Employees rating this skill higher (+4) than leaders (+2). In addition, both employees and leaders who are business owners viewed the ability to have confidence as a very important skill, as it received the highest rating (+4), while leaders in upper management but are not owners only rated it as somewhat important (0). When looking at the ability to resolve conflicts with and among others, employees viewed this skill as one of the very important (+3) soft skills leaders should possess, while leaders viewed it as one of the least important skills (-1) to possess during crisis time.

Finally, the conceptual framework suggested that emotional intelligence is another crucial soft skill that leaders should possess, especially during crisis. Despite this, it was noticed that employees rated this soft skill highly, while leaders rated it less so. Empathy has also been suggested as another important soft skill leaders should have in a telecommuting environment based on the conceptual framework. However, this skill is viewed by leaders as less important (-1), while employees view it as more important (+2) soft skills for leaders to possess.

Implications for Practice and Policy: The Saudi Vision of 2030 and Beyond

This study examining Saudi professionals' perspectives regarding what soft skills are most important for leaders to possess in telecommuting environments during times of crisis holds implications for leadership practice and programming and national policies intended to support the development of leadership tied to the national vision identified by Saudi leaders.

From a development standpoint, study findings strongly suggest that future Saudi leadership programs should include the instruction and support of the development of soft skills that reflect the perspective of the leaders, but also the perspective of other professionals in Saudi organizations. In addition, the Q methodological approach and research design of this study also hold implications for Saudi leaders and leadership development. Particularly during times of crisis like the Covid-19 pandemic, which demanded a rapid transition for many organizations to telecommuting environments and modalities, leaders would do well to elicit and listen to other points of view when making decisions. Here, Q methodology was chosen and used because of its capacity to maintain close proximity to participant perspectives. Leaders themselves could employ this methodology in applied ways, or they could use other methods designed to uplift the voices and perspectives of others in their organization in order to inform their leadership practices. Such inclusive leadership practices will filter into and improve leader day-to-day decision-making processes and, given the consensus importance of decision-making as a leadership softs skill, this would be particularly important.

Additionally, in order for Saudi Arabia to achieve its 2030 vision to transform the national occupational and leadership landscapes, it will be essential that programs for leadership skill development and training are developed that can emphasize the soft skills viewed to be most important. The results from this study demonstrated that how leadership soft skills are understood and applied is deeply contextual and are thus perceived differently by different professionals within organizations. As such, leadership development programs would do well to consider that context matters and that the first stages of leadership development might seek to surface professionals' unique perceptions of what leadership soft skills they believe are important as well as why they are important. Once these views are identified, leaders-in-training can then

explore and share their understandings of soft skills and the importance of them relative to their organizations' needs and challenges. This process of surfacing and exploring individual professionals' and leaders' perspectives could be facilitated by their completion of Q sorts of the soft skill statements in this study or ones created within the context of the individual organizations themselves.

This more collaborative approach to leadership development may assist leaders in their efforts to accomplish the goals of their organizations, as well as meeting the objectives of the national 2030 Vision. The 2030 Vision will require profound changes to how Saudis lead and the soft skills needed to do so. This requirement is all the more urgent and critical when the work is performed remotely. One implication of the 2030 Vision is that there is an expectation that leadership will shift from a top-down management style to a more inclusive, collective style of management over the coming years. This will require that Saudi leaders and organizations begin to develop methods and approaches to learn from more perspectives within their organizations and, as this research demonstrated, doing so can produce compelling and informative findings.

Implication For Future Research

Based on the foundational research on the topic, and what has been found through this study, it would be beneficial for future researchers to begin with the premise that there is never one size that fits all. It seemed that participants had many different experiences, encountered many different situations, and had different roles within their organizations, which shaped what they perceive as important soft skills for leaders during a crisis while telecommuting.

It is essential for future researchers to note that the different perspectives that were observed in this Q study should be taken into account for future research. These perspectives differ not only between employees and leaders, as explained previously, but also among leaders

themselves. There were many different perspectives among leaders. For example, there were leaders who were people oriented, leaders who encouraged communication between individuals and groups, leaders who were focused on being exemplary individuals with high moral values, leaders who were more problem solutions oriented, leaders who were more big picture thinkers and growth oriented, and leaders who had a high sense of responsibility, making handling ambiguity and uncertainty their focus. This study showed that when it comes to the most important soft skills that a leader should possess during a crisis, the domain in which participants work or the leadership style that they adopt is a very important factor in how they perceive these soft skills.

