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Exploring work environment standards in Saudi Arabia Companies

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Abstract

This research aimed to ascertain whether the organizations operating in Saudi Arabia are implementing work environment standards. The study adopted mixed research methods to realize this aim by collecting data from both secondary and primary sources. The secondary data were quantitative and collected from credible internet sources, while primary data were qualitative. The population sample consisted of 12 employees from four different companies implying three participants for every company. After data analysis through thematic analysis, the findings revealed that Saudi Arabia's companies are implementing work environment standards. The results also indicated that a favorable work environment leads to employee job satisfaction. In addition, the evidence analyzed demonstrated that organizational performance is affected by work environment standards. Finally, the research revealed that Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 positively affects companies operating within the country.

Exploring Work Environment Standards in Saudi Arabia Companies

A Graduate Research/Project Paper
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1.0 Introduction

According to Sorensen et al. (2019), all employees deserve and want emotionally and physically safe work to concentrate on their job responsibilities and fulfillment instead of worrying about harassment, discrimination, and dangerous conditions. Notably, employees are critical assets in the organization. The company's responsibility is to take care of the workers by ensuring that they operate and work in a safe and conducive environment (Sorensen et al., 2019). Similarly, Cherniak et al. (2020) argued that paying attention to the work environment is essential because employees spend substantial or most of their lives at work; hence, that work environment affects their emotional and cognitive states. Furthermore, Cherniak et al. (2020) added that the condition of the work environment plays a significant role in the engagement and performance of the employees. In other words, the concentration and productivity of the employees can sometimes be traced to the working conditions or work environment maintained within the organization.

The work environment can include anything that exists around the workers where they work and affect how they carry out their daily activities (Sorensen et al., 2019). Moreover, the work environment consists of both internal and external conditions that influence the employees. Still, this study mainly focuses on an internal work environment that the organization can control. Therefore, some of the internal work environment factors include but are not limited to work layout, design and age, workstation set-up, cleanliness, ventilation, spacing, lighting, air quality, temperature, safety measures, and protective gears (Sorensen et al., 2019). Based on the assertion of Olds et al. (2017), the physical aspects of the work environment directly link to employees' performance, productivity, comfort, health and safety, morale, job satisfaction, and overall performance of the organization. Furthermore, many studies have found that a proper and conducive work environment brings

improvement to employees' mental and physical capabilities in conducting daily tasks. In contrast, an unfavorable work environment leads to work stress (Olds et al., 2017).

Given the relevance and popularity of the work environment in recent years, many countries have taken steps to ensure that companies operating within their jurisdictions adhere to specific work environment standards, and Saudi Arabia is no exception. In 2016, the government of Saudi Arabia launched the National Transformation Program, popularly known as Saudi Vision 2030. In line with this Vision 2030, the Ministry of Labor and Social Development launched occupational health and safety inspections to ensure that companies employing more than 49 employees follow the guidelines provided in the program (Muhammad, 2018). Although Vision 2030 is for all sectors, the labor sector is meant to comply with the National Strategic Program for Occupational Safety and Health (OSH), part of Vision 2030 concerning employment (Muhammed, 2018). Notably, all the companies operating within Saudi Arabia are expected to comply with this guideline by having an occupational safety policy failure to which the companies are fined to a tune of SR10,000 (Muhammed, 2018).

Occupational safety and health-related to the work environment is an essential aspect of engineering or technology-related jobs. In engineering and technology, the use of materials and equipment are involved that can be hazardous to the employees in the absence of proper safety and health regulations. Accordingly, Brauer (2016) asserts that although all fields require adequate safety and health regulations, the engineering sector or area requires it more because the absence of the same can lead to mental health issues and catastrophic physical injuries. Therefore, the work environment, especially occupational safety and health, is critical to engineering and technology because of the physical materials and equipment involved that can be dangerous in the absence of guidelines on how to handle them.

1.1 Purpose of the Study

The main aim of this study is to explore work environment standards within companies operating in Saudi Arabia. In other words, the study seeks to understand whether the companies in Saudi Arabia are maintaining a favorable and conducive work environment. The following specific objectives supported the research aim:

1. To determine the work environment standards maintained by companies in Saudi Arabia;
2. To explore the impact of work environment on employees' satisfaction;
3. To investigate the influence of following work environment standards on organizational performance;
4. To evaluate the effects of Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 on companies in Saudi Arabia.

