The Mentor's Mandate: Expatriate Manager Perceptions of Developing Qatari Talent under Nationalization Programs

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1. Introduction: The Expatriate Manager as a Keystone in Workforce Nationalization

In the rapidly transforming economic landscape of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), workforce nationalization has emerged as a paramount strategic policy. For the State of Qatar, this initiative, known as "Qatarization," is not merely a labor market adjustment but a foundational element of its long-term developmental blueprint. Within this national project, the expatriate manager occupies a uniquely pivotal and complex position. Recruited for their global expertise and managerial acumen, these individuals are tasked not only with achieving corporate objectives but also with serving as the primary conduits for knowledge transfer and talent development, mentoring the very Qatari professionals intended to eventually assume their roles.

This section establishes the strategic context of Qatarization, defines the inherent duality of the expatriate manager's role, and positions mentorship as the critical instrument through which the policy's human capital objectives are to be realized.

1.1 The Strategic Imperative of Qatarization: Context, Goals, and Progress

The State of Qatar's economic trajectory is guided by the ambitious Qatar National Vision 2030 (QNV 2030), a strategic framework designed to navigate the nation away from the inherent volatilities and finite nature of a hydrocarbon-dependent economy (GSDP 2008). Launched in 2008, the vision is a direct policy response to the economic phenomenon known as the "resource curse," or the paradox of plenty, where countries with an abundance of natural resources often experience slower economic growth, less democracy, and worse development outcomes (Badeeb, Lean, and Clark 2017). The "resource curse" concept itself is a well-established, though evolving, field of economic study (Kinnaman 2023). QNV 2030 aims to short-circuit this paradox by orchestrating a structural transformation towards a diversified, competitive, and, crucially, knowledge-based economic model (GCO n.d.; Sharq Law Firm 2025). This transition is critical for fossil fuel export-dependent economies facing the prospect of global decarbonization, which could lead to significant fiscal and economic transition costs (Jensen 2023).

Central to this grand strategy is the Human Development Pillar, which posits that the nation's most sustainable and valuable long-term asset is its own citizenry (GSDP 2008). This pillar is not merely a social goal but a fundamental economic imperative (Sharq Law Firm 2025). In a world increasingly focused on the global energy transition and decarbonization, the long-term fiscal stability of the state can no longer be guaranteed by hydrocarbon revenues alone (Jensen 2023). Therefore, cultivating a skilled, productive, and motivated national workforce capable of driving growth in non-oil sectors, such as finance, logistics, technology, and tourism, is essential for ensuring long-term economic sovereignty and prosperity (Kularatne, Miyajima, and Muir 2024). Recent economic data underscores this reality; while Qatar's real GDP growth was a modest 2.6% in 2024, non-hydrocarbon activities expanded by a more robust 3.7%, driven by significant growth in education (+14.4%) and tourism-related services (+8.7%) (Bank Audi 2025). The policy of "Qatarization," which aims to increase the number of Qatari nationals in the workforce, especially in the private sector, is the primary operational vehicle for realizing the objectives of the Human Development Pillar (Zaidan, Wazen, and Al-Saidi 2025). It represents a shift in the nation's social contract, from one based on the distribution of resource wealth to one based on the creation of human capital wealth (Al-Thani 2024).

Table 1: Key Milestones in the Evolution of Qatarization Policies

Year	Milestone / Decree	Key Outcome / Target
1962	Qatari Labor Law No. 3	Prioritized Qatari nationals for vacant positions.
1970s	Administrative Qatarization	Qatarized administrative posts in the public sector.
1997	Emiri Decree	Mandated that at least 20% of private sector employees be Qatari citizens.

2000	Comprehensive Qatarization Program	Launched an ambitious program aiming for a 50% national workforce in the energy sector by 2005 (target not met).
2023	Cabinet Draft Law	Approved a draft law to nationalize specific jobs in the private sector.
2024	Third National Development Strategy (NDS3)	Set a target to increase the share of the Qatari workforce in the private and semi-private sectors from 17% (2023) to over 20% by 2030.

Note: This table synthesizes key milestones from the historical literature cited in the corresponding text (J. Williams, Bhanugopan, and Fish 2011; Ministry of Labour (MoL) 2024b; International Monetary Fund (IMF). Middle East and Central Asia Dept. 2025).

The drivers behind this sustained policy push are multifaceted. The demographic reality has given rise to significant national security considerations, with the "massive presence of expatriates" viewed as not merely an economic matter but a national security issue (J. Williams, Bhanugopan, and Fish 2011; Kapiszewski 2006). Beyond these concerns, Qatarization is a vital tool for cultural preservation. In a hyper-globalized environment, the policy is an explicit effort toward "maintaining Qatar's national identity" and preserving its traditional Islamic and family values (Elshenawy 2017).