Strengths of the Study

The study's primary strength and uniqueness comes from the fact that it is the first known Q methodology study to examine soft skills from a leadership and an employees' perspective. Although other studies may have examined leadership soft skills, the methodology used was different, and they examined soft skills from only the employees' perspective, rather than from leaders' self-reported perspectives (Redha Al Abduwani, 2012). There is little information available about what employees and leaders believe is the most important skills for leaders to possess in crises, even though leadership and soft skills have been examined in the context of crisis situations, like the Covid-19 pandemic (Malik & Ahmad, 2020). In this study, leaders' and employees' perspectives are examined in regard to what they both believe to be very important soft skills for leaders to possess during crisis situations, particularly when it comes to remote work.

This study also has another major strength which is the Q methodological framework, which none of the previous studies that were included in the literature have used to examine

leadership soft skills. Consequently, this study makes a truly unique contribution to the literature due to this feature. By using the Q methodology approach in this study, it helped reduce potential bias while gaining the valuable perspectives of Saudi Arabian leaders and employees who have been working remotely due to the Covid-19 outbreak. Using Q methodology to implement this exploratory study allowed for a design that was collaborative and comprehensive from beginning to end, which ultimately helped to make sure leaders and employees ' perspectives were allowed to emerge with a limited amount of researcher involvement (McKeown & Thomas, 1998). In order to demonstrate the collaborative and comprehensive nature of this Q methodology study, leaders and employees led the concourse development via a primarily naturalistic approach (McKeown & Thomas, 1998). The resulting Q sample was developed using both an explanatory and descriptive approach that allowed for themes to emerge to determine data extraction (McKeown & Thomas, 1998). Rank ordered statements on the forced distribution enabled leaders and employees to convey their perspectives comprehensively in the processing of Q sort data (Watts & Stenner, 2012). Finally, the data were analyzed and interpreted in a way that allowed for as much variation as possible by using factor analysis sorts as opposed to individual statements (Watts & Stenner, 2012). In order to capture the entire point of view expressed (Watts & Stenner, 2012), the entire collection of statements was analyzed. Additionally, this study recognizes the importance of soft skills through its collaborative and comprehensive approach.

Limitations of the Study

The primary limitation of this study was not having a clear definition regarding the Soft Skills (statements) that the participants were asked to sort online, where the researcher wasn't available to answer any questions simply and quickly or clarify any confusion the participants may have had while sorting the statements. It is possible that participants did not have a clear

understanding or recognize the real meaning of some of the soft skills they sorted. An example of this potential statement confusion was in the Emotional Self-Regulation statement (Statement 1), which refers to the Emotional Intelligence skill. This skill related to the ability to perceive, interpret, demonstrate, control, and use emotions effectively and constructively in communicating with and relating to others. In Riggio (2010), Emotional Intelligence is defined as the ability to perceive, use, understand, and manage one's emotions. It can also be referred to the recognition and application of one's own emotional states and the emotional states of others in order to solve problems or manage behavior, as defined by Salovey and Mayer (1990). This soft skill was viewed by the leaders as less important than by the employees. It is possible that leaders gave a low rating because the meanings of the statements were unclear in definitions, causing the statements to be interpreted differently. It is also possible that the leaders were unfamiliar with the terms used and were biased when interpreting the researcher's statements. Another example of potential misinterpretation by participants were in the statements that referred to generosity (statement 42) and humility (statement 6) as well. As these terms have different meanings across cultures, and the researcher wasn't present to clarify when the participants needed it, misinterpretation was likely to occur.

Researcher Lessons

The recommendations for improvement are based on observations generated during the implementation of the study. The first lesson learned was that because of the potential varying interpretations of each soft skill by participants, future researchers would benefit from defining each soft skill more precisely in order for participants to know exactly what it means. Participants could refer to this definition of soft skills during the Q sort for clarification if they needed it while sorting. Furthermore, if the researcher is using the Q methodology for a study, it

is better to be near the participants in order for them to be able to communicate with the researcher in case of questions or clarifications. According to the participant in this Q study, the Q sort was unfamiliar to them, though they liked the method.

Another area of potential improvement again has to do with the clarity of the research. In response to the post-sort questions, several participants did not describe why the three soft skills they placed in the (+4) column were the Most Important for leaders to possess in a telecommuting environment during crisis, and why the three soft skills they placed in the (-4) column were the Least important for leaders to possess in a telecommuting environment during crisis. Once again, this was probably due to the lack of clarity in explaining the importance of answering those questions to the overall study understanding.