This study is of interest because its findings will provide an overview of the working conditions and environment in Saudi Arabia. Furthermore, most studies investigating the work environment usually focus on Western countries, but few concentrates on Middle Eastern countries. Thus, this study is of interest because it will add more insight into the work environment from Saudi Arabia's perspective. In addition, the study is interesting because its findings will provide insights on whether the elements of Vision 2030 relating to labor are being followed and whether it influences the company positively in terms of employee satisfaction and organizational performance. From an engineering perspective, the research is significant because it provides an overview of the state of the work environment in the country.

2.0 Method of Study

The research adopted a mixed research method where both qualitative and quantitative data were collected. According to Creswell and Creswell (2017), the mixed

research method is beneficial because it starts from the respective advantages of qualitative or quantitative research methods while reducing the disadvantages. The quantitative data were collected from secondary sources such as government databases, publications, and past studies on the subject in this study. On the other hand, the qualitative data were collected from 12 employees working in four different companies in Saudi Arabia.

The research adopted a convenience sampling method to access the participants and select the sample population for primary data collection. Convenience sampling refers to the sampling method in which the participants are randomly selected based on availability and access at a specific time and place (Moser & Korstjens, 2018). This method was advantageous to the research because it was easy to implement and low cost (Moser & Korstjens, 2018). This implies that the study randomly approached the participants after getting permission from the immediate supervisors. Even after the approval from the supervisor, the individual participants were asked if they were willing to take part in the study to ensure that their participation was voluntary.

Some interviews were conducted face-to-face, while others were carried out through phone calls. The interview questions were in accordance with the aim or purpose of the study, and the questions used during the interview are available in appendix 1. Each interview took approximately 20 to 30 minutes, and they were assured that they could leave the process at any point. The responses from the interviewees were typed for subsequent analysis. Notably, aliases were used during data analysis instead of interviewees' real names to ensure anonymity. Thus, numbers were used in place of names: Interviewee 1, Interviewee 2 up to Interviewee 12.

In collecting the secondary data, the research collected data from credible sources such as consortium reports, official industry reports, official company websites, news publications,

and review websites, among others. In collecting data, the research mainly relied on keywords to obtain relevant data from the internet (Andrei, 2018). Some of the words used included “work environment standards in Saudi Arabia,” “job satisfaction,” “Saudi Arabia’s Vision 2030,” and “organizational performance,” among others. More importantly, the searches were limited to reports published between 2010 and 2021.

After data collection, the research adopted thematic analysis to analyze the data gathered from both secondary and primary sources. Essentially, thematic analysis implies data analysis where the data collected are grouped depending on the similarity of specific themes (Terry et al., 2017). Therefore, the research objectives were adopted as the overarching research themes. Consequently, each theme or objective had highlighted subthemes depending on the underlying patterns existing in the data collected. For example, “work environment standards maintained by companies in Saudi Arabia” was treated as one of the major themes with various subthemes under it. Therefore, the study developed four significant themes based on the objectives and several subthemes under each central theme.

3.0 Analysis and Results

3.1 Work environment standards in Saudi Arabia’s companies

Most companies in Saudi Arabia follow work environment standards

To understand the state of work environment standards in Saudi Arabia’s organizations, the participants were asked whether their companies follow the work environment standards. All the participants acknowledged that their company follows the work environment standards provided by the labor department. For instance, Interviewee 1 said, “*I think the company strictly follows the standards in order especially in safety standards in work to maintain the worker's safety.*” However, some participants believed that although companies in Saudi Arabia follow the work environment standards, some

companies do not follow them strictly. For instance, Interviewee 3 mentioned, “*I think it follows some standards, but not for everything.*” Nevertheless, the underlying theme is that most companies in Saudi Arabia follow the work environment standards. The responses suggest that although companies attempt to follow the work environment standards, it is challenging to strictly follow all the standards or guidelines. This is supported by the assertion of Grote (2012) that despite attempts by organizations to implement occupational safety measures strictly, it can be expensive, thereby affecting the effectiveness.

