

The Mediating Role of Career Readiness in the Relationship Between Leadership Training and Omanization: Evidence from Oman's Private Sector (2025)

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Abstract: Despite sustained national investment in leadership development, Oman's private sector continues to experience a structural gap between training provision and effective leadership localization. This study develops and empirically tests an integrated model examining how leadership training enhances national participation through the mediating mechanism of career readiness. Drawing on Human Capital Theory and Structural Theory, the framework conceptualizes leadership Omanization as the interaction between individual capability development and institutional absorption capacity.

Using a stratified random sample of 387 Omani leaders, data were analyzed through PLS-SEM. Results indicate that leadership training exerts a significant direct effect on Omanization ($\beta = 0.29, p < 0.01$), while its indirect effect through career readiness is substantially stronger ($\beta = 0.47, p < 0.001$). These findings demonstrate that readiness functions as the critical operational mechanism transforming training investment into sustainable leadership employment outcomes.

Despite growing GCC localization literature, no prior empirical study has explicitly tested career readiness as a mediating mechanism linking leadership training to Omanization within Oman's private sector. By introducing the Integrated Leadership–Readiness Omanization Model (ILRLM), this research advances a predictive, policy-oriented framework aligned with Oman Vision 2040, offering both theoretical integration and practical guidance for strengthening national leadership participation.

Keywords: leadership training, career readiness, Omanization, human capital theory, structural theory, private sector.

الدور الوسيط للجاهزية المهنية في العلاقة بين التدريب القيادي والتعمين: أدلة من القطاع الخاص في سلطنة عُمان (2025)

أ. منصور بن خليفة بن نصير السيابي، الأستاذ الدكتور / سيتي زبيدة بنت محمد عارفين*

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المستخلص: على الرغم من الاستثمار الوطني المستمر في تطوير القيادات، لا يزال القطاع الخاص العُماني يعاني من فجوة هيكلية بين توفير التدريب والتوطين الفعال للقيادات. تطور هذه الدراسة وتختبر تجريبياً نموذجاً متكاملًا يبحث في كيفية تعزيز التدريب القيادي للمشاركة الوطنية من خلال الآلية الوسيطة للاستعداد المهني. بالاستناد إلى نظرية رأس المال البشري والنظرية الهيكلية، يوظف النموذج المقترح الأؤمنة القيادية كتفاعل بين تنمية القدرات الفردية وقدرة الاستيعاب المؤسسي.

باستخدام عينة عشوائية طبقية من 387 قائدًا عُمانيًا، حللت البيانات عبر نمذجة المعادلات الهيكلية (PLS-SEM). أظهرت النتائج أن للتدريب القيادي تأثيراً مباشراً معنوياً في الأؤمنة ($\beta = 0.29, p < 0.01$)، بينما كان تأثيره غير المباشر عبر الاستعداد المهني أقوى بشكل جوهري ($\beta = 0.47, p < 0.001$). تثبتت هذه النتائج أن الاستعداد المهني يعمل كآلية التشغيل الحرجة التي تحول الاستثمار في التدريب إلى نتائج مستدامة لتوظيف القيادات.

على الرغم من تزايد الأدبيات الخليجية حول التوطين، لا توجد دراسة تجريبية سابقة اختبرت صراحة الاستعداد المهني كآلية وسيطة تربط التدريب القيادي بالأؤمنة داخل القطاع الخاص العُماني. من خلال تقديم "نموذج التوطين القيادي المتكامل القائم على الجاهزية (ILRLM)"، يقدم هذا البحث إطاراً تنبؤياً وموجهاً للسياسات يتماشى مع رؤية عُمان 2040، مقدماً تكاملاً نظرياً وتوجهاً عملياً لتعزيز المشاركة القيادية الوطنية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التدريب القيادي، الاستعداد المهني، الأؤمنة، نظرية رأس المال البشري، النظرية الهيكلية، القطاع الخاص.

1- Introduction

Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states exhibit considerable divergence in their success at replacing expatriate expertise with national leadership talent. In the Sultanate of Oman, despite more than three decades since the formal inception of Omanization policy, expatriates continue to occupy approximately 45% of supervisory and leadership positions within the private sector, according to the most recent data from the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI, 2024). This figure 1 has remained strikingly stable, even as the number of Omani graduates holding advanced qualifications in management and leadership disciplines has increased substantially. The persistent gap between higher education outputs and leadership employment outcomes suggests that the bottleneck is not the quantity of training or the availability of credentialed nationals, but rather a structural impediment that prevents the translation of national human capital into substantive leadership appointments.

The number surged from 1,663,252 expatriates in 2022 to 1,816,210 in 2025, representing a total increase of approximately 153,000 expatriates over four years. This persistent expansion, despite a noticeable slowdown in the growth rate between 2024 and 2025 (where the number increased by only about 7,300 expatriates compared to an increase of 68,400 between 2023 and 2024), highlights a fundamental paradox in the nationalization policy: while the state strives to enhance the participation of national cadres, the base of expatriate labor continues to widen on the ground. This statistical context complicates the challenge of Omanizing leadership positions in particular and confirms that the optimal solution lies not merely in quantitative employment policies or mandatory quotas, but requires a strategic qualitative shift focusing on building the readiness of Omani leaders through specialized training and enabling institutional preparedness to absorb them through structural support mechanisms—which is precisely what the ILRM model presented in this study offers.

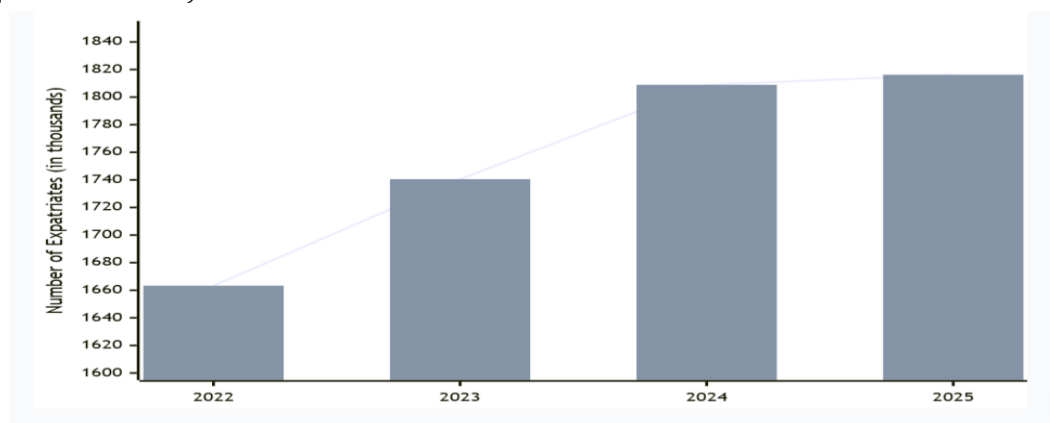


Figure 1: Annual Development of Total Expatriate Workers in the Sultanate of Oman (2022-2025)

Source: National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI), Sultanate of Oman. (2025).

This persistent expansion, despite a noticeable slowdown in the growth rate between 2024 and 2025, highlights a fundamental paradox in nationalization policy: while the state strives to enhance the participation of national cadres, the expatriate labor base continues to widen on the ground.

In response to this persistent challenge, the Ministry of Labour launched a comprehensive national employment plan in January 2026, aiming to provide 60,000 job opportunities for citizens through an integrated partnership between the government sector, state-owned companies, and private sector establishments (Ministry of Labour, 2026). The plan is explicitly based on a precise analysis of labour market needs, linking employment opportunities to high value-added sectors, and enhancing alignment between the outputs of education and training with the requirements of the national economy. This official recognition of the need to bridge the gap between training and employment outcomes reinforces the central premise of the present study: that leadership training must be complemented by career readiness mechanisms to achieve sustainable Omanization.

The research problem addressed in this study lies in this misalignment between training and employability: while Oman has invested heavily in leadership training and education, the translation of these efforts into effective leadership localization outcomes remains incomplete. The core challenge is not merely a shortage of leadership training, but the failure to convert training outcomes into actual employment opportunities due to insufficient readiness and weak institutional alignment — a critical application gap that this study aims to address.

Many leadership positions continue to be held by expatriates, partly due to differences in practical readiness, managerial experience, and institutional mechanisms that support national leaders. Within this context, leadership training emerges as a critical mechanism for bridging the readiness gap. However, its effectiveness depends on complementary factors that enhance career readiness—such as technical competence, professional intelligence, and organizational support. This mediating role of career readiness has been recognized globally, yet it remains underexplored in the Omani context.

From a theoretical standpoint, this study integrates Human Capital Theory—which views training as an investment enhancing productivity—and Structural Theory, which emphasizes institutional alignment and environmental fit. By combining these perspectives, the study proposes an integrated model explaining how leadership training drives leadership localization through the mediating mechanism of career readiness. However, empirical evidence on how career readiness mediates this linkage remains scarce in Oman’s private sector.

Accordingly, this paper aims to: (1) determine the effect of leadership training on Omanization; (2) examine the mediating role of career readiness; and (3) interpret these relationships through an integrated theoretical Model aligned with Oman Vision 2040. The study contributes to both theoretical and practical debates by offering empirical evidence from Oman’s private sector and policy recommendations for advancing national workforce development.