1.2 Defining the Expatriate Manager's Dual Role: Performance Driver and National Developer

Expatriate managers are recruited into the Qatari economy for a clear and specific purpose: to provide specialized skills, technical expertise, and international management experience that are not yet sufficiently available within the local talent pool (Rodriguez and Scurry 2013). Their primary function, from a corporate perspective, is to drive business performance, manage complex projects, and ensure operational excellence. This role requires them to leverage their world-class standards and international expertise while adapting to a new culture and work environment (Ceric, Williams, and Ramudu 2013).

Simultaneously, the policy of Qatarization imposes a second, equally critical mandate upon them. They are explicitly expected to function as national developers, with a core responsibility for knowledge transfer, training, and mentoring local Qatari talent (Al-Horr 2011; J. Williams, Bhanugopan, and Fish 2011). Expatriates are pivotal in the localization process precisely because they are responsible for implementing the policy and for training nationals to a level where they can take over the expatriate's position (Ceric, Williams, and Ramudu 2013).

This dual mandate creates an inherent structural conflict within the expatriate manager's position. The manager is hired and valued for their unique expertise, yet their success under the Qatarization mandate is measured by their ability to effectively transfer their knowledge to their Qatari mentees, a process which, ironically, can mean "displacing one's own employment with that of a national, making one's position obsolete" (Ceric, Williams, and Ramudu 2013). This dynamic establishes a direct conflict of interest. Expatriates widely perceive the policy as a threat to their job security (Irfan et al. 2024). As a result, while their role officially requires them to share knowledge, the situation creates a powerful unspoken incentive to engage in "knowledge hoarding" by withholding information as a means of professional self-preservation (Lee 2018).

1.3 Mentorship: A Critical Instrument for Human Capital Development

Within the framework of Qatarization, mentorship is not an ancillary activity but is positioned as a central and indispensable instrument for achieving the nation's human capital development goals. It is recognized as a vital mechanism for transferring skills, cultivating leadership potential, and integrating national talent into a globally competitive workforce (Ogunsola et al. 2023). This strategic view aligns directly with national policy, which calls for mechanisms to "facilitate skills transfer between high-skilled foreign employees and promising Qataris" (GSDP 2011).

The strategic importance of mentorship is reflected in the proliferation of both governmental and corporate initiatives. The government has established high-profile institutions like the Qatar Leadership Centre (QLC), and other public bodies, such as the Qatar National Library with its "Murshidi Program," connect students and graduates with seasoned professionals (Ahmad et al. 2023). These national-level efforts are mirrored in the private and semi-private sectors, which have institutionalized mentorship as a core component of their Qatarization strategies. This is particularly visible in vital industries like energy, where companies such as QatarEnergy LNG, North Oil Company (NOC), and QAPCO have established comprehensive national development programs, often featuring a "sponsorship" model where senior managers mentor junior Qatari employees (Fakhouri 2019). Similar practices are crucial in other key sectors, such as the medical field at Hamad Medical Corporation (Suliman et al. 2018).

Mentoring is thus seen as the essential bridge between the theoretical knowledge gained through formal education and the practical, tacit knowledge required to build succession pipelines and create the "high-calibre Qatari workforce" envisioned by national leaders. The entire strategy rests heavily on the practical implementation of training and knowledge transfer from experienced expatriates to local employees (Irfan et al. 2024). The effectiveness of this strategy, however, depends significantly on the willingness and ability of experienced expatriate managers to embrace their role as mentors, a perception that is far from straightforward.

2. Motivations and Challenges: The Expatriate Mentor's Perspective

The decision by an expatriate manager to fully engage in mentoring is a calculation based on a complex set of competing motivators and demotivators. While some may find intrinsic satisfaction in developing others, they also face significant barriers. These factors, which shape the expatriate manager's perspective, are categorized and detailed in Table 2.

2.1 The Psychological Contract: Expatriate Expectations vs. Organizational Realities

The relationship between an employee and their organization is governed not only by a formal employment contract but also by a "psychological contract," which comprises the unwritten, implicit beliefs and expectations each party holds about their mutual obligations (Conway and Briner 2009). For expatriate managers, this contract is often multifaceted and carries heightened significance due to the substantial personal and professional risks involved in relocating.

2.1.1 The Expatriate Contract: Transactional vs. Relational Elements

For an expatriate manager, the psychological contract is a multifaceted agreement, blending both transactional and relational promises. Transactional terms are tangible and short-term, such as high compensation, benefits, and relocation packages. In contrast, relational terms are the more open-ended, long-term promises based on mutual trust and loyalty (Rousseau 2000). While transactional benefits are expected, it is the relational elements that often carry greater weight for an expatriate. These include the unspoken promises of meaningful career development, consistent organizational support, and a stable degree of job security throughout their assignment (Haslberger and Brewster 2009).