These views mirror some of the literature concerning work environment standards in Saudi Arabia’s organizations. According to secondary literature, Saudi Arabia has witnessed a reduction in work injuries because of work environment standards, as shown in figure 1 below (Azmat & Saad, 2018). Thus, it can be argued that companies in Saudi Arabia follow the work environment standards, thereby contributing to the reduction in injuries around the country.

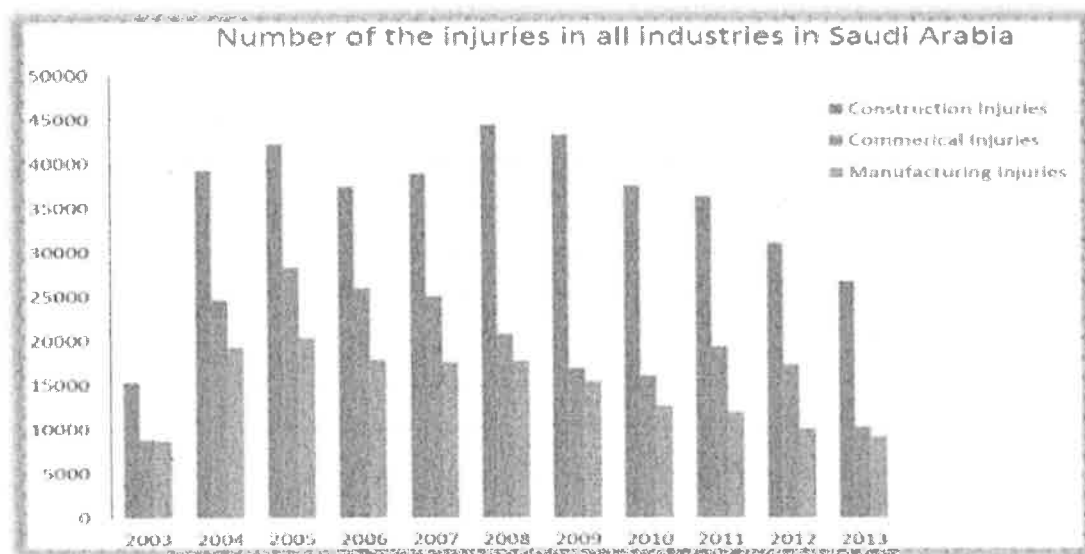


Figure 1: Number of injuries in all industries in Saudi Arabia

Source: Azmat and Saad (2018)

Constant cleaning of workplace and wearing of protective gear

To understand some of the methods used by Saudi Arabian organizations to maintain work environment standards, the participants were asked to identify some of the ways through which the companies follow the work standards. From the responses, wearing protective gear and regular cleaning were common themes. For instance, Interviewee 7 mentioned, *“teamwork and maintaining the cleanliness of the work by contracting with a cleaning company to ensure a consistently clean work....”* Similarly, Interviewee 1 maintained, *“employees cannot move inside the maintenance workshops without wearing a helmet on the head or without safety shoes or without glasses to protect the eyes....”* The data shows that although several methods are used to implement work environment standards, cleaning and wearing protective gear are common in most organizations. These findings reflect the view of Ismail and Razimi (2018), identifying work cleanliness and the availability of protective equipment for workers as some of the standard methods through companies to ensure adherence to work environment standards.

The views expressed by the participants indicate that the employees are aware of the work environment standards maintained by their companies, a signal that organizations in Saudi Arabia are adopting some of the universally accepted methods for maintaining work standards. Correspondingly, Azmat and Saad (2018) found that organizations in the manufacturing and engineering sector in Saudi Arabia have made it part of their safety culture to wear personal protective equipment at work. Furthermore, in a study by Awad (2013), the provision of the necessary equipment was identified as one of the safeties and health methods because half of the participants acknowledged it, as shown in figure 2 below. Therefore, the findings revealed that some of the most common ways Saudi Arabia companies follow work environment standards are regular cleanliness and personal protective equipment.