The final lesson learned is looking ahead to follow-up studies. Performing a follow-up study to validate the interpretation of the factors in this study would help provide additional context and confirmation that the interpretation accurately represents the perspective of the study participants. A further investigation into what leaders and employees perceive are essential soft skills for leaders to possess in times of crisis when the work is done remotely would help fill the gap in this study.

Conclusions

Cultural and societal shifts in Saudi Arabia, including leadership, business, and economic changes, have made leadership soft skills more important than ever; however, this need does not seem to have been adequately addressed. Additionally, as women become more prevalent in the workplace, both as leaders and employees, the way leaders must respond to and adapt to their needs has changed as well. As the Covid-19 pandemic approached, it became increasingly evident that soft skills were becoming even more important. Despite the fact that the Covid-19

threat is now under control, it is still believed by many industry forecasters that a significant

amount of work will continue to be done remotely for years to come, even when the threat is no

longer there.

Considering this new reality, leaders need to know which soft skills are essential for

effective remote work in a crisis, as well as how they can identify those skills and develop them

among their employees. It goes almost without saying that there will be a positive impact on the

organization if there is an alignment between the soft skills that employees and leaders perceive

to be important in order for them to be able to work effectively together in the workplace, and the

organizations will be able to achieve their goals and succeed in their operations. It was the

purpose of this study to examine what soft skills leaders and employees consider is important for

leaders to possess during a crisis in a telecommuting environment. Six distinct perspectives were

identified, each holding unique vantages on the most important soft skills for leaders to possess

in telecommuting environments during crises.

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Appendix A: Concourse Development

Concourse Development Questionnaire Page 1 of 2

Shatha Khalifah- Doctoral Student

Perspectives toward What soft skills are considered most important

Naturalistic Concourse Items (From Participants)

" What specific soft skills do YOU consider most important for leaders to possess in telecommuting environments during crises? (Please list and briefly describe up to ten)

(In the spaces below, please list and briefly describe as many as ten)

Concourse Development Questionnaire Page 2 of 2
Shatha Khalifah- Doctoral Student

Thank you for your responses. Could you now tell us a little bit about your background?
    1. What is your gender?
        a. Female
        b. Male
    2. What is your work position? _____

    3. How many years of experience do you have?

        a. Less than 5 years of experience

        b. From 5 years to 10 years of experience

        c. More than 10 years of experience

Appendix B: Recruitment Email – Concourse Development

<u>Recruitment email | Concourse Questionnaire</u>

From: Shatha Khalifah

Date: November 2022

To: Potential Participant

Subject: What soft skills are considered most important for leaders to possess in telecommuting environments during crises? A Q Methodology Study examining the perspectives of Saudi Arabian leaders and employees.

Hello,

My name is Shatha Khalifah, and I am conducting dissertation research on what soft skills are considered most important for Saudi Arabian leaders to possess in telecommuting environments during crises?

I am requesting your participation in this research study. Your participation will involve you responding to one written prompt designed to bring out your perspectives on what soft skills are considered most important for leaders to possess in telecommuting environments during crises? Your participation will involve you responding to one open-ended question: "What are the essential soft skills for leaders to possess in telecommuting environments during crises?"

Your participation responding to this brief questionnaire and the accompanying background information questions will take approximately 10-15 minutes to complete.

Your participation is completely voluntary; you may withdraw at any time during the process. All responses will be anonymous, as no personally identifying data (like names and emails) will be collected. Additionally, all data collected from this process will be kept securely by the researchers, and any data and findings resulting from this study that are eventually described in writing or presented publicly, will only be in the aggregate. In compliance with IRB requirements and to ensure data security, your responses will be stored on a secure server and destroyed at the culmination of this research.

There are no foreseeable risks, direct benefits, or compensation for participating in this study. However, your participation in this research may lead to a more nuance understanding of what soft skills are considered by leaders and employees as most important for leaders to possess in telecommuting environments during crises?

The University of North Florida Institutional Review Board has approved this research study. If you have any concerns, questions, or requests regarding your rights as a participant, please contact the University of North Florida's Institutional Review Board directly at 904-620-2498 or

via email at irb@unf.edu. Should you have any questions regarding the design or purpose of this study or the research approach I am using, please feel free to contact me, Shatha Khalifah, directly at N00925254@unf.edu, or my Doctoral Chairperson, Dr. Chris Janson, at 904.238.3571 or c.janson@unf.edu.