The decision to move abroad for a job involves significant personal disruption, such as uprooting one's life and family. Because of these high stakes, the expatriate places greater importance on the psychological contract, as it represents the employer's unspoken commitment that this personal risk will be rewarded with career support and stability. Therefore, an expatriate's willingness to accept an international assignment is often based on a fundamental belief that the organization is making a long-term investment in their career, not just filling a temporary position (Haslberger and Brewster 2009).

2.1.2 Qatarization: A Source of Contract Strain and Breach

The policy of Qatarization directly challenges the psychological contract of expatriate managers by creating a fundamental conflict between the organization's duties. On one hand, the organization must fulfill its state-mandated obligation to prioritize national talent. On the other hand, it has an implicit relational obligation to provide its expatriate employees with job security and opportunities for career advancement (Irfan et al. 2024; J. S. Williams 2014). This creates a perception that the organization's commitment to the state supersedes its commitment to them, leading to feelings of violation and diminished trust (Irfan et al. 2024).

This ongoing tension frequently leads to a psychological contract breach, defined as an employee's perception that their organization has failed to fulfill one or more of its promises (Turnley and Feldman 2000). For an expatriate, this breach becomes tangible when they see career paths blocked or opportunities explicitly reserved for their less-experienced Qatari mentees, directly contradicting the promises of career growth that may have motivated their relocation (Aldossari and Robertson 2016). Because Qatarization is a continuous, long-term policy, this is not a singular event. Instead, it is experienced as a chronic breach, a constant and unavoidable reminder of the precarious nature of their employment.

2.1.3 Contract Breach: Consequences for Commitment and Retention

When expatriates perceive a breach of their psychological contract, the consequences are predictable and detrimental, manifesting in several negative behavioral outcomes (Turnley and Feldman 2000). The most critical consequences for the success of nationalization include:

- **Reduced Organizational Commitment:** A sense that the organization has broken its promises erodes the expatriate's loyalty and willingness to exert maximum effort. Research in Qatar confirms that the "increasing trend of Qatarization exhibits a negative impact on effective and continuance commitment" among expatriate employees (Coyle-Shapiro and Kessler 2000; Irfan et al. 2024).

- **Reduced Organizational Citizenship Behaviors (OCBs):** Employees become less willing to engage in discretionary "extra-role" behaviors that are not formally required but are vital for a healthy organization. Critically, this includes the very act of committed, high-quality mentorship, which is an OCB that requires going above and beyond daily tasks (Turnley and Feldman 2000).

- **Increased Turnover Intentions:** A large body of research confirms that contract breach is a powerful predictor of an employee's intention to leave. This is particularly relevant in the Gulf, where high turnover among returning expatriates is often linked to the feeling that the organization failed to deliver on its career promises (Turnley and Feldman 2000; Haslberger and Brewster 2009; Aldossari and Robertson 2016).

2.2 The Labyrinth of Challenges: Navigating Expatriate Mentor Perceptions

Beyond the foundational strain on the psychological contract, the expatriate manager's experience is shaped by several specific and acute challenges. These barriers are rooted in the structural paradox of their role, difficult interpersonal dynamics, and systemic organizational dysfunctions.

Table 2: Perceived Motivators and Demotivators for Expatriate Mentors in Qatar

Factor Category	Perceived Motivators (Drivers for Engagement)	Perceived Demotivators (Barriers to Engagement)
Career & Performance	- Fulfilling a key performance indicator - Personal satisfaction from developing others - Opportunity to build a legacy and local team	- Mentoring is time-consuming, detracts from core goals - Lack of formal recognition or reward - Fear of training one's own replacement
Organizational Support	- Clear and structured formal mentorship programs - Strong commitment from top management - Access to cross-cultural training	- Lack of organizational support and clear guidelines - Inadequate HR policies - Perceived inequity in compensation/benefits
Interpersonal & Cultural	- Building strong, trusting relationships - Reciprocal learning and gaining local insights - Genuine desire to bridge cultural gaps	- Communication barriers (language, style) - Perceived lack of mentee commitment (stereotyping) - Navigating cultural norms like *Wasta*

	- Contributing to a national strategic goal	- Ambiguity in Qatarization policies
Policy & Environment	- Aligning personal role with the country's development	- Pressure to meet quotas regardless of suitability
		- Overall sense of job precariousness

Note: This table synthesizes and categorizes the challenges and motivators detailed in the corresponding text (Lee 2018; Ceric, Williams, and Ramudu 2013; Nguyen, Malik, and Budhwar 2022; Irfan et al. 2024; Younis, Elsharnouby, and Elbanna 2023; Fakhouri 2019; Aldossari and Robertson 2016).