Number of question	Questions	The answer as Percentage
Q1.	You feel your work is dangerous.	58%
Q2.	You feel it is excited to work in unsafe environment.	22%
Q3.	Sometimes it is necessary to do risk procedures to get the job done, what is your opinion?	22%
Q4.	You are able to get the equipment needed to work on health and safety procedures.	50%

Figure 2: Results of the questionnaire

Source: Awad (2013)

3.2 Impact of work environment on employees' satisfaction

Work environment standards in Saudi Arabia's company positively influence employees' job satisfaction

Based on the responses from the participants, a common theme that seems to cut across is the positive link between work environment standards and the satisfaction of the employees. In other words, the data suggest that employees are satisfied with their job because of the excellent work environment standards maintained by their companies. For instance, Interviewee 5 said, *"Yes, I do satisfy because I have flexible working hours. Also, the company provides girls a private place (room) which gives us a full of privacy."* Although the wording was different, all the other interviewees seemed to agree that they obtained satisfaction due to a conducive work environment. For example, Interviewee 7 also acknowledged the positive links by alluding, *"Yes, I am satisfied, as it provides me with a comfortable and enjoyable work environment so that I do not feel the working hours."* The

views show that when employees perceive the work environment standards to be conducive, they tend to be happy with their work and experience a positive attitude.

It is apparent that employees are happy and satisfied with their work because they feel safe and secure due to the work environment standards maintained by their companies. Accordingly, Alotaibi et al. (2016) investigated the factors affecting job satisfaction among Saudi Arabian nurses, and the results identified the working environment as one of the leading factors. The study revealed that the nurses are happy with their work when the work environment is conducive. Furthermore, Almutairi et al. (2013) found that a conducive work environment leads to high job satisfaction among employees of five-star hotels in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. Figure 3 below demonstrates that operation conditions or work environment are also facets of job satisfaction for Saudi Arabian physicians (Allebdi & Ibrahim, 2020). Thus, it is apparent that work environment standards affect employees' job satisfaction in Saudi Arabia. Notably, although all the participants identified the work environment as a contributor to their job satisfaction, more work is required to ensure that employees feel comfortable in the work set-up.

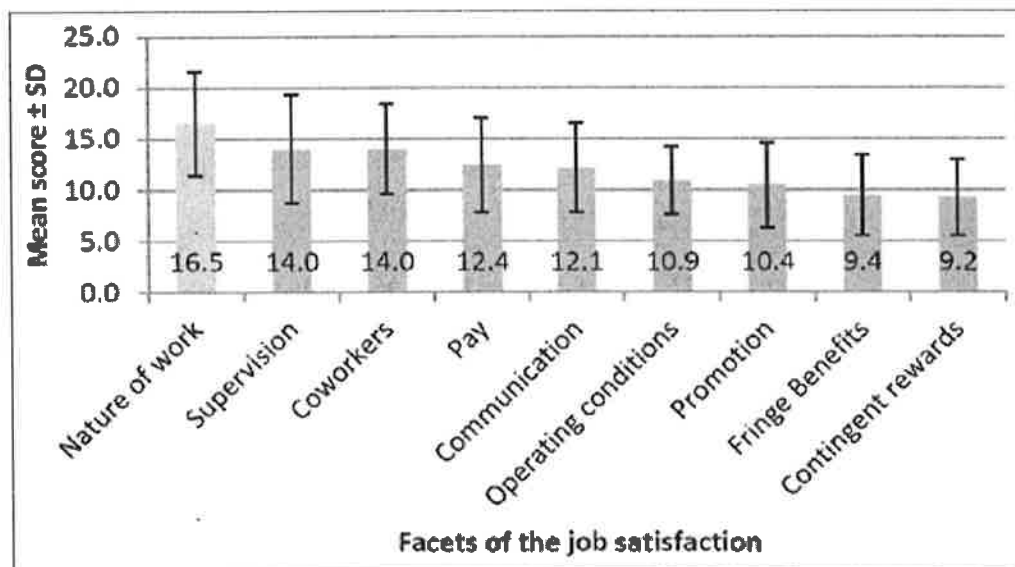


Figure 3: Job satisfaction facets among Saudi Arabian physicians

Source: Allebdi and Ibrahim (2020)