Completion of this concourse questionnaire implies that you have read the information describing the process and consent to take part in the research

Please click the link below to go to the online questionnaire. Upon opening the link below, you will be asked to again read the consent information for this study. Once completed, the one-item questionnaire and instructions will be launched.

Questionnaire link: (to be added)

Thank you in advance for your time and cooperation.

Sincerely,

Shatha Khalifah, Doctoral Student

Appendix C: Informed Consent

Welcome to this collective study examining the perspectives of Saudi Arabian leaders and employees about what soft skills are considered most important for leaders to possess in telecommuting environments during crises

In order to better understand the range and nuances of how leaders and employees understand what they consider to be the essential soft skills for Saudi Arabia leaders to possess in telecommuting environments during crises, you are invited to participate in the following anonymous, one-item questionnaire.

Your participation will involve you responding to one written prompts designed to elicit your perspectives regarding the most important soft skills for leaders to possess in telecommuting environments during crises. Your participation in this questionnaire is estimated to take you around 10-15 minutes to complete.

You must be older than 18 to participate in this research study. Also, your participation is completely voluntary; you may withdraw at any time during the process. All data collected through this process is anonymous. Following data collection, all data will be kept securely and all data and findings resulting from this study that will be eventually described in writing or presented publicly will only be in the aggregate. In compliance with IRB requirements and to ensure data security, responses will be stored on a secure server and destroyed at the culmination of this research.

There are no foreseeable risks, direct benefits, or compensation for participating in this study. However, your participation in this research will contribute to the development of a research instrument, called a Q Sample, which will be used in a further phase of the study. In total, this research study may lead to a general advancement in how soft skills are considered and valued by Saudi Arabian leaders and employees.

The University of North Florida Institutional Review Board has approved this research study. If you have any concerns, questions, or requests regarding your rights as a participant, please contact the University of North Florida's Institutional Review Board directly at 904-620-2498 or via email at irb@unf.edu. Should you have any questions regarding the design or purpose of this study or the research approach I am using, please feel free to contact me, Shatha Khalifah, directly at N00925254@unf.edu, or my Doctoral Chairperson, Dr. Chris Janson, at 904.238.3571 or c.janson@unf.edu.

Completion of this questionnaire implies that you have read the information describing the process and consent to take part in the research. Thank you very much for your time and participation.

Sincerely, Shatha Khalifah, Doctoral Student

Appendix D: Sample Q Sample Statements

Note: These items have been collected from a literature search, not participants.

1. Self-regulation,
2. Flexibility,
3. Communications skill,
4. Empowerment
5. Humility
6. Trustworthy
7. Agility
8. Competence
9. Leadership Philosophy
10. Crisis Management
11. Emotional Intelligence
12. Confidence
13. Futuristic
14. Emotional intelligence
15. Employee engagement
16. Flexibility
17. Respect
18. Empathy
19. Communication skills
20. Empathy
21. Engagement
22. Teamwork spirit
23. Critical thinking
24. Seek first to understand then to be understood very important
25. Think Win-Win
26. Leading at Home very important
27. Group Dynamics very important
28. Leading projects
29. Innovation
30. Leading Work Teams very important
31. Digital Etiquette very important
32. Ability to make decision
33. Decentralized
34. Working under pressure
35. Teamwork
36. Communication
37. Trust
38. Respect
39. Empathy
40. Social intelligence
41. Emotional intelligence
42. Flexibility
43. Understanding
44. Understanding and communication skills
45. Reliability and responsibility with taking the lead
46. the honesty and confidence
47. Emotional intelligence
48. Be skillful in digital as well as technology
49. Engage their employees more to the company
50. Be motivated
51. Be passionate about the work
52. Emotional Intelligence
53. Intentionally build a culture of trust
54. Develop the leadership potential in others and improve performance through consistent feedback and coaching
55. Must think big and execute their vision and strategy all the way through
56. Leading by example
57. Flexibility
58. Up to date with technology and work information
59. Emotional intelligence
60. Authentic
61. Taking hard decisions
62. Flexible
63. Adaptability
64. Empathy
65. Emotional Intelligence
66. Cooperation
67. Communication
68. Delegation
69. Supportive
70. Problem solving
71. Flexibility in communication and timing
72. Critical thinking to support in problem