2.2.1 Job Insecurity: The Knowledge Hiding Dilemma

The most acute challenge shaping the expatriate manager's perception is the threat to their own job security. This dynamic can be understood through the established psychological lens of Conservation of Resources (COR) theory, which posits that individuals are motivated to protect their valued resources, such as job security (Nguyen, Malik, and Budhwar 2022; Hobfoll 1989). The policy of Qatarization, by requiring expatriates to train, mentor, and develop their potential successors, creates a direct threat to this resource (Ceric, Williams, and Ramudu 2013). This places the expatriate manager in a professionally untenable position: to succeed in one aspect of their job (mentoring), they perceive they must risk failure in another (maintaining their employment). This defensive reaction manifests as "knowledge hiding," a concept defined in international literature as an intentional attempt to withhold or conceal requested knowledge (Connelly et al. 2012). This theoretical framework finds direct application in the Gulf context, where research on knowledge transfer in both Qatar and Saudi Arabia identified a deliberate "Deter-Defer-Delay strategy for knowledge hiding" explicitly linked to this sense of expatriate job insecurity (Lee 2018).

- **Defining the Dilemma:**

    An intentional attempt by an expatriate manager to withhold or conceal knowledge from a Qatari mentee. This is often a rational, self-preservation strategy driven by the perception that successfully training a replacement will lead to their own job redundancy. It involves tactics like deterring, deferring, and delaying knowledge transfer (Connelly et al. 2012; Lee 2018).

2.2.2 Interpersonal Barriers: Perceived Skills Gaps and Stereotyping

The mentor's effectiveness is also shaped by their perception of the mentee's commitment and capabilities, a dynamic amplified in Qatar's cross-cultural environment (J. S. Williams 2014; Lee 2018; Ismail 2015). The literature reveals that some expatriates hold persistent negative stereotypes, perceiving a lack of professional commitment or a "sense of entitlement" among national employees (Younis, Elsharnouby, and Elbanna 2023; Lee 2018).

Crucially, these perceptions are not formed in a vacuum. They are often linked to socio-cultural realities, such as generous state welfare and the strong preference for secure public-sector employment, which can be misinterpreted by outsiders as a lack of ambition (Younis, Elsharnouby, and Elbanna 2023). This dynamic of mutual stereotyping creates a tense

environment that can directly harm the mentee's development; one study found such tensions reduced the self-confidence of Qatari mentees, hindering the entire mentoring process.

This interpersonal friction is compounded by a structural issue. The situation can be described as an "Expert Trap," a specific manifestation of the broader organizational "competency trap," where a focus on exploiting existing knowledge prevents the exploration of new skills (Benner and Tushman 2003; Levinthal and March 1993).

- **Defining the Trap:**

    A situation where organizations hire expatriates for their immediate, specialized expertise but fail to invest in their ongoing career development, systemically excluding them from growth opportunities. This framing of the expatriate as a temporary "finished product" inherently limits their motivation and capacity to serve as an effective, long-term mentor (Benner and Tushman 2003; Rodriguez and Scurry 2013).

2.2.3 Dysfunctional Mentoring: Mismatches, Neglect, and Lack of Expertise

While job insecurity and stereotypes are major challenges, other dysfunctional aspects of mentoring can also derail developmental relationships. International research has identified a range of negative mentoring experiences that are not solely linked to fear of replacement but stem from other interpersonal, organizational, and skill-based factors (Simon and Eby 2003; Baranik, Roling, and Eby 2010). This body of research provides a critical framework for understanding potential challenges in the complex interpersonal dynamics of Qatar's diverse workplaces. Key potential dysfunctions include:

- **Mismatch Within the Dyad:** This refers to a poor fit between mentor and mentee due to differences in personality or values (Simon and Eby 2003). This general concept has been specifically identified as a significant issue in Qatar, often arising from a fundamental confusion between the developmental role of mentoring and the evaluative role of supervision. A study at Hamad Medical Corporation confirmed this created mismatched expectations from the outset (Suliman et al. 2018). Furthermore, demographic and social differences, such as those in age or perceived work ethic, can become a source of tension that erodes the mentee's self-confidence and poisons the relationship (Fakhouri 2019).

- **Distancing Behavior:** International research identifies behaviors like mentor neglect or self-absorption, where the mentor pays little attention to the protégé's development due to work pressures or lack of commitment (Simon and Eby 2003). While not unique to Qatar, this behavior is a significant risk in any high-pressure environment and can manifest as a failure to build the foundational trust necessary for knowledge transfer, increasing the "interaction anxiety" of the mentee (Hsu et al. 2024).