3.3 Influence of adhering to work environment standards on organizational performance

Organizational performance increase because of having to comply to work environment standards

To understand the link between complying with work environment standards and organizational performance, the participants were asked to give their opinion on their organization's performance after strictly implementing the work environment standards. Evidently, all the participants agreed that following the work environment standards leads to better organizational performance. Although they explained their responses from various perspectives, including reducing losses due to injuries to increasing productivity, the underlying theme is that organizational performance is positively influenced by adherence to work environment standards. For instance, Interviewee 2 explained, *“Yes, I think so. Not many accidents could cause huge losses due to following specific safety standards. In addition, direct communication with decision-makers in the company and their interaction with us improves the work environment and makes us more productive.”* On the other hand, other participants believed that performance increases because employees find the work comfortable, thereby increasing their working hours and productivity. For example, Interviewee 8 explains, *“Yes, the company's performance has increased due to the employees' love to work in a comfortable and encouraging work environment to stay for hours in work without feeling bored or tired.”*

The views show that although the employees have diverse perspectives on how following the work environment increases organizational performance, they acknowledge that links exist between the two variables. In other words, work environment standards

improve organizational performance from perspectives, including reducing injuries resulting in losses, enhancing comfortability of work, making employees spend more time at work, and boosting employees' morale to the extent of increasing their productivity. In that regard, Pires (2018) studied the influence of organizational support and working conditions on job satisfaction and performance by surveying 43,850 individuals in different European countries. The study revealed that working conditions is one of the facets of performance because it boosts the morale and attitude of employees, who in turn increase their productivity, thereby increasing organizational performance. From the perspective of Saudi Arabia, Al-Shammari (2013) found that employees in Saudi Arabia are motivated by good working conditions or work environments that affect their productivity, thereby increasing the overall performance of the organization.

3.4 Effects of Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 on companies in Saudi Arabia

Vision 2030 pushed companies to align their work environment goals with government plans

To understand how Vision 2030 affects the work environment standards, the participants were asked to comment on any improvements that were realized because of the announcement of Vision 2030. The majority of the participants believed that Vision 2030 complimented existing work environment standards by pushing companies to accelerate the same implementation. For example, Interviewee 9 said, *“Even before the announcement of Vision 2030, but Vision 2030 pushed the development process in the company to keep pace with work environment standards and government plans.”* Furthermore, the participants also recognized that more changes took place after the introduction of Vision 2030. For instance, Interviewee 7 mentioned, *“Yes, many things have been changed because of not only the 2030 Vision but also the Vision of the company for the development of employees and the work.”*

Therefore, the colors of the offices were changed, and the chairs were changed with comfortable chairs for the back, how much was added 20-minute break every two working hours.”

The views expressed by the participants suggest that although various companies were already implementing work environment standards, the announcement of Vision 2030 forced them to accelerate the execution process to meet the government deadline. Thus, it is a common theme that most organizations had an existing work environment, but the introduction of Vision 2030 caused changes in the form of accelerating the implementing process. Based on the secondary data, Vision 2030 has forced companies to improve the work environment leading to more women being employed (Nereim, 2021). In other words, Vision 2030 has compelled companies to create a favorable work environment for women leading to more women being employed. Figure 4 below shows a rapid increase in the number of women in employment since the introduction of Vision 2030 (Nereim, 2021).