73. Emotional intelligence in dealing with members and providing support
74. Leading by example
75. Be Good Evaluative for events and programs is very essential because it will help improving and progressing any organization and groups .. which means that a leader eventually will evaluate and change programs and policies that are not working
76. Enthusiastic… because it's contagious
77. Quite confidence …which means being sure of him/herself with humble intentions
78. Respectful of self and others
79. Rewarding (in a way that will recognize the effort of others and reinforce those actions.. we all enjoy being recognized for our actions)
80. Well Educated ..because as much you know as much as you will increase your success in leading others
81. Delegator
82. Open minded and open to changes
83. Interested in feedback
84. Conflict resolution

Appendix E: Sample Q Sort

Note: This is an example of a forced distribution sorting grid. The actual configuration will only be determined after the Q sample has been developed. The Q sample cannot be developed until after communication concourse items are developed from participant responses. This won't occur until after IRB approval.

<u>(Q Sort) Data Collection Form and Post Sort Questions</u>

Page 1 of 3

1. Lay out the number cards from left to right with the negative (-) numbers on your left (see picture below):

2. Read through all 40 cards to become familiar with the statements.

3. As you read through the statements for a second time, organize them into three piles:

   ▪ On the right, create a pile for the cards with statements that you believe are like your perspective **regarding the most important soft skills for Saudi leaders to possess in telecommuting environments during crises.**

   ▪ On the left, create a pile for the cards with statements that are unlike your perspectives **regarding the most important soft skills for Saudi leaders to possess in telecommuting environments during crises.**

   ▪ In the middle, create a pile for the cards with statements that fall somewhere in the middle or that you are unsure about.

   ▪ Beginning with the pile on the right, place the **three** cards that represent *the most important soft skills* **for Saudi leaders to possess in telecommuting environments during crises** and place them under the +4 column

   ▪ Now, turning to your left side, place the **three** cards that represent the *least important soft skills* **for Saudi leaders to possess in telecommuting environments during crises** and place them under the -4 column.

<u>(Q sort) Data Collection Form</u>

4. Continue this process, working your way from the outside in, until all the cards are placed. You are free to change your mind during the sorting process and switch items around.

5. When completed, you should have the following number of cards under each row (see grid on next page):

   ▪ You should have 3 cards under the **+4 column** (most important) and -4 (least important).

   ▪ You should have 4 cards under the **+3 column** (very important) and -3 (not very important).

   ▪ You should have 5 cards under the **+2 column** (important) and -2 (not important).

   ▪ You should have 6 cards under the **+1 and -1 column**.

   ▪ You should have 7 cards under **the 0 column** (somewhere in the middle, unsure).

Sample Q Sort Grid

-4 (3 statements)	-3 (4 statements)	-2 (5 statements)	-1 (6 statements)	0 (7 statements)	+1 (6 statements)	+2 (5 statements)	+3 (4 statements)	+4 (3 statements)

Post Q sort Data Collection Form

1. Please briefly describe your reasoning for viewing statements that you placed under the "+4" column as being the MOST IMPORTANT.

Statement #   Reason

_____   _____

2- Likewise, please describe why the statements you placed below the "-4" column are LEAST IMPORTANT.

Statement #   Reason

_____   _____

Background Information

3-What is your gender?

    a. Female

    b. Male

4- What best describes your highest level of education?

    a. Bachelors degree

    b. Masters degree

    c. PhD or EdD

    d. Other_____

5-What is your work position? _____

5- How many years of experience do you have?

    a. Less than 5 years of experience

    b. From 5 years to 10 years of experience

    c. More than 10 years of experience

Appendix F: Recruitment email - Q Sort

Subject: What soft skills are considered most important for leaders to possess in telecommuting environments during crises? A Q Methodology Study examining the perspectives of Saudi Arabian leaders and employees.

Hello,

My name is Shatha Khalifah, and I am conducting dissertation research on what soft skills are considered most important for Saudi Arabian leaders to possess in telecommuting environments during crises?

I am requesting your participation in this research study. Your participation will involve sorting ## statements, each representing an essential soft skill for leaders to possess in telecommuting environments during crises. Your participation in this sorting process and the accompanying background information questions will take approximately 25 minutes to complete.

Your participation is completely voluntary; you may withdraw at any time during the process. All responses will be anonymous, as no personally identifying data (like names and emails) will be collected. Additionally, all data collected from this process will be kept securely by the researchers, and any data and findings resulting from this study that are eventually described in writing or presented publicly, will only be in the aggregate. In compliance with IRB requirements and to ensure data security, your responses will be stored on a secure server and destroyed at the culmination of this research.