- **Lack of Mentor Expertise:** A significant barrier, identified in global studies, occurs when the mentor simply lacks the necessary skills (Hansen and Rasmussen 2016). In the cross-cultural context of Qatarization, this risk extends beyond technical skills to include a critical lack of cultural intelligence (CQ), the ability to interact effectively across different cultural settings (Stoermer, Davies, and Froese 2021). An expatriate may be a technical expert but lack the CQ needed to render their guidance effective. This deficit can also manifest as a lack of communication patience, where an inability to remain calm and

constructive in the face of linguistic or cultural misunderstandings can frustrate both parties and halt knowledge transfer (Hsu et al. 2024).

- **Autonomy-Undermining Behavior:** Finally, general psychological research based on Self-Determination Theory highlights the risks of a mentor who is overly controlling or fails to provide choice (McAnally and Hagger 2024). This controlling style, even if well-intentioned, can create dependency and stifle a mentee's long-term growth, a relevant consideration in the hierarchical and paternalistic leadership contexts sometimes found in the region.

3. Effectiveness of Mentorship: Bridging Gaps in Culture and Competency

Evaluating the effectiveness of expatriate-led mentorship requires moving beyond the manager's internal perceptions to assess the tangible outcomes of the mentoring process. This section analyzes the dynamics of cross-cultural knowledge transfer, examines mentorship's role in addressing specific skill shortages, and explores the profound impact of the local socio-cultural context.

3.1 Knowledge Transfer: The Dynamics of Cross-Cultural Exchange

At its core, expatriate-led mentorship is a process of knowledge transfer. Organizations view expatriate managers as crucial vehicles for disseminating critical knowledge, which includes technical expertise, organizational routines, and corporate culture, from global headquarters to the local Qatari workforce. Expatriates, in this sense, function as agents of direct control ("bears"), as conduits for socialization into the corporate culture ("bumble-bees"), and as weavers of informal communication networks ("spiders") (Harzing 2001). However, the path of this knowledge is fraught with cross-cultural complexities that can create "internal stickiness," impeding the flow of information and best practices within the firm (Szulanski 1996).

3.1.1 Tacit Knowledge: The Core Transfer Challenge

The central challenge in expatriate mentorship lies in transferring the right kind of knowledge. The most valuable expertise an expatriate brings is rarely the *explicit* knowledge that can be written down in a manual or taught in a classroom. Instead, it is the *tacit* knowledge: the intuitive, experience-based "know-how" that governs effective decision-making, political navigation, and nuanced leadership (Hocking, Brown, and Harzing 2004). This type of knowledge cannot be easily codified; it is transferred through direct, hands-on engagement, such as observation, shared experiences, and sustained mentoring relationships (Ismail 2015; Swap et al. 2001).

The difficulty of this process creates a high degree of "internal stickiness," a term describing resistance to the flow of knowledge within an organization (Szulanski 1996). This resistance is not primarily about a lack of willingness, but about the recipient's absorptive capacity, which is their readiness to effectively receive, internalize, and apply new, complex knowledge. For mentorship to succeed, the mentee's absorptive capacity must be built on two pillars:

- **Ability:** The mentee must possess the foundational skills and qualifications to understand the knowledge being shared.

- **Motivation:** The mentee must have the genuine drive to learn and the commitment to apply that learning.

Both components are essential. A highly motivated mentee without the requisite background will struggle, just as a highly capable mentee without the drive to learn will fail to internalize the lessons. Therefore, effective mentorship depends on both the mentor's ability to share tacit knowledge and the mentee's capacity to absorb it (Minbaeva et al. 2002).

3.1.2 Social Capital: The Foundation of Trust and Shared Vision

The relationship between an expatriate mentor and a Qatari mentee is profoundly influenced by differing cultural norms. A mutually respectful and trusting relationship is the paramount factor for success (Fakhouri 2019). This highlights the central role of social capital, which refers to the resources embedded within a network of relationships (Reiche, Harzing, and Kraimer 2009; Ismail 2015; Montazemi et al. 2012). This capital can be understood through three dimensions: structural (the network), relational (the trust), and cognitive (a shared vision) (Reiche, Harzing, and Kraimer 2009).

- **Trust:** In a cross-cultural context, trust mitigates the uncertainty and anxiety inherent in intercultural interactions (Ismail 2015). For the expatriate to effectively share nuanced information, they must trust that the mentee is genuinely engaged (Hsu et al. 2021). Building this trust often takes longer in the Gulf context, where relationships precede business (Dodds and Grajfoner 2018).

Shared Vision: The development of a shared vision between the expatriate and the host-country national (HCN) helps bridge cultural and organizational divides, creating a common ground that facilitates communication and knowledge transfer (Montazemi et al. 2012). Research has demonstrated that a shared vision acts as a significant mediator in the transfer of knowledge between expatriates and local employees (Zulkifly, Ismail, and Hamzah 2020).