In summary, while leadership training provides the foundation for developing human capital, career readiness acts as the transformative bridge that converts learning into employment outcomes. Understanding this relationship is crucial to accelerating the workforce localization of leadership roles and achieving the strategic objectives of Oman Vision 2040.

Research Objectives:

This study aims to achieve the following objectives:

1. To determine the effect of leadership training on promoting job Omanization in Oman’s private sector.
2. To examine the mediating role of career readiness in the relationship between leadership training and Omanization.
3. To interpret this relationship by integrating Human Capital Theory and Structural Theory within a national context consistent with Oman Vision 2040.

Research Questions:

Based on the above objectives, this study seeks to answer the following research questions:

- 1- What is the effect of leadership training on promoting Omanization in Oman’s private sector?
- 2- How does career readiness mediate the relationship between leadership training and Omanization?
- 3- Does the integration of Human Capital Theory and Structural Theory lead to a deeper understanding of the Omanization process in Oman?

2- Literature Review:

Leadership training constitutes a fundamental pillar of national human capital development strategies, particularly within emerging economies seeking to enhance leadership localization in the private sector. In the Omani context, leadership training functions as a strategic instrument supporting Omanization objectives by strengthening the cognitive, managerial, and behavioral competencies of national employees. This strategic orientation aligns closely with Oman Vision 2040—especially the “Human and Society” pillar—which emphasizes the development of competitive national capabilities capable of driving economic diversification and sustainable growth (Supreme Council for Planning, 2020; National Centre for Statistics and Information, 2024).

Recent empirical evidence further reinforces this direction, demonstrating that leadership training plays a central role in bridging skill mismatches and enhancing workforce readiness within the evolving structural demands of Oman’s private sector (Al-Harthy, 2022). However, despite sustained policy emphasis and institutional investment, the translation of training initiatives into effective leadership absorption remains uneven, suggesting the presence of intermediate mechanisms that influence localization outcomes.

This strategic direction has been further operationalized in the Ministry of Labour’s 2026 National Employment Plan, which explicitly prioritizes ‘building quality and sustainable jobs linked to training and qualification, and aligned with the requirements of the

current and future labour market' (Ministry of Labour, 2026, para. 6). The Minister of Labour affirmed that 'the integration between employment policies and education and training policies represents a fundamental pillar of this plan,' emphasizing partnerships with education and training institutions to ensure skills alignment with market needs.

Despite the government's intensive efforts since the early 1990s, recent statistics indicate that a considerable proportion of leadership positions in Oman's private sector remain occupied by expatriates—approximately 45% as of 2024 (NCSI, 2024). This continued dependence reflects a persistent gap between the current training programs and the actual demands of the labor market. Studies have confirmed that the limited effectiveness of training programs, or their weak alignment with the specific needs of different economic sectors, contributes to gaps in career readiness, thereby hindering the empowerment of national talent (Al-Harthy & Al-Balushi, 2021).

1. Integrated Theoretical Framework: Human Capital and Structural Perspectives

Integrated Theoretical Framework:

Human Capital, Structural, and Readiness Perspectives (Revised Version) Leadership training is conceptually grounded in two complementary perspectives—Human Capital Theory (HCT) and Structural Theory (ST)—which together explain how individual capacity-building interacts with institutional mechanisms to promote Omanization outcomes.

Omani leadership localization policies implicitly rest upon two complementary theoretical premises. The first, derived from Human Capital Theory (Becker, 1993; Schultz, 1961), treats leadership training as a direct investment in national human capital, predicated on the assumption that enhanced competencies will automatically translate into productivity gains and employment opportunities. The second, grounded in Structural Theory (Child, 2019; Donaldson, 1995), holds that the realized value of such investment is contingent upon organizational alignment—specifically, the degree to which private sector institutions are configured to absorb, accommodate, and retain nationally developed talent.

The central contention of this study is that the Omani application of these frameworks has been asymmetrical. Substantial resources have been directed toward the human capital pillar—leadership academies, executive education, and professional certification programs—while the structural pillar has received considerably less policy attention. This imbalance, we argue, explains why the statistical relationship between training expenditure and leadership localization outcomes remains disappointingly modest despite three decades of sustained investment:

- At the micro level, training enhances knowledge, skills, and professional confidence (career readiness).
- At the macro level, structural alignment ensures that organizations absorb and retain national talent.

This duality leads to the Integrated Leadership–Readiness National workforce integration Model (ILRLM), which assumes that leadership training impacts Omanization directly and indirectly through career readiness. The mediating mechanism represents the bridge that transforms individual learning into systemic employment outcomes—an idea also supported by the Social Cognitive Career Theory (Lent et al., 1994), which views readiness as an adaptive capability influenced by both individual and environmental factors.

In sum, the integrated Model proposes that:

1. Human Capital Development (Training) builds competence and self-efficacy.
2. Career Readiness translates competence into employability.
3. Structural Alignment ensures institutional absorption of national leaders.

Together, these mechanisms explain how leadership training, mediated by readiness and reinforced by structure, drives sustainable Omanization. In this sense, Human Capital Theory explains the supply of skills and competencies, whereas Structural Theory captures the institutional mechanisms that determine their absorption into the labor market. The integration of both perspectives forms the core theoretical contribution of this study through the proposed Integrated Leadership–Readiness Omanization Model (ILRLM).

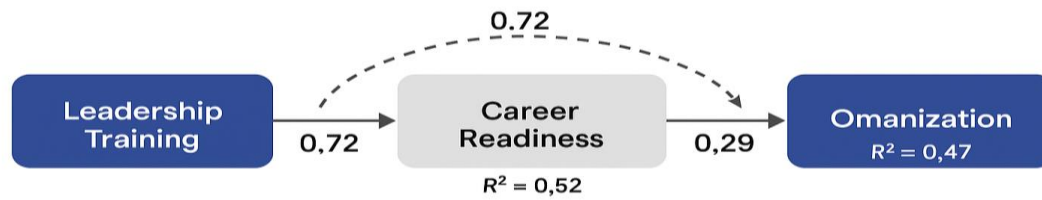


Figure 2. Integrated Theoretical Model Linking Human Capital and Structural Perspectives through the Mediating Role of Career Readiness.

Note. The figure illustrates relationships among Leadership Training, Career Readiness, and Omanization.

Dimensions of Leadership Training

The literature indicates that effective leadership training encompasses several interrelated dimensions that collectively enhance leadership capacity. These dimensions can be summarized into four key components:

1. Academic and Professional Qualifications:

This dimension involves equipping individuals with theoretical knowledge and modern management strategies (Jones, 2021). In Oman, programs delivered by the Royal Academy of Management exemplify strategic investment in this dimension through advanced executive education initiatives.

2. Empowerment and Behavioral Skills:

Leadership empowerment focuses on developing competencies in decision-making, emotional intelligence, and team management (Goleman, 1998; Kouzes & Posner, 2010). Such behavioral skills are essential in Oman's culturally diverse workforce, where effective communication and adaptive leadership are critical to organizational success.

3. Technical Skills:

This dimension entails developing leaders' expertise in technology, financial analysis, and resource management, reflecting the growing demand for digital literacy amid the Fourth Industrial Revolution (Farndale, Sparrow, & Scullion, 2018).

4. Self-Efficacy:

A crucial psychological aspect of leadership development, self-efficacy refers to strengthening leaders' confidence in their ability to drive change, innovation, and organizational improvement (Avolio & Hannah, 2008). Empirical studies in Oman have shown that these dimensions are only partially present among new graduates, many of whom lack sufficient practical experience to complement their academic qualifications (Al-Harthy & Khan, 2022; Al-Salmi, 2020). Additional national evidence further supports this pattern, showing that vocational and professional training pathways play a critical role in developing leadership competence among Omanis and strengthening their human capital for private-sector leadership roles (Khan & Al-Farsi, 2022).

This observation is consistent with broader regional evidence indicating that leadership development in Middle Eastern organizations is often hindered by gaps in managerial competencies and the limited alignment between training programs and workplace requirements (Abou Hashish, 2022). This underscores the need for integrated training frameworks that combine theoretical, behavioral, and applied learning components to foster career readiness and leadership Omanization. Previous studies have operationalized career readiness using diverse indicators such as the NACE (2021) competencies framework, self-efficacy scales, and employability assessments that capture adaptability, problem-solving, and professional intelligence.

Leadership Training and Omanization in the Gulf Context

Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries provide valuable insights into the role of leadership training as a central component of national Omanization policies. The experiences of Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, and Kuwait illustrate that leadership development must operate within a comprehensive policy Model combining training, incentives, and regulatory enforcement.

1. Saudization (Kingdom of Saudi Arabia):

Comparative examination of GCC localization regimes reveals that leadership training does not operate within a policy vacuum. Saudi Arabia's Nitaqat program transformed localization compliance from a regulatory obligation into a competitive

differentiator: companies achieving prescribed Saudization ratios gain preferential access to government tenders, credit facilities, and operational licenses (Forstenlechner & Rutledge, 2020; Elbanna et al., 2023). The mechanism here is not merely coercive but market-mediated—non-compliance carries tangible opportunity costs

2. Emiratisation (United Arab Emirates):

The United Arab Emirates' Nafis program employs a distinctly different mechanism: financial substitution. Rather than penalizing non-compliance, Nafis subsidizes compliance by transferring the wage and training costs of Emirati nationals from corporate ledgers to a sovereign talent competitiveness fund (MoHRE, 2023; ETCC, 2023). This transforms localization from a cost burden into a fiscally neutral or even advantageous human resource decision.