A Growing Presence in the Labor Force

Employed Saudi women*

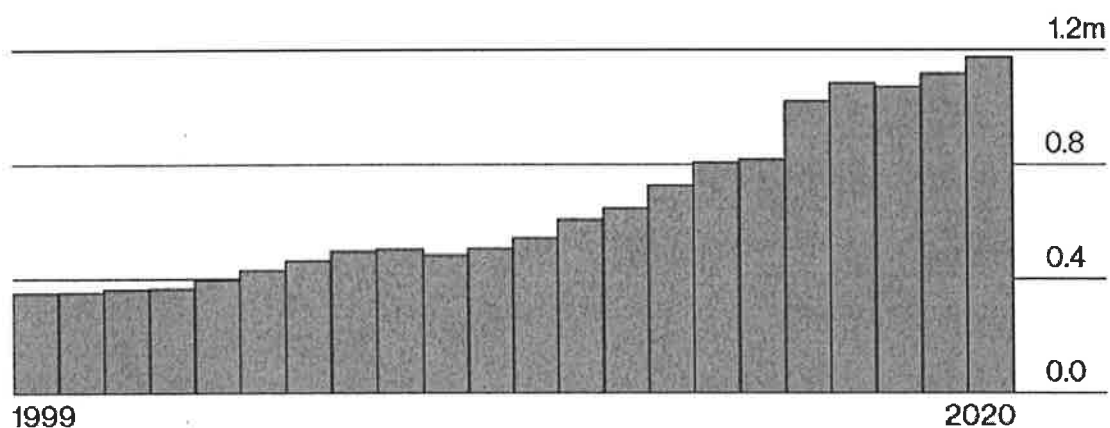


Figure 4: Increasing number of Saudi women in employment

Source: Nereim (2021)

Companies are happy with the vision 2030 requirements because of the benefits associated with its implementation

When asked whether the companies were happy with meeting Vision 2030 goals, the participants acknowledged that the companies welcomed the 2030 deadline for implementing all the requirements because the benefits associated with the plan outweigh the drawbacks. Therefore, the underlying theme is that companies were happy with the requirements of Vision 2030 because of the benefits they would gain from implementing the plan entirely. For instance, Interviewee 9 believed that the company was happy with the requirement because it improved welfare employees and organizational sustainability. Specifically, the Interviewee explained, *“When I spoke with my manager at work in this regard, he told me that the company is benefiting from these requirements despite their high cost, but you will get a wonderful work and retain experiences and minds for years.”*

Based on the responses from a majority of the participants, Vision 2030 requirements are employee-focused, which in the long-term would positively benefit the organization because a happy workforce equals better organizational performance. In other words, the company is satisfied with the requirements of Vision 2030 because more benefits will come because of it. For instance, Interviewee 10 explained, *“I do not know what the company's response to this question is, but I think they are satisfied because it brought them many benefits.”* Therefore, the views suggest that the companies are happy with the requirements because they expect more benefits to follow in the future. For instance, companies will benefit through increased access to labor because more people will be seeking employment because of the favorable working conditions. According to secondary data, Saudi Arabia witnessed an increase in employment and a decrease in unemployment between 2017 and 2018 after the announcement of Vision 2030 (SUSTG, 2019). Figure 5 below shows the reduction in unemployment rates after the information of Vision 2030.

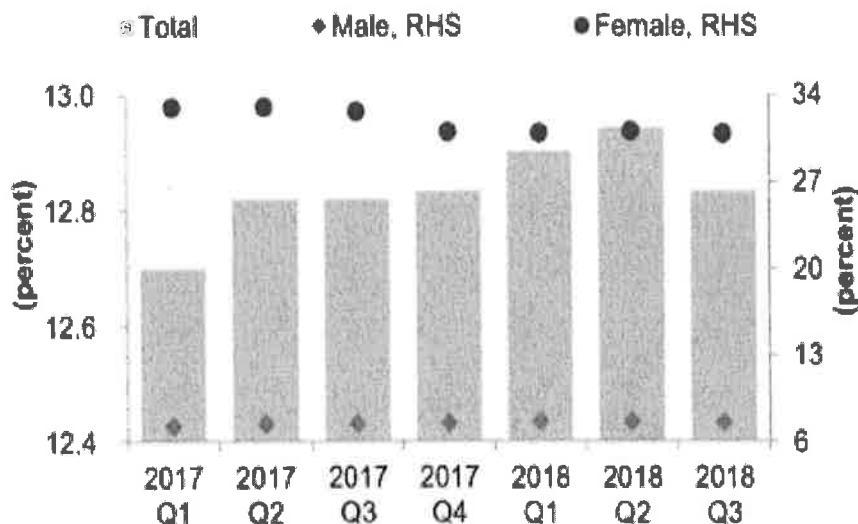


Figure 5: Saudi Arabia's unemployment rates

Source: SUSTG (2019)