3.1.3 Cultural Dynamics: Key Cross-Cultural Dimensions

Expatriate managers must develop a high degree of cultural intelligence to navigate the cultural differences that can create friction. Research on cross-cultural management in the Middle East consistently highlights significant variations in communication styles, perceptions of hierarchy, and approaches to building professional relationships. The GLOBE study's findings on the Arab world, along with regional studies, provide a useful framework for understanding these dynamics (Thom 2006; Dodds and Grajfoner 2018). One key dimension is the expectation of paternalistic leadership, a style that combines strong discipline with "fatherly benevolence" (Jackson 2016). Western managers may misinterpret this style as purely authoritarian, missing the underlying expectation of care and personal support, which can lead to friction. Furthermore, a study at Hamad Medical Corporation in Qatar found that confusion between the developmental role of a mentor and the evaluative role of a supervisor was a significant source of mismatched expectations, reflecting the challenges of navigating high power-distance cultures (Suliman et al. 2018).

Table 3: Key Cross-Cultural Dimensions and Their Impact on Mentoring in Qatar

Dimension	Typical Western (Low-Context) Approach	Typical Qatari/GCC (High-Context) Approach	Potential Impact on Mentoring Relationship
Communication	Direct, explicit, task-focused.	Indirect, relational, face-saving is crucial.	Expat's direct feedback may be perceived as harsh; mentee's indirectness may be seen as a lack of clarity.
Hierarchy	More egalitarian; challenges to authority are acceptable.	High respect for authority, age, and status. Decisions are top-down.	Mentee may be hesitant to ask questions or challenge the mentor; mentor may misinterpret deference as a lack of initiative.
Relationship	Task-oriented. Trust is built through competence and delivery.	Relationship-oriented. Trust must be established before business can be done.	Expat may try to "get down to business" too quickly, appearing cold; mentee may prioritize social connection first.
Time	Monochronic: time is linear, deadlines are rigid.	Polychronic: time is flexible, relationships can take precedence.	Expat may perceive missed deadlines as a lack of discipline; mentee may perceive a rigid focus on punctuality as disrespectful.

Note: This table provides a summary framework of the cross-cultural literature cited in the corresponding text (Dodds and Grajfoner 2018; Thom 2006; Jackson 2016; Suliman et al. 2018).

3.1.3 The Individual Factor: The Role of Cultural Intelligence (CQ)

While cultural values provide the context, individual attributes determine how effectively a person operates within it. Cultural Intelligence (CQ) is a critical capability, defined as an individual's competence to function effectively in culturally diverse settings (Setti, Sommovigo, and Argentero 2022). High CQ is a key predictor of successful bi-directional knowledge transfer (Zulkifly, Ismail, and Hamzah 2020) and is positively related to an expatriate's effectiveness in knowledge sharing (Stoermer, Davies, and Froese 2021). This attribute is crucial for both parties:

- **For the Expatriate Mentor:** High CQ allows the manager to accurately read cultural cues and adapt their communication style.

- **For the Qatari Mentee:** A host country national (HCN) with high CQ is better able to understand the expatriate's communication style and navigate corporate culture, thereby increasing their "absorptive capacity" for new knowledge (Szulanski 1996). Ultimately, the dynamics of knowledge transfer are bidirectional. While the expatriate mentors on technical matters, the HCN often acts as a mentor on local culture, a process known as reciprocal or reverse mentoring (Van Bakel et al. 2022).

3.2 Bridging Critical Skills Gaps: A Sectoral Analysis

A significant challenge for Qatar's labor market is the persistent gap between the skills possessed by the workforce and the evolving demands of the economy. This skills mismatch is a

multifaceted issue, with roots in the education system, the unique dynamics of a rapidly developing, expatriate-driven labor market, and the specific needs of key economic sectors (Said and Alhares 2021). Addressing this gap is crucial for achieving the goals of Qatar National Vision 2030, which emphasizes a transition to a knowledge-based economy and a more diversified, competitive private sector (GSDP 2008).

3.2.1 The Skills Gap: Soft Skills vs. Technical Competencies

Recent studies and analyses of the Qatari labor market reveal a consensus among employers that while technical skills (hard skills) are important, the most significant deficiencies lie in the realm of soft skills. A gap analysis of business students in Qatar found that employers place a high value on soft skills such as communication, adaptability, flexibility, and a strong work ethic (Alshare and Sewailem 2018). This finding is echoed in a study on the Qatari finance and banking sector, which identified a major mismatch between the perceptions of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) program leaders and employers, particularly in social and civic skills (Said and Alhares 2021). Employers in this sector prioritize leadership, cultural awareness, and communication, ranking them higher than many technical competencies (Said and Alhares 2021).