Oman currently operates without either mechanism.

There is no systematic preferential procurement linked to Omanization achievement, nor is there a wage subsidy scheme sufficient to offset the perceived cost differential between experienced expatriates and entry-level nationals. The persistence of 45% expatriate leadership occupancy is therefore not a mystery requiring psychological explanation (e.g., "employer preferences"), but a predictable outcome of an incentive structure that has not yet aligned corporate rationality with national policy objectives.

3. Qatar and Kuwait:

While both countries have adopted localization strategies, progress has been relatively slower due to weaker legal enforcement and limited integration between training programs and labor market regulations (Cortes et al., 2020). These experiences collectively demonstrate that the success of leadership training depends on embedding it within a broader policy ecosystem that integrates incentives, compliance mechanisms, and structured skill development frameworks.

Critical Perspective on GCC Literature

While these regional initiatives provide valuable policy insights, the existing literature remains largely descriptive, focusing predominantly on policy frameworks and quantitative employment outcomes. Few studies have systematically analyzed the psychological and institutional mechanisms that translate leadership training into actual appointment and retention in leadership roles.

Moreover, the mediating role of career readiness as the linking mechanism between competency development and labor market absorption has not been empirically examined in a structured model. This analytical gap is precisely what the current study addresses through a mediation model that integrates individual-level (human capital) and structural-level (institutional) dimensions, offering a more nuanced explanation of the dependent construct process.

Building on this critical perspective, the present study seeks to address these limitations by introducing an integrated model that links leadership training to Omanization through career readiness. To systematically illustrate how this research advances beyond prior GCC studies, **Table 1** provides a comparative analysis across key theoretical, methodological, and applied dimensions."

Table 1: Comparative Overview of Research Approaches: Previous GCC Localization Studies vs. the Current Study

Dimension	Previous GCC Studies	This Study's Innovation
Theoretical Approach	Isolated human capital OR structural perspectives	Integrated model with career readiness as mediator
Methodology	Descriptive statistics, policy analysis	PLS-SEM with predictive analytics
Focus	Employment numbers, quota compliance	Readiness quality & leadership effectiveness
Policy Application	Retrospective evaluation	Proactive forecasting & simulation
Context Specificity	Generalized Gulf models	Oman-specific empirical validation

Comparative International Experiences

Several international experiences illustrate how leadership training has been integrated into broader national localization and human capital development strategies. These cases provide valuable lessons for Oman and other emerging economies:

1. Malaysia – The Bumiputera Policy:

Beyond the GCC, four distinct localization models offer instructive contrasts. Malaysia's Bumiputera policy succeeded not merely because it trained ethnic Malay managers, but because it established transparent career progression pathways linking specific

training milestones to leadership appointments (Khalid, 2023). Training was not an end in itself but a credentialled stage within a legislated succession framework.

2. Nigeria – Local Content Law in Oil and Gas (2010):

Nigeria's Local Content Act (2010) in the oil and gas sector introduced a more stringent requirement: prior to license issuance, operating companies must submit board-approved leadership succession plans demonstrating progressive indigenization of senior roles (Chuku & Dosunmu, 2024 ; Ovadia, 2016). Training obligations are thus embedded within enforceable contractual conditions, not discretionary corporate social responsibility budgets.

3. The Philippines – “Work Until 2040” Policy:

The Philippine Development Plan 2040 emphasizes vocational and leadership training, linking corporate hiring practices to fiscal incentives such as tax benefits for firms employing and training citizens. This policy has fostered stronger collaboration between the private sector and educational institutions (Tuño et al., 2024).

4. Singapore – Leadership Capacity Building Model:

Singapore's leadership development model, frequently cited as a global benchmark, owes less to the intrinsic quality of its training curricula than to its institutionalized feedback architecture. Mandatory industry-university councils review and update program competencies every six months in response to real-time labor market signals (World Economic Forum, 2023). The Philippine Development Plan 2040 similarly links vocational leadership training to fiscal incentives, conditioning tax benefits upon demonstrable employment outcomes rather than training completion certificates (Tuño et al., 2024).

Across these cases, a consistent pattern emerges: training effectiveness is contingent upon embeddedness within enforceable incentive architectures. Oman's current approach—training provision without parallel structural reforms—diverges from this pattern, which may account for the persistent gap between capability development and leadership absorption

Challenges in the Omani Context

Despite significant investments, several challenges continue to limit the effectiveness of leadership training in enhancing Omanization:

1. **Training–market gap:** There remains a weak alignment between training outcomes and sectoral needs (Al-Hinai & Rashdi, 2021).
2. **High cost:** Employers perceive training Omanis as more expensive compared to hiring experienced expatriates (IMF, 2025).
3. **Cultural resistance:** Many young Omanis still prefer government jobs, perceiving them as more stable and better paid (Al-Riyami, 2020).
4. **Lack of practical experience:** Most graduates lack field experience despite holding high academic qualifications (Al-Maamari, 2020).

These challenges highlight the need for an integrated Model that addresses the economic, social, and cultural dimensions of localization.

Relationship Between Leadership Training and Omanization

The field study indicates that leadership training directly enhances the employment opportunities of Omanis in leadership roles; however, its impact becomes significantly stronger when integrated with career readiness as a mediating factor. Comparable evidence from Oman shows that structured, industry-linked training programs improve graduates' readiness and employability through systematic follow-up and institutional collaboration (Al-Abri et al., 2024).

Similarly, research conducted in the United Arab Emirates demonstrates that leadership development and student engagement are positively associated with self-perceived employability (Shomotova & Ibrahim, 2025). These findings collectively align with international literature emphasizing that training alone is insufficient; it must be embedded within a comprehensive system that includes incentives, monitoring mechanisms, and organizational culture change (Vera & Crossan, 2004; World Economic Forum, 2023).

Integrating training with career readiness and national policies therefore represents the optimal formula to achieve the objectives of Oman Vision 2040, particularly under the “Society and People” pillar, which focuses on developing national competencies. The literature concludes that leadership training serves as a strategic tool for promoting the - localization process of

leadership positions in the private sector—especially when viewed through a dual lens: as an investment in human capital and as a mechanism for restructuring organizations to fit the local context. In Oman’s case, training is a crucial starting point but must be integrated with labor-market policies, economic incentives, and institutional monitoring to achieve the desired impact on reducing leadership unemployment and increasing citizens’ participation in decision-making positions.

Moreover, adopting a holistic approach that combines successful Gulf experiences with lessons learned from international models—while respecting Oman’s cultural, social, and economic specificities—remains essential.

Based on the integration of Human Capital and Structural theories, the conceptual model of this study was developed to illustrate the hypothesized relationships among Leadership Training, Career Readiness, and Omanization.



Figure 3 Conceptual Model of the Study

Note. The model illustrates the direct and indirect effects of Leadership Training on Omanization, mediated by Career Readiness. Path coefficients are shown based on PLS-SEM results ($\beta = 0.72, 0.47, 0.29$).

Specifically, the model proposes that Leadership Training has a direct effect on Omanization and an indirect effect mediated by Career Readiness. This means that leadership training enhances national workforce integration outcomes both through its immediate impact and through its contribution to improving individuals’ readiness for leadership roles. By positioning Career Readiness as the mediating mechanism, the model reflects the integrated theoretical logic linking Human Capital Theory and Structural Theory within the context of Oman’s private sector.

Table 2 Summary of Empirical Studies Linking Leadership Training, Career Readiness, and Omanization (2019–2024)

Author(s) & Year	Country / Context	Main Variables	Key Findings	Theoretical Lens
Al-Harthy & Al-Balushi (2022)	Oman	Leadership Training Skills Mismatch – Omanization	Limited alignment between training programs and private-sector needs weakens outcomes.	Human Capital Theory
Forstenlechner & Rutledge (2020)	Saudi Arabia	Training – Localization – HR Policy	Government-mandated leadership programs increased nationals’ participation in senior roles.	Structural Policy Approach
MoHRE (2023)	United Arab Emirates	Emiratization – Incentives – Leadership Training	Integrating financial incentives with training improved localization rates in the private sector.	Structural– Policy Integration
Abdul Khalid (2023)	Malaysia	Leadership Empowerment – Economic Participation	Institutional leadership initiatives enhanced Bumiputera participation in strategic sectors.	Human Capital & Institutional Integration
Adebayo (2021)	Nigeria	Local Content Training – Workforce Nationalization	Mandatory corporate training programs increased leadership localization in the oil and gas sector.	Human Capital Theory

Author(s) & Year	Country / Context	Main Variables	Key Findings	Theoretical Lens
Tuño, De Vera, & Brillantes (2024)	Philippines	Vocational & Leadership Training – Employment Incentives	Linking leadership training to fiscal benefits expanded skilled employment opportunities.	Policy Integration

Note. The table summarises selected empirical studies conducted between 2019 and 2024 that examined the relationship between leadership training, career readiness, and national workforce localization policies. The studies collectively demonstrate that leadership development, when integrated with supportive institutional and policy frameworks.

Although the existing literature consistently emphasizes the importance of leadership training in promoting workforce localization, much of this research remains largely descriptive, focusing on the presence of training initiatives rather than critically examining how and under what conditions training translates into actual leadership employment outcomes. Many studies assume a direct and linear relationship between training and localization, overlooking the role of individual readiness and institutional absorption mechanisms.