Vision 2030 elevate companies into becoming more successful and competitive

When asked how Vision 2030 may directly affect the company, most participants explained the benefits from employees' perspectives. They believed that Vision 2030 would improve the welfare of the employees, making them more comfortable in their work, leading to increased productivity and performance. In turn, the improved performance from the employees will make the companies become successful and gain a competitive advantage. Accordingly, Interviewee 2 mentioned, *“One of the most important requirements that affected my work environment was the decision to set a minimum salary, which in turn made employees feel financially more comfortable.”* Furthermore, Interviewee 3 also explained, *“Vision 2030 aims to elevate companies to become successful and strong companies, so I think that the impact of the requirements of Vision 2030 on the company I work for is positive for the employees.”* Therefore, Vision 2030 affects the companies positively by making them more successful and competitive by improving the welfare of the employees.

4.0 Summary and Conclusion

This study aimed to determine whether companies operating in Saudi Arabia are maintaining or observing work environment standards. From the analysis of both secondary and primary data, it is apparent that companies selected as a sample population maintain work environment standards. Therefore, this study can conclude that organizations in Saudi Arabia implement work environment standards. Besides achieving its aim, the research has also satisfied its objectives through the findings obtained.

For instance, the findings revealed that the majority of the companies in Saudi Arabia follow the acceptable work environment standards. All the participants from the 12 companies acknowledged that their companies follow or implement work environment standards leading the research to conclude that most of the companies, if not all, maintain work environment standards. In addition, the findings also revealed that the most common way companies maintain work environment standard is by cleaning regularly and providing protective equipment to employees. Although other methods exist, most companies in the manufacturing and engineering sector practice these two methods.

The research also satisfied the second objective by revealing that employees tend to be more satisfied when working and operating in a conducive and favorable work environment. A favorable work environment makes the employees feel safe and secure, leading to a feeling of happiness and fulfillment from their work. On the other hand, an unfavorable work environment makes employees uncomfortable to the extent that they cannot concentrate and feel a positive attitude towards work. Therefore, the study concludes that a favorable work environment positively influences the job satisfaction of the employees.

The findings from data analysis met the third objective because they revealed that complying with work environment standards or requirements leads to improved

organizational performance. The evidence indicated that implementing work environment standards reduces work-related injuries that cost the company money that would otherwise be avoided with conducive working conditions. Moreover, maintaining a favorable work environment also improves organizational performance through increased productivity in employees. In other words, employees will realize increased morale and spend more time at work because of the favorable working conditions, thereby improving the company's performance. Based on these findings, the study concludes that favorable work environment standards positively influence organizational performance.

The study's findings also satisfied the fourth objective by revealing that Vision 2030 mostly has positive effects on the companies operating in Saudi Arabia. For instance, the plan enabled the companies to accelerate their work environment plans to align with the government's Vision 2030. In addition, the findings also indicated that companies are happy and satisfied with the requirements of Vision 2030 because of the long-term benefits associated with it. Moreover, it was apparent from the evidence that Vision 2030 would make the companies more successful and gain a competitive advantage through their satisfied employees.

Although this research used mixed research methods, the population sample was too small to provide a comprehensive representation. Therefore, the study suggests that future researchers who investigate the same subject should consider adopting mixed methods focusing on quantitative and qualitative primary data. In other words, the use of a questionnaire would allow for a larger sample population.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Interview Questions

Interview

Dear Sir/Madam,

I am currently carrying out a study on the work environment within the Saudi Arabia companies. I intend to explore whether Saudi Arabia companies are adhering to the work environment standards and how that influence their performance. I am grateful for sparing your time to respond to these questions and your answers will only be used for academic purposes. Please respond to the questions to the best of your knowledge.

Thank you for your participation.

Interview Questions

1. Do you think your company follows work environment standards?
2. Can you think of any ways through which your company follow the work environment standards?
3. Do you believe you are satisfied with your work because of the work environment standards maintained by your company?
4. In your opinion, do you think the performance of your company has increased because of following work environment standards?
5. Do you believe your organization improved its work environment standards after the announcement of Vision 2030 in 2016?
6. In your experience, was your company happy with the requirement that their work environment standards have to improve by 2030?
7. Can you briefly explain how the requirements of Vision 2030 affects the company?
8. What other ways do you think your company can improve the work environment standards?

Thank you for your time.