3.2.2 Graduate Readiness: The Role of the Education System

A recurring theme in the literature is the disconnect between the output of the education system and the needs of the labor market. A 2018 study revealed that a significant majority of employers in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) believe that the education system does not adequately prepare graduates for the workplace (Alshare and Sewailem 2018). This sentiment is shared by educators and students in Qatar, who have pointed to several underlying issues:

- **A curriculum skewed towards theory:** The education system is often criticized for its emphasis on theoretical knowledge and memorization over practical application and the development of transferable skills. This leaves graduates ill-equipped for the realities of the workplace (Younis, Elsharnouby, and Elbanna 2023).

- **Insufficient stakeholder collaboration:** There is a recognized need for better and more structured collaboration between educational institutions and employers to align curricula with labor market demands (Said and Alhares 2021). While some initiatives exist, such as the Government Scholarship Programme for the private sector, which aims to align educational outcomes with industry needs (MoL 2025a), these are still in their early stages.

- **Lack of employability skills in the curriculum:** Key employability skills, including critical thinking, problem-solving, and communication, are often not formally embedded in the curriculum (Alshare and Sewailem 2018). This forces employers to invest heavily in on-the-job training to bridge these gaps.

The Education Strategy 2024-2030 aims to address these challenges by fostering a culture of lifelong learning and aligning educational programs with evolving labor market demands (Government Communications Office (GCO) 2024). The strategy emphasizes a holistic approach encompassing early childhood, primary, secondary, higher, and vocational education (GCO 2024).

3.2.3 Workforce Nationalization: The Challenges of Qatarization

The policy of Qatarization, intended to increase the share of Qatari citizens in the workforce, adds complexity to the skills-mismatch problem observed across the GCC. While gains have been achieved in the public sector, private-sector implementation remains challenging due to (i) quota-induced "phantom employment," (ii) cultural preferences for secure public roles and the social stigma around some vocational tracks, and (iii) stereotypes and tense workplace dynamics that impede knowledge transfer. The remedy requires more than quotas: credible private-sector value propositions, robust mentoring and training pipelines, and leadership competency development for nationals:

(i) **"Phantom employment":** The pressure to meet quotas has, in some cases, led to the phenomenon of "ghost" or "phantom" employment, where nationals are on the payroll but do not contribute meaningfully to the organization's productivity (Younis, Elsharnouby, and Elbanna 2023).

(ii) **Cultural and social perceptions:** There is a cultural preference among many Qataris for public sector employment, which is often perceived as offering better pay, benefits, and job security, alongside a societal "distaste for low-status jobs" (Younis, Elsharnouby, and Elbanna 2023).

(iii) **Stereotypes and workplace dynamics:** Negative stereotypes can exist on both sides, with some employers questioning the work ethic and commitment of nationals, and some nationals feeling that expatriates are a threat to their job security (Fakhouri 2019; Lee 2018). This can hinder effective knowledge transfer and mentorship, which are crucial for skills development.

To address these issues, a multifaceted approach is needed that goes beyond simple quotas. This includes fostering a stronger work ethic through education and media campaigns, promoting the private sector as an attractive career option, and implementing robust mentorship and training programs to ensure that Qatari employees are equipped with the skills and competencies needed to succeed (Suliman et al. 2018). The development of leadership competencies among Qatari nationals is also seen as a critical element for the long-term success of Qatarization (Mistarihi 2021; Schnepfleitner and Ferreira 2021).

3.2.4 Knowledge Transfer: The Role of the Expatriate Workforce

Given that expatriates constitute the vast majority of the labor force in Qatar (ILO Project Office for the State of Qatar 2025; National Planning Council (NPC) n.d.), their role in bridging the skills gap is undeniable. They are the primary source of on-the-job training, mentorship, and knowledge transfer for Qatari nationals. This reliance on expatriates for skill development often occurs through informal, on-the-job interactions. Dr. Al-Hajri's (2022) case study of a Qatari company highlights that key mechanisms for this informal learning include managerial coaching and team knowledge exchange, which can be either hindered or facilitated by factors such as leadership style and trust between colleagues. However, this process is not without its challenges:

- **Job insecurity:** The very nature of Qatarization, which involves replacing expatriates with nationals, can create a sense of job insecurity among the expatriate workforce, leading to a reluctance to share knowledge and expertise (Lee 2018).

- **Cultural differences:** Differing cultural backgrounds and communication styles between expatriate mentors and Qatari mentees can create friction and misunderstandings, hindering the effectiveness of mentoring relationships (Fakhouri 2019).

- **Lack of formal training in mentorship:** While many expatriates are technical experts, they may not have the necessary training and skills to be effective mentors and coaches, underscoring the need for structured mentoring programs (Suliman et al. 2018).