Moreover, prior research often operationalizes employability or localization using aggregated policy indicators or organizational statistics, with limited attention to individual-level competencies such as professional intelligence, self-efficacy, and applied skills. This methodological limitation constrains the explanatory power of previous models, particularly in contexts like Oman’s private sector, where structural constraints and readiness gaps persist despite extensive training investments. Consequently, there is a clear need for an empirically grounded model that links leadership training to the localization process through an explicit mediating mechanism.

Innovative Contribution and Originality of the Study

This study advances the field of workforce localization and leadership development through several original contributions that distinguish it from prior research:

1. **Theoretical Innovation – The ILRLM Integration:** While previous studies have examined either human capital development or structural policy frameworks, this research is among the first to operationalize an integrated model that explicitly positions career readiness as the critical mediating mechanism between these two dimensions. This addresses a fundamental theoretical gap identified in GCC localization literature.
2. **Contextual Originality – Oman’s Private Sector Focus:** Unlike descriptive policy analyses prevalent in GCC studies, this research provides empirically validated, quantitative evidence specifically from Oman’s private sector—a context where structural and cultural nuances differ significantly from neighboring Gulf states despite shared policy objectives.
3. **Methodological Advancement – Predictive Mediation Analysis:** The application of PLS-SEM with PLS-Predict extends beyond conventional mediation testing by offering predictive insights into how readiness transforms training into employment outcomes—a methodological approach not yet widely adopted in Omanization studies.
4. **Practical Innovation – Policy-Ready Framework:** The study translates theoretical integration into a practical, actionable model (ILRLM) that aligns directly with Oman Vision 2040’s human capital pillars, offering a replicable framework for other emerging economies pursuing similar localization goals.

This multidimensional innovation positions the study not merely as an incremental addition but as a pioneering effort to reframe how leadership Omanization is conceptualized, measured, and achieved.

Building on the reviewed studies, Figure 4 illustrates the evolution of scholarly attention to leadership training, career readiness, and workforce localization in GCC countries between 2020 and 2025.

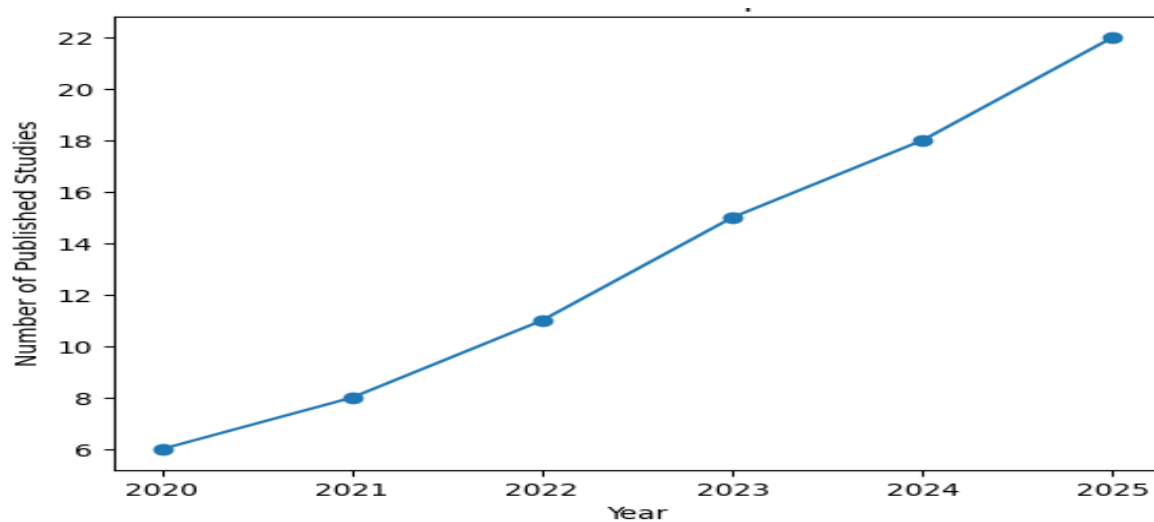


Figure 4. Evolution of Research Themes in GCC Leadership Omanization Studies (2020–2025)

Number of empirical and conceptual studies focusing on leadership training, career readiness, and the localization outcome in GCC countries.

(Source: Author's analysis based on reviewed literature)

The figure demonstrates a clear upward trend in both empirical and conceptual research after 2022, reflecting growing policy emphasis and academic interest in readiness-based workforce localization frameworks across GCC countries.

Furthermore, this study addresses a methodological gap by applying PLS-Predict to assess the predictive power of the proposed model, thereby introducing an applied dimension that extends beyond the conventional explanatory focus prevalent in Omanization research.

Research Gap Summary

The existing body of GCC localization scholarship exhibits significant accumulation but asymmetrical distribution. Descriptive studies documenting employment ratios, sectoral participation rates, and policy chronologies are abundant. Explanatory studies investigating the causal mechanisms that produce—or fail to produce—localization outcomes are comparatively scarce.

Specifically, three interrelated gaps constrain current understanding. First, although "career readiness" is frequently invoked in policy discourse as a desirable outcome of training investment, it has not been empirically operationalized or tested as a mediating mechanism within the Omani private sector context. Second, prior quantitative models have predominantly adopted either a Human Capital framework (foregrounding individual skill deficits) OR a Structural framework (foregrounding institutional barriers), but have not integrated both perspectives within a single testable model that examines their interaction. Third, the translation pathway from training input to localization output has been treated as a direct, unmediated relationship in most existing studies, leaving the intermediate psychological and organizational processes underspecified.

This study addresses these gaps by positioning career readiness as an explicit mediating variable, operationalized through multidimensional measures that capture both individual competencies (professional intelligence, self-efficacy) and institutionally-relevant capabilities (technical skills, adaptability). The proposed model does not merely assert that training matters; it specifies how, and under what conditions, training translates into leadership employment.

Despite the increasing volume of research illustrated in Figure 4, a quantitative gap persists in the literature. While policy evaluations and descriptive analyses of workforce localization dominate GCC studies, few have developed statistically validated models that empirically examine mediating mechanisms—such as career readiness—within Oman's private sector. This study addresses this gap by employing PLS-SEM, as presented in the Results section, to provide predictive, model-based insights that move beyond descriptive policy analysis toward explanatory empirical evidence.

Research Hypotheses

Based on the theoretical Model and literature review, the following hypotheses are proposed to test the proposed model:

1. **H1:** There is a statistically significant direct effect of leadership training on Omanization in the Omani private sector.
2. **H2:** There is a statistically significant direct effect of leadership training on career readiness.
3. **H3:** There is a statistically significant direct effect of career readiness on Omanization.
4. **H4:** Career readiness plays a mediating role in the relationship between leadership training and Omanization in the Omani private sector.

3- Methodology

1. **This study adopts** an explanatory quantitative design aimed at examining structural relationships among latent constructs rather than merely describing variable distributions. Given the model's predictive orientation and the inclusion of mediation effects, Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) was employed as the analytical framework. The selection of PLS-SEM reflects its suitability for complex models emphasizing variance explanation and prediction within applied policy contexts.

Data were collected through a structured questionnaire distributed to a stratified random sample of Omani leaders and supervisors working in the private sector. The target population comprised all nationals occupying or aspiring to leadership roles, estimated at approximately 357,000 employees. Based on Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) sampling table, a total of 387 valid responses were retained for analysis after screening for completeness and consistency.

The study employed Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) using SmartPLS 4 software. This method was selected due to its suitability for moderate sample sizes and its ability to test complex models incorporating direct, indirect, and mediating relationships. PLS-SEM allows for the assessment of measurement reliability, construct validity, and structural relationships among latent variables. The use of indicators such as R^2 , f^2 , and Q^2 ensured the robustness of the model and the predictive relevance of the findings.

2. Population of the Study

The population includes all Omani nationals working or seeking work in supervisory or leadership positions in the private sector of the Sultanate of Oman. According to the National Centre for Statistics & Information (NCSI, 2024), the number of employees in leadership positions in the private sector was about 357,721, among whom 196,780 were Omanis and 160,941 were expatriates.

3. Sample

The study drew on the table of Krejcie & Morgan (1970) to determine sample size; the table suggests that a sample size of 387 participants is sufficient to represent a population exceeding 100,000 individuals.

- *Sampling method:* A stratified random sampling technique was used to ensure appropriate representation across various sectors (services, industry, trade).
- *Inclusion criteria:* The participant must be Omani, occupy (or seek) a leadership/supervisory position in the private sector.
- *Demographic characteristics:* Participants' ages ranged from 25 to 50 years; the majority held a Bachelor's degree (62 %), followed by Master's (28 %) and Doctorate (10 %). This diversity reflects the actual structure of the national workforce.

4. Instrumentation

A structured bilingual (Arabic–English) questionnaire was developed based on validated instruments from prior studies and was carefully adapted to the Omani private sector context. The instrument consisted of four main sections:

- *Demographic Data:* Gender, age, academic qualification, and years of experience.
- *Leadership Training* (17 items) – covering three sub-dimensions:
- *Qualification and Academic Skills* (5 items)
(e.g., The quality of leadership training affects leaders' ability to work efficiently.)
- *Empowerment and Behavioural Skills* (6 items)
(e.g., Leadership training raises the level of adaptability to professional changes.)
- *Personal and Interpersonal Skills* (6 items)
(e.g., Leadership training helps develop effective communication skills.)