There are no foreseeable risks, direct benefits, or compensation for participating in this study. However, your participation in this research may lead to a more nuance understanding of what soft skills are considered by leaders and employees as most important for leaders to possess in telecommuting environments during crises?

The University of North Florida Institutional Review Board has approved this research study. If you have any concerns, questions, or requests regarding your rights as a participant, please contact the University of North Florida's Institutional Review Board directly at 904-620-2498 or via email at irb@unf.edu. Should you have any questions regarding the design or purpose of this study or the research approach I am using, please feel free to contact me, Shatha Khalifah, directly at N00925254@unf.edu, or my Doctoral Chairperson, Dr. Chris Janson, at 904.238.3571 or c.janson@unf.edu.

Completion of this concourse questionnaire implies that you have read the information describing the process and consent to take part in the research

Please click the link below to go to the online sorting activity. Upon opening the link below, you will be asked to again read the consent information for this study. Once completed, the actual sorting activity and instructions will be launched.

Q Sort link: (to be added)

Thank you in advance for your time and cooperation.

Sincerely,

Shatha Khalifah, Doctoral Student

Appendix G: Q Statement and Factor Array Table

#	Q Statement	Factor					
		1	2	3	4	5	6
1.	Emotional self-regulation.	-2	3	-2	2	2	-1
2.	Being flexible and comfortable with change.	0	-1	-4	-3	2	-1
3.	Being a good communicator.	4	4	-2	4	1	0
4.	Ability and willingness to empower others.	-2	3	-1	0	0	1
5.	Being trustworthy.	2	1	-1	3	-3	3
6.	Humility.	-4	-3	3	1	-3	-1
7.	The ability to focus or concentrate on relevant topics, issues, or challenges.	2	1	-2	1	-1	1
8.	Confidence.	0	0	3	4	3	4
9.	Being respectful.	2	3	0	0	-1	2
10.	Empathy.	-2	2	2	2	-1	1
11.	Engaging others.	-3	3	1	0	1	0
12.	Able to work effectively with people from diverse backgrounds.	-1	-1	-3	-4	1	-1
13.	Being a good listener.	1	4	-1	1	0	0
14.	Strong critical thinking skills.	3	2	-1	2	2	-2
15.	Having a win-win attitude.	1	0	0	-1	-4	-3
16.	Demonstrating consistent ethical character in all settings and places.	-1	2	2	1	-1	-2
17.	Understanding and effectively demonstrating appropriate professional etiquette including online.	-1	-2	-3	2	-2	-2
18.	Ability to make decisions even when those decisions are difficult.	2	1	2	4	4	4
19.	Being able to work well under pressure.	2	-1	1	0	4	1
20.	Being reliable and responsible.	4	0	3	-2	-1	4
21.	Honesty.	4	0	3	-4	-2	3
22.	Being highly motivated.	1	-2	-2	-3	-4	1
23.	Demonstrating passion and enthusiasm.	-2	-1	0	-3	1	2
24.	A growth mindset.	1	-2	4	1	2	0
25.	Having vision and seeing "the big picture."	2	4	-1	-1	3	3
26.	Being authentic.	-4	-2	1	1	-2	2
27.	Able to share or delegate work tasks and responsibilities.	-1	1	1	-1	3	2
28.	Time management skills or ability to prioritize one's time appropriately.	3	1	-4	-2	3	-2
29.	Being supportive.	0	2	0	3	-2	0
30.	Strong problem-solving skills.	3	-3	-3	3	1	1
31.	Being a good judge of others.	-3	-2	4	0	0	-4
32.	Making others feel acknowledged and recognized.	-4	2	2	0	0	0
33.	Being open-minded.	-1	0	-2	2	-1	-1
34.	Being innovative and creative.	3	-1	0	2	0	-4

35.	Ability to help resolve conflicts with and among others.	0	-1	-1	3	2	-2
36.	Being able to receive feedback from others.	-2	2	-2	-2	2	-4
37.	Helping others develop toward their own potential.	-1	1	2	-3	1	-3
38.	Patience.	0	-3	4	-1	-3	2
39.	Being focused on the future.	1	-2	2	-1	4	-1
40.	Optimism.	1	0	1	-2	-2	2
41.	Vulnerability.	-3	-4	1	-2	-3	-2
42.	Generosity.	-2	-4	-3	-4	-2	-3
43.	Being attentive to detail.	-3	-4	-4	-2	-4	-3
44.	Being able to tolerate ambiguity and uncertainty.	0	-3	0	-1	0	3