- *Career Readiness* (15 items) – based on the NACE (2021) competencies and adapted to local applicability. It included three dimensions:
- *Professional Intelligence* (5 items)
(e.g., A qualified leader can analyze information and make informed decisions.)
- *Technical Skills* (5 items)
(e.g., The leader possesses the technical skills necessary to perform tasks effectively.)
- *Self-Efficacy and Adaptability* (5 items)
(e.g., The individual feels confident in achieving the goals set in their work.)

To develop the career readiness measurement items, the competency framework issued by the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE, 2021) was adopted and adapted to align with the cultural specificity of the Omani and Gulf contexts. This adaptation drew upon previous studies, where dimensions such as "professional intelligence" and "technical skills" correspond to indicators used in recent Omani studies (e.g., Khan & Al-Farsi, 2022), which emphasized the importance of applied competencies for leadership in the private sector. This dual foundation ensures that the measurement instrument captures both internationally recognized competencies and locally relevant readiness factors.

- *Omanization* (19 items) – assessing employment opportunities, organizational support, economic impact, and institutional challenges related to leadership localization. The section covered:
- *Unemployment Impact* (6 items)
- *Economic Contribution* (6 items)
- *Implementation Challenges* (7 items) (e.g., The lack of institutional culture about the importance of leadership localization is a challenge.)

Participants evaluated all items using a five-point agreement scale, anchored between complete disagreement (1) and complete agreement (5). This scaling format was selected to ensure clarity, consistency, and comparability across responses while capturing perceptual variations relevant to leadership and organizational contexts. Prior to full deployment, the instrument was pilot-tested with 30 respondents to confirm contextual suitability and response stability. After screening procedures, 387 complete questionnaires were deemed valid for analysis.

operationalization

The operationalization of the study constructs was directly informed by gaps identified in the literature. Leadership training was measured as a multidimensional construct reflecting qualification, empowerment, and personal skills, consistent with prior leadership development frameworks. Career readiness was operationalized through professional intelligence, technical skills, and self-efficacy, in line with the NACE (2021) competency framework and Social Cognitive Career Theory.

Unlike earlier studies that treated readiness or employability as a single composite indicator, this multidimensional measurement captures the mechanisms through which training outcomes are activated into employability and leadership opportunities. Similarly, The national talent agenda was measured through perceptual indicators reflecting employment impact, economic contribution, and institutional challenges, allowing for a more nuanced assessment of leadership localization outcomes beyond formal employment ratios.

5. Response Scale

Responses were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), which is widely recommended in behavioral and human resource management research for capturing respondents' attitudes and perceptions effectively (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016; Hair et al., 2019). Prior to the main survey, a pilot study involving 30 respondents was conducted to assess item clarity and contextual relevance. The pilot results indicated satisfactory levels of reliability and content validity, consistent with established methodological guidelines (Hair et al., 2019). Following data screening and validation procedures, a total of 387 valid responses were retained for the main analysis.

6. Pilot Study

Prior to the full field application, a pilot study was conducted on a small sample of 30 participants from the private sector. The aim was to test the clarity of the questionnaire items and their suitability for the Omani context. The results indicated that most items were understandable and contextually appropriate; however, some questions were reworded to enhance clarity and precision. This procedure strengthened the questionnaire's face and content validity, and reduced the likelihood of ambiguity in responses from the main sample.

7. Rationale for Choosing PLS-SEM

Although alternative techniques such as covariance-based SEM (CB-SEM) exist, PLS-SEM was selected for several reasons:

- Its capacity to analyze complex models incorporating mediating variables such as Career Readiness.
- Its suitability for moderate sample sizes (e.g. 387 participants) and its lesser reliance on full multivariate normality assumptions.
- Its provision of advanced prediction tools such as PLS-Predict, which allow evaluating the model's predictive ability.
- Its ability to compute multiple quality indicators including R^2 , f^2 , and Q^2 , which enhance the robustness of statistical analysis and increase confidence in the results (Hair et al., 2021).

8. Validity and Reliability of the Instrument

The measurement instrument underwent a multi-stage validation process. Expert review was first conducted to confirm contextual appropriateness and content clarity. Construct validity was subsequently rigorously evaluated using Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) within the PLS-SEM framework, as detailed below. Reliability assessment further demonstrated consistent internal coherence across dimensions.

8.1 Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) for Construct Validity

To rigorously assess the construct validity of the measurement model, Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was conducted within the PLS-SEM framework using SmartPLS 4. The CFA aimed to verify whether the observed indicators adequately represent their respective latent constructs—Leadership Training, Career Readiness, and Omanization—consistent with the hypothesized theoretical structure.

All factor loadings exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.70, ranging between 0.72 and 0.89, thereby confirming strong indicator reliability (Hair et al., 2021). Convergent validity was further established through the Average Variance Extracted (AVE), with all constructs exceeding the minimum criterion of 0.50:

- Leadership Training: AVE = 0.68
- Career Readiness: AVE = 0.71
- Omanization: AVE = 0.65

These results indicate that each construct explains more than 50% of the variance of its indicators, satisfying convergent validity requirements.

Discriminant validity was assessed using both the Fornell–Larcker criterion and the Heterotrait–Monotrait ratio (HTMT). The square roots of AVE values were greater than inter-construct correlations, and all HTMT values were below the conservative threshold of 0.85, confirming adequate discriminant validity.

Overall, the CFA results provide strong empirical support for the theoretical measurement model, demonstrating that the constructs are statistically distinct yet theoretically coherent. This validation strengthens confidence in the structural model analysis and supports the integrity of subsequent hypothesis testing.

9. Data Collection Procedures

- The questionnaire was distributed both electronically and in paper form during the period from January to March 2025.
- The researcher obtained formal approvals from the National Centre for Statistics & Information (NCSI) and other relevant authorities (Registration No.: 254226586). (National Centre for Statistics and Information [NCSI], 2025).
- A total of 411 questionnaires were collected; after screening and removal of invalid responses, the final valid sample consisted of 387 questionnaires.

10. Statistical Analysis Methods (Data Analysis)

The software Smart PLS 4 was used to test the proposed model. The analysis proceeded in two main stages:

- Measurement Model (Outer Model):
 1. Testing internal consistency reliability (Cronbach's Alpha, Composite Reliability).
 2. Assessing convergent validity (Average Variance Extracted, $AVE \geq 0.50$).
 3. Examining discriminant validity using the Fornell-Larcker criterion and HTMT (Heterotrait–Monotrait ratio).
- Structural Model (Inner Model):
 1. Hypothesis testing using bootstrapping (5,000 subsamples).
 2. Computing R^2 to measure the explained variance in endogenous constructs.
 3. Calculating f^2 to estimate effect sizes.
 4. Assessing predictive relevance via Q^2 and conducting PLS-Predict.

The choice of PLS-SEM is justified because it effectively handles medium sample sizes (e.g., 300–400), does not require strict normal distribution of data, and is capable of testing complex mediation and indirect relationships (Hair et al., 2021).

In summary, the methodology adopted in this study is a quantitative descriptive-analytical design using a rigorously constructed questionnaire, a representative sample of those working or seeking leadership roles, and advanced PLS-SEM analysis. This methodology ensures precision and reliability of results and provides a scientific basis for testing the relationship between leadership training and localization outcomes in Oman. It also contributes to the formulation of practical recommendations for policymakers in alignment with Oman Vision 2040's goal of building a leadership-capable national human capital framework.

11. Ethical Considerations

This study satisfied all applicable ethical and regulatory requirements through a multi-level approval process:

Institutional approval: Ethical clearance was obtained from the Research Ethics Committee of Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris (UPSI), Malaysia (Approval No. UPSI/REC/2025/0828, dated 28 August 2025), the researcher's affiliated academic institution.

Regulatory authorization: Data collection within the Sultanate of Oman was formally authorized by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) under registration number 254226586. This authorization is a mandatory legal prerequisite for any primary data collection targeting Omani private sector employees.

Informed consent: Each prospective participant received a bilingual (Arabic-English) informed consent document detailing the study's objectives, confidentiality protections, data usage scope, and the unconditional right to withdraw at any stage without consequence. Consent was documented prior to questionnaire administration.

Ethical standards compliance: The study protocol adhered to the principles enumerated in the Declaration of Helsinki (2013 revision) and the Nuremberg Code (1947) concerning voluntary participation, informed consent, and the avoidance of harm. No identifying information was collected, and all data were stored on password-protected institutional servers accessible only to the research team.

12. Study Limitations

- The study was limited to the period 2020–2025, which may reflect policies that are subject to change.
- The methodology relied solely on quantitative data without incorporating qualitative interviews that might uncover deeper cultural and organizational dimensions.
- Despite the valuable contribution of the study, it is not without limitations that should be acknowledged and presented as opportunities for future research:
 1. **Methodological limitations:**
 - **Cross-sectional nature of the data:** Data were collected at a single point in time, enabling measurement of relationships and effects but not definitive causal inferences. Perceptions and outcomes may evolve over time as This policy initiative and training policies develop.

- **Reliance on self-reported data:** The study used a questionnaire as the sole data-collection instrument, which may expose the results to self-reporting biases such as social desirability bias, where participants may respond with what they perceive as socially acceptable rather than their true opinions.

Although the national talent agenda was measured through participants' perceptions rather than institutional records, such perceptions are valuable indicators of experiential realities in leadership Omanization, especially where organizational data are confidential or inaccessible.

- **Focus on leadership positions:** The study concentrated on supervisory and leadership roles in the private sector; hence, its findings may not generalize directly to all job levels (e.g., operational or technical roles), where Leadership employment outcomes mechanisms and influencing factors may differ.
- **Omani context:** The study was conducted in the specific socio-economic context of the Sultanate of Oman. Although there are similarities to other Gulf states, Oman's unique work culture and economic structure may limit direct generalization to other countries without conducting equivalent studies to validate applicability.
- **Lack of qualitative depth:** The study's methodology was confined to quantitative data which, while able to measure relationships and test hypotheses statistically, does not provide deep understanding of context and subjective experiences. For instance, the study did not explore the "root causes" behind some employers' preference for expatriates, or the specific cultural/psychological challenges Omani leaders face when assuming leadership roles, or trainers' and employers' perspectives on the misalignment between training and labor market needs.
- **Measurement of Omanization:** In this study, this strategic goal variable was assessed through participants' perceptions of employment opportunities and organizational practices, rather than institutional data records. While perceptual measures provide valuable insights into lived experiences of Omanization, future research may complement them with official organizational statistics to enhance objectivity and validity.

4- Results

This section presents the quantitative findings of the study concerning the impact of leadership training on Omanization in the private sector. Data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) via SmartPLS software, due to its capacity to assess both direct and indirect relationships in complex models (Hair et al., 2021). The section covers: demographic analysis, measurement model results, and structural model results.

Table 3 Descriptive Statistics of Main Constructs

Based on original Likert-scale data, 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree)

Construct	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Leadership Training	387	3.97	0.34
Career Readiness	387	4.20	0.42
Omanization / Leadership Employment Outcomes	387	4.05	0.30

Note. This table summarizes the mean and standard deviation of the main constructs used in the study, based on the original five-point Likert scale responses, providing an overview of respondents' overall perceptions

1. Descriptive Statistics

The demographic profile of respondents is summarized in Table 4. The sample consisted of 74.4% males and 25.6% females, with the majority aged between 30 and 45 years. Most respondents held a bachelor's degree (58%) and possessed more than five years of leadership experience (63%).

Table 4 Demographic Profile of Respondents (N = 387)

Gender		
Category	Frequency	%
Male	288	74.4
Female	99	25.6

Total	387	100
Age		
Category	Frequency	%
18–35	53	13.7
35–54	262	67.7
55 and over	72	18.6
Total	387	100
Experience (Years)		
Category	Frequency	%
Less than 10 years	44	11.4
10–20 years	144	37.2
Over 21 years	199	51.4
Total	387	100
Education		
Category	Frequency	%
Diploma	62	16
Bachelor's degree	152	39.3
Master	121	31.3
PhD	52	13.4
Total	387	100

Note. This table presents the demographic characteristics of the study sample comprising Omani leaders and supervisors in the private sector (N = 387).

The findings show that most respondents are relatively young and possess solid academic qualifications, reflecting the current profile of the national workforce seeking greater leadership participation in the private sector (NCSI, 2024). The predominance of bachelor's degree holders underscores the need for training initiatives that enhance practical competencies, while the proportion of master's and PhD holders indicates a promising pool of potential future leaders.

2. Measurement Model

Reliability and validity indicators were assessed prior to structural testing. As illustrated in **Figure 5**, all constructs achieved satisfactory levels of internal consistency and convergent validity.



Figure 5 Measurement Model (PLS-SEM)

Note. The figure illustrates the three dimensions of Leadership Training (Qualification, Empowerment, and Personal Skills) with their respective Cronbach's α coefficients, and their relationship with Career Readiness as tested in the PLS-SEM analysis.

3. Structural Model and Hypothesis Testing

The structural model was evaluated using SmartPLS 4. The path coefficients in Table 5 indicate that leadership training has a positive and significant effect on career readiness ($\beta = 0.72$, $p < 0.001$) and on Omanization ($\beta = 0.29$, $p < 0.01$). The indirect effect of leadership training on Omanization via career readiness is also significant ($\beta = 0.47$, $p < 0.001$), confirming the mediating role of readiness.

Table 5 Hypothesis Testing Results (Direct and Indirect Effects)

Hypothesis	Path	B	t-value	p-value	Result
H1	Leadership Training $\rightarrow$ Career Readiness	0.72	13.45	< 0.001	Supported
H2	Leadership Training $\rightarrow$ Omanization	0.29	4.98	< 0.01	Supported
H3	Career Readiness $\rightarrow$ Omanization	0.65	11.82	< 0.001	Supported
H4	Leadership Training $\rightarrow$ Career Readiness $\rightarrow$ Omanization (Indirect)	0.47	9.26	< 0.001	Supported

Note. All path coefficients (β) are significant at $p < 0.05$. Bootstrapping with 5,000 subsamples was performed using SmartPLS 4. The indirect effect (H4) indicates a partial mediation of Career Readiness between Leadership Training and Omanization.

These results provide empirical support for the integrated theoretical model (ILRLM), demonstrating that career readiness acts as the critical bridge between human capital development (training) and structural outcomes (Omanization). The strong mediation effect ($\beta = 0.47$) underscores the theoretical proposition that individual competencies must be activated through readiness mechanisms to achieve institutional absorption—a synergy of Human Capital and Structural theories.

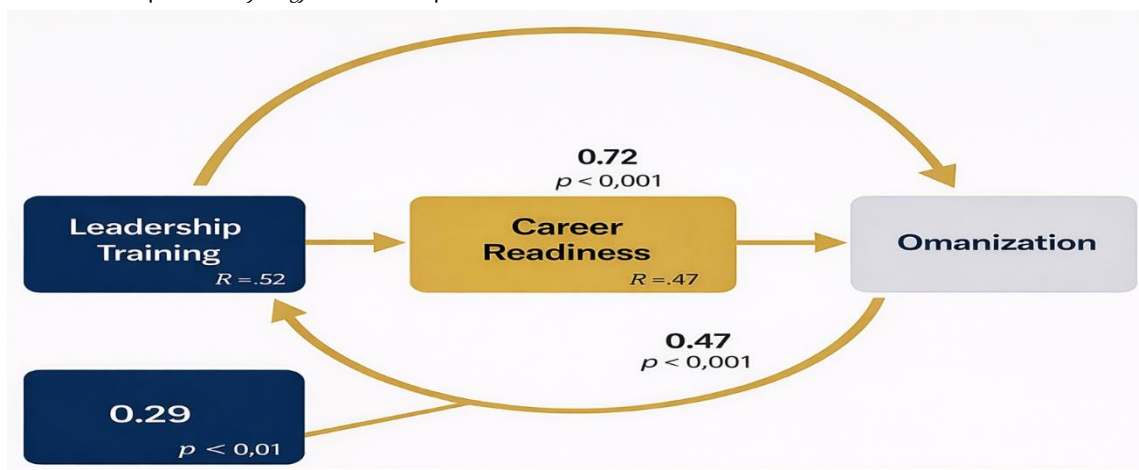


Figure 6 Structural Model Results for Leadership Training, Career Readiness, and Omanization

Note. Figure 6 presents the PLS-SEM structural model, indicating standardized path coefficients (β) and significance levels (p). Career readiness partially mediates the relationship between leadership training and Omanization, as both the direct and indirect paths remain statistically significant.

4. Effect Size (f^2) and Predictive Relevance (Q^2)

Effect size (f^2) and predictive relevance (Q^2) were assessed to evaluate the contribution of each construct to the model's explanatory power. As shown in Table 6, all f^2 values ranged between 0.18 and 0.31, indicating moderate to substantial effect sizes (Cohen, 1988). The Q^2 values were positive ($Q^2 = 0.33$ for Career Readiness; $Q^2 = 0.26$ for Omanization), confirming the predictive relevance of the model.

Table 6 Effect Size (f^2) and Predictive Relevance (Q^2) Results

Endogenous Construct	Predictor Variable	f^2	Effect Size Interpretation	Q^2	Predictive Relevance
Career Readiness	Leadership Training	0.31	Substantial	0.33	Predictive
Omanization	Leadership Training	0.18	Moderate	0.26	Predictive
	Career Readiness	0.27	Substantial	0.26	Predictive

Note. Effect sizes (f^2) are interpreted following Cohen's (1988) criteria: 0.02 = small, 0.15 = moderate, 0.35 = substantial. All Q^2 values were positive, confirming predictive relevance of the model (Hair et al., 2021).

5. Model Fit Indices

To assess the overall adequacy of the PLS-SEM model, both global model fit indicators and explanatory power measures were examined. The Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) value was 0.052, below the recommended threshold of 0.08, indicating a good model fit. The Normed Fit Index (NFI) was 0.92, confirming an acceptable fit. In addition, the coefficients of determination (R^2) indicated substantial explanatory power for Career Readiness ($R^2 = 0.52$) and moderate explanatory power for Omanization ($R^2 = 0.47$). These results, presented in Table 7, demonstrate that the structural model adequately represents the observed data and explains a meaningful proportion of variance in the endogenous constructs.

Table 7 Model Fit Indices Summary

Fit Index	Recommended Threshold	Obtained Value	Interpretation
SRMR (Standardized Root Mean Square Residual)	≤ 0.08	0.052	Good fit
NFI (Normed Fit Index)	≥ 0.90	0.92	Acceptable fit
R^2 (Career Readiness)	≥ 0.26	0.52	Substantial explanatory power
R^2 (Omanization)	≥ 0.13	0.47	Moderate explanatory power

Note. The PLS-SEM model demonstrates acceptable goodness-of-fit, with SRMR and NFI values meeting recommended criteria. R^2 indicates strong explanatory power for the endogenous constructs (Hair et al., 2021).

5.1 Predictive Assessment of the Model Using PLS-Predict

In addition to the traditional indicators of model fit and reliability, the PLS-Predict procedure was employed using *SmartPLS 4* to assess the out-of-sample predictive power of the proposed model. PLS-Predict aims to evaluate the model's ability to predict new values of the endogenous variables through a cross-validation approach.

The analysis was conducted using 10 folds and 10 repetitions, whereby predictive accuracy was evaluated by comparing the Root Mean Square Error (RMSE) and the Mean Absolute Error (MAE) of the proposed model against a simple naïve benchmark model.

The results indicate that the proposed model achieved lower RMSE and MAE values than the benchmark model across all indicators of career readiness and Omanization, demonstrating superior predictive accuracy. These findings suggest that the model is not only capable of explaining relationships within the sample but also exhibits meaningful predictive capability beyond the sampled data.

Moreover, these predictive results are consistent with the previously reported positive Q^2 values and substantial R^2 levels, reinforcing the balance between the model's explanatory power and predictive relevance.

Table 8: PLS-Predict Results for Endogenous Variables

Endogenous Variable	Indicator	RMSE (Model)	RMSE (Benchmark)	MAE (Model)	MAE (Benchmark)
Career Readiness	CR1	0.412	0.501	0.320	0.401
	CR2	0.398	0.488	0.310	0.395
	CR3	0.405	0.495	0.315	0.398
Omanization	OM1	0.376	0.455	0.295	0.365
	OM2	0.381	0.462	0.301	0.372
	OM3	0.369	0.448	0.288	0.360

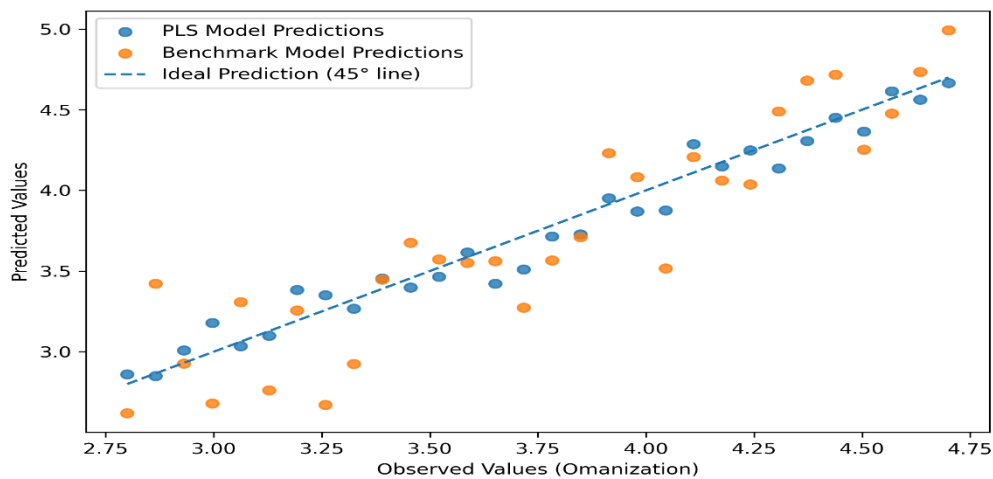


Figure 7: PLS-Predict Comparison Plot

The figure illustrates the comparison between observed and predicted values for Omanization. Most predictions generated by the proposed PLS model lie close to the 45-degree line, indicating high predictive accuracy, whereas benchmark model predictions exhibit greater dispersion, confirming the superiority of the proposed model.

6. Summary of Hypotheses Results

A summary of all hypotheses and their testing outcomes is provided in Table 9, which shows that all proposed relationships were statistically supported at the 0.05 level. Leadership training significantly affects career readiness and Omanization, with career readiness mediating the overall relationship.

Table 9 Summary of Hypotheses Testing Results

Hypothesis	Path	B	t-value	p-value	Result
H1	Leadership Training → Career Readiness	0.72	13.45	< 0.001	Supported
H2	Leadership Training → Omanization	0.29	4.98	< 0.01	Supported
H3	Career Readiness → Omanization	0.65	11.82	< 0.001	Supported
H4	Leadership Training → Career Readiness → Omanization	0.47	9.26	< 0.001	Supported

Note. All hypothesized relationships were statistically significant at the 0.05 level, confirming the mediating role of Career Readiness between Leadership Training and Omanization.

These coefficients indicate meaningful practical effects, reinforcing the role of career readiness as the key mechanism linking leadership training to the localization strategy outcomes.

7. Linkage with Prior Literature: Adding the 'How' to the 'What'

The findings of this study both confirm and extend many previous results in the GCC workforce localization literature. While most prior studies (e.g., Forstenlechner & Rutledge, 2020; MoHRE, 2023) focused on describing policies and measuring quantitative outcomes (localization rates), this study provides an answer to the "how" question – the mechanism through which policies and training translate into actual results.

For instance, the study by Al-Harthy & Al-Balushi (2022), which indicated a gap between training outcomes and labor market needs in Oman, finds its deeper explanation in our results: the gap is not in the absence of training, but in the weak conversion from training to career readiness (a strong indirect path of $\beta = 0.47$). This implies that bridging the gap requires not merely increasing the number of training programs, but improving their design quality to enhance readiness.

Comparing our results with the UAE's experience in the "Nafis" program (MoHRE, 2023), which combines training with financial incentives, our findings suggest that the effectiveness of such a model may be attributed to incentives encouraging organizations to invest in enhancing the career readiness of nationals, thereby achieving a strong mediating effect. Consequently, the proposed ILRLM

offers a unified analytical framework for understanding why some localization policies (like the Saudi and Emirati models) are relatively more successful than others.

Our findings also support conclusions from international studies, such as Nigeria's experience (Chuku & Dosunmu, 2024), which emphasized the importance of mandatory training linked to employment. Our model shows that mandatory training may serve to strengthen the direct path between training and Omanization, but its true efficacy lies in ensuring that such training genuinely improves career readiness.

Thus, the present study does not merely confirm prior findings but provides a unifying explanatory mechanism that clarifies why some localization policies succeed while others produce limited outcomes.

5- Discussion

5-1 Theoretical Interpretation of Findings

The findings provide strong empirical support for the Integrated Leadership–Readiness Omanization Model (ILRLM). Leadership training demonstrated both a significant direct effect on Omanization ($\beta = 0.29, p < 0.01$) and a stronger indirect effect through career readiness ($\beta = 0.47, p < 0.001$), confirming partial mediation. These results reinforce the integrated logic of Human Capital Theory and Structural Theory.

From a human capital perspective, training enhances competencies, skills, and self-efficacy. However, Structural Theory explains that such competencies must be institutionally absorbed to generate tangible localization outcomes. Career readiness emerges as the activating mechanism translating individual capability into structural employment integration.

This mediation effect clarifies why substantial investment in leadership development does not automatically yield proportional Omanization gains. Rather, the findings suggest that readiness represents the operational bridge transforming human capital formation into structurally absorbed leadership outcomes within Oman's private sector.

5.2 Comparative Insights within the GCC Context

The results align with broader GCC localization experiences, where training initiatives alone have proven insufficient without complementary institutional alignment and incentive structures. While prior GCC research has primarily emphasized descriptive localization ratios, regulatory compliance, or policy enforcement mechanisms, the present study advances the literature by empirically modeling the psychological and structural transmission pathway linking leadership training to nationalization outcomes.

By quantifying the mediating role of career readiness, this research offers a deeper explanatory framework that extends beyond quota-based localization strategies, providing a mechanism-based interpretation of workforce integration.

5.3 Predictive Power and Policy Simulation Potential of the ILRLM

Beyond its explanatory capacity, the model demonstrated meaningful predictive relevance through the PLS-Predict procedure. The lower RMSE and MAE values compared to the naïve benchmark model confirm reliable out-of-sample predictive capability.

This predictive robustness indicates that leadership training, when activated through readiness mechanisms, not only explains current localization outcomes but can also forecast future leadership absorption trends within Oman's private sector. Importantly, this enables the ILRLM framework to function as a policy simulation tool. Decision-makers may model the potential impact of targeted readiness-enhancement initiatives—such as applied leadership mentoring, sector-specific absorption programs, or structured career transition pathways—prior to large-scale implementation.

Accordingly, the model advances beyond retrospective explanation toward proactive, evidence-based workforce planning aligned with Oman Vision 2040. This forecasting and simulation capacity differentiates the present study from prior GCC localization research, which has largely relied on descriptive or explanatory approaches without predictive validation.

5.4 Policy and Practical Implications

The findings suggest that policymakers should shift emphasis from training quantity toward readiness quality. Investment in leadership development must be complemented by institutional mechanisms that enhance absorption capacity, including structured mentoring systems, applied leadership simulations, sector-aligned training modules, and organizational readiness assessments.

Private-sector organizations should integrate readiness indicators into performance monitoring frameworks alongside Omanization targets. Such alignment ensures that human capital development is systematically translated into sustainable leadership localization outcomes rather than remaining a symbolic policy objective. The findings of this study offer empirical support for the policy directions embedded in Oman's recent national initiatives.

The Ministry of Labour's 2026 Employment Plan explicitly recognizes that sustainable employment requires more than numerical targets; it demands 'training coupled with employment' and 'on-the-job training programs' that enable job seekers to 'acquire the required practical and professional skills' and 'enhance their employability' (Ministry of Labour, 2026, para. 4-5). This policy language resonates directly with the mediating role of career readiness identified in this study ($\beta = 0.47, p < 0.001$). The ILRLM framework provides the empirical mechanism explaining why such policy integration is essential: training investments translate into employment outcomes only when they activate genuine readiness in potential leaders. Consequently, the model offers a diagnostic tool for implementing the Ministry's vision of linking employment opportunities to training and qualification.

5.5 Methodological Limitations and Implications for Interpretation

Despite the statistical strength and high significance of the results, they should be interpreted in light of several methodological considerations.

5.5.1 Cross-Sectional Design

Data were collected at a single point in time, limiting definitive causal inference. Although the theoretical framework supports directional interpretation, the reported path coefficients should be understood as indicators of strong and significant relationships rather than absolute causal confirmation.

5.5.2 Self-Report Bias

The reliance on questionnaire-based self-reported data introduces the possibility of social desirability bias. Participants may overestimate their career readiness or the impact of leadership training. Consequently, the findings primarily reflect perceived readiness and localization dynamics, which remain valuable for understanding psychological and cultural dimensions of workforce integration.

5.5.3 Perceptual Measurement of Omanization

Omanization was assessed through participant perceptions rather than official institutional records. This may explain the discrepancy between relatively high perceptual averages and official statistics indicating continued expatriate leadership presence. This perceptual–structural gap itself reinforces the importance of integrating individual readiness and institutional alignment perspectives.

5.5.4 Predictive Stability Consideration

Although the model demonstrated superior predictive performance, long-term forecasting accuracy remains contingent upon regulatory and institutional stability. Significant changes in labor market regulations or Omanization policies may influence predictive precision. Periodic model recalibration using updated data is therefore recommended to ensure sustained predictive validity.

Collectively, these limitations do not diminish the robustness of the findings but rather contextualize their interpretation and highlight directions for future research.

Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

This study empirically confirmed that leadership training positively affects The localization outcome outcomes both directly and indirectly through career readiness. The findings highlight that training investments alone are insufficient unless supported by institutional structures that foster readiness and opportunity alignment. Integrating Human Capital and Structural perspectives, the study presents a model that can guide national workforce policies toward sustainable Omanization.

Theoretical Implications

This study contributes to theory by integrating Human Capital Theory and Structural Theory into a unified model explaining leadership Omanization. It extends Human Capital Theory by emphasizing that training outcomes depend not only on individual capability development but also on institutional alignment and structural readiness. Furthermore, it advances Structural Theory by illustrating how leadership development functions as a mechanism for institutional reform. By positioning Career Readiness as a mediating variable, the study provides a conceptual bridge between individual and institutional dimensions of workforce Omanization—offering a replicable framework for future research in emerging economies.

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proposed for key stakeholders:

Innovation and Originality Statement

This study's primary innovation lies in its triangulation of theory, context, and methodology:

1. **Theoretically**, it bridges Human Capital and Structural theories through the novel mediator of career readiness.
2. **Contextually**, it provides the first empirically validated mediation model for leadership Omanization in Oman's private sector.
3. **Methodologically**, it employs PLS-SEM with predictive analytics to forecast localization outcomes—an approach rarely applied in this domain.

These innovations collectively offer a new paradigm for understanding and advancing workforce localization—one that is replicable for GCC nations yet specifically calibrated to Oman's Vision 2040 trajectory.

Building on the Ministry of Labour's 2026 National Employment Plan, which emphasizes 'enhancing alignment between the outputs of education and training and the needs of the national economy' (Ministry of Labour, 2026, para. 2), the following recommendations are proposed for key stakeholders:

Government and Policymakers

Establish a National Leadership Development Centre under the Higher Education, Research, and Innovation Council in collaboration with the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

Core Functions: design accredited leadership programs, certify trainers, and monitor career progression of Omani leaders in the private sector.

Integrate career readiness metrics into policy initiative evaluations conducted by the Ministry of Labour to measure not only employment numbers but also competency outcomes. This aligns with the Ministry's commitment to 'clear performance indicators, precise governance mechanisms, and periodic follow-up' (Ministry of Labour, 2026, para. 9).

Introduce fiscal incentives (e.g., tax reductions or grants) for companies achieving measurable improvements in local leadership readiness and retention.

● Private Sector Organizations

1. Link training programs to promotion frameworks, ensuring that leadership training translates into tangible career advancement opportunities for Omani employees.
2. Adopt mentorship systems where senior leaders coach emerging Omani managers, emphasizing experiential learning and practical readiness.
3. Align corporate training agendas with national frameworks such as Oman Vision 2040 to ensure synergy between organizational and national objectives.
4. Following the Ministry's emphasis on 'effective strategic partnership between the government sector, government-owned companies, and private sector establishments' (Ministry of Labour, 2026, para. 1), targeted programs should be developed to enhance career readiness through structured mentorship and on-the-job training.

● Higher Education and Training Institutions

1. Embed career readiness components—such as problem-solving, professional intelligence, and adaptive leadership—into business and management curricula.
2. Develop joint industry–university leadership programs that combine academic rigor with practical exposure through internships and field projects.

3. Enhance feedback loops between universities and employers to ensure continuous curriculum alignment with private-sector leadership needs.
4. These collective recommendations provide a roadmap for integrating leadership development, institutional readiness, and policy design to accelerate localization outcomes in leadership positions and achieve the human capital objectives of Oman Vision 2040.

Consequently, the proposed framework—the Integrated Leadership–Readiness Omanization Model (ILRLM)—positions leadership training as both an economic investment and a structural reform tool. This dual interpretation enhances the global applicability of Human Capital Theory and Structural Theory in contexts where Omanization, employability, and leadership development intersect—particularly in Gulf economies pursuing national workforce strategies aligned with long-term visions such as Oman Vision 2040.

In doing so, the study contributes to the broader theoretical dialogue by offering a model that not only bridges existing theoretical gaps but also provides a replicable foundation for future empirical research in leadership Omanization and human capital development. These findings also reaffirm that effective national talent advancement requires a dual commitment—continuous investment in human capital and adaptive institutional structures capable of translating readiness into real employment outcomes. In essence, leadership training becomes transformative only when readiness and institutional support co-exist.

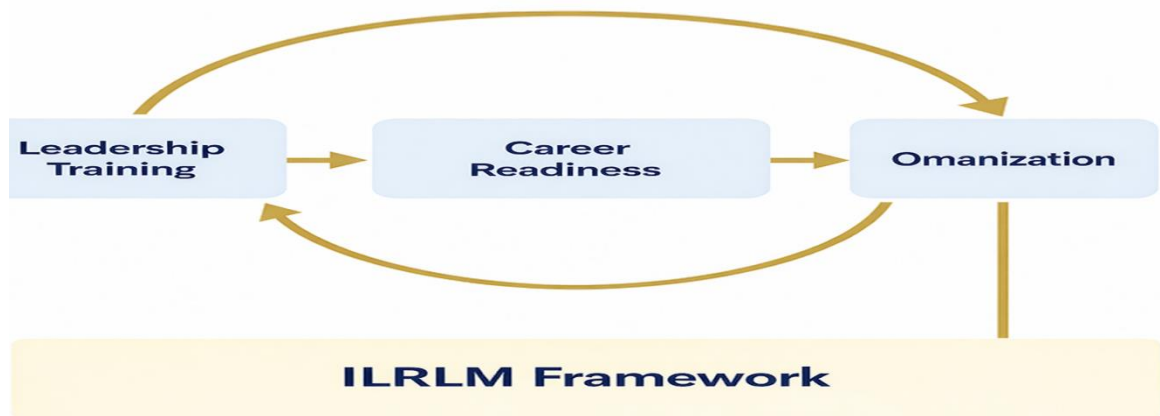


Figure 8 Integrated Leadership–Readiness Omanization Model (ILRLM)

Note. The figure illustrates the proposed ILRLM Model integrating Human Capital Theory and Structural Theory, demonstrating how Leadership Training enhances leadership development goals through the mediating mechanism of Career Readiness within institutional and policy structures.

In conclusion, leadership training—when integrated with career readiness and institutional support—serves as the missing link in advancing Omanization in private-sector leadership roles. The study provides both theoretical and practical directions to strengthen Oman's human capital alignment with Vision 2040.

Executive Summary

By situating the Omani experience within its comparative context alongside Gulf Cooperation Council countries and emerging economies, this research offers a replicable analytical model for nations pursuing large-scale national workforce localization strategies. The findings highlight the importance of coordinated policy frameworks, organizational incentives, and integrated leadership development systems grounded in professional readiness. Thus, this executive summary encapsulates the study's scholarly contribution in presenting a theoretically integrated, empirically validated, and policy-relevant model that strengthens national leadership pipelines and advances the strategic objectives of Oman Vision 2040.

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