Ultimately, successful knowledge transfer requires a supportive organizational culture, a commitment from leadership, and a willingness on the part of both expatriates and nationals to engage in open and collaborative learning (Lee 2018; Fakhouri 2019).

3.3 Leadership Development: Cultivating the Next Generation of Qataris

Beyond filling immediate technical and administrative skills gaps, a more profound goal of Qatarization is the development of a sustainable pipeline of indigenous Qatari leaders capable of steering the nation's key industries into the future (Ahmed 2018). This ambition is a cornerstone of the Qatar National Vision 2030, which emphasizes the transition to a knowledge-based economy driven by skilled and capable citizens (Mohamed et al. 2022). This national ambition is also a direct response to the broader challenge of overcoming a "resource curse mentality," where abundant natural wealth can lead to a reliance on state provisions and foreign expertise, potentially hindering the full development of local human capital (Brannagan and Grix 2023). The process therefore elevates the function of mentorship beyond simple training to encompass a more holistic developmental process that includes coaching, sponsorship, and role modeling.

3.3.1 Formal Structures: National Leadership Programs

The State of Qatar has invested heavily in formal structures to support this goal. The Qatar Leadership Centre (QLC), for instance, offers a suite of prestigious programs (the Rising Leaders Program, the Government Leaders Program, and the Executive Leaders Program) tailored to Qatari professionals at different stages of their careers (QLC n.d.-a). These programs are often delivered in collaboration with world-renowned academic institutions. The QLC also offers an Executive Master's in Leadership program in partnership with Georgetown University and Qatar University (QLC n.d.-a).

Similarly, the Institute of Public Administration, under the Civil Service and Government Development Bureau (CGB), seeks to develop and improve the human component of government agencies by providing training and empowerment for Qatari employees (CGB n.d.-a). Recent initiatives include the 2024 graduation ceremony for programs such as "Leadership," "Human Capital Leaders," and "Sadara," which are designed to enhance leadership skills and national competencies (CGB n.d.-a). A key initiative is the Kafaa E-Learning Platform, which offers thousands of training programs from top global institutions, contributing to the long-term development of employee skills (CGB n.d.-b).

Further demonstrating this commitment, the Ministry of Labour (MoL) has partnered with private sector entities like Ahli Bank through its "Partners in Success" initiative. This collaboration focuses on specialized training and professional development programs for Qatari nationals and the children of Qatari women. These tailored programs aim to strengthen employability and

enhance competitiveness, reinforcing the alignment of training with national development strategies (MoL 2025b). The overall goal is to enhance the availability of local expertise and R&D capabilities, which are recognized as critical Resilience Engineering Indicators (REIs) for organizational resilience, especially in vital sectors like oil and gas (Al Mohannadi et al. 2023). Together, these formal programs from the QLC, CGB, and MoL represent a strategic, top-down approach to building national leadership capacity (Al Thani, Kamri, and Abughazaleh 2025).

3.3.2 The Mentor's Role: Bridging Theory and Practice

The role of the expatriate manager is to act as the crucial link between formal, classroom-based learning and its real-world application. While Qatari culture has its own leadership traditions, these programs are often designed to introduce and translate modern leadership concepts for a new generation (Schnepfleitner and Ferreira 2021). In this capacity, a mentor is expected to provide their Qatari mentee with opportunities to lead projects, navigate complex organizational politics, and gain visibility with senior leadership.

However, the effectiveness of this crucial function is often severely constrained by multiple, overlapping challenges:

- **The Knowledge Hiding Dilemma:** The inherent conflict where an expatriate is tasked with training their own replacement creates a significant barrier to genuine mentorship, driven by challenges of trust and job security (Jasimuddin and Saci 2022). Research on expatriate employees in Qatar confirms that the policy of Qatarization has a negative impact on their commitment, driven by the fear of being replaced (Irfan et al. 2024).

- **Defensive Behaviors:** Empirical studies reveal that supervisors often engage in "knowledge hiding," which is an intentional withholding of information to protect their job security and power. This behavior leads to distrust among supervisees, a dynamic that is particularly pronounced for foreign workers who experience higher levels of distrust when their supervisors hide knowledge (Arain et al. 2020).

- **Negative Perceptions of Localization:** This situation is compounded by how expatriate managers perceive the policy itself. Studies in Qatar have shown that expatriates may view localization with "unwillingness" or "disinterest," seeing their primary mission as "getting the job done" rather than enabling locals to take over. Concerns over "job security" are prevalent, with expatriates fearing redundancy. Consequently, a sense of "pessimism" can arise where localization is perceived as merely an "ideal" with no real implementation plans, often viewed as an obligation rather than a strategic priority (Ceric, Williams, and Ramudu 2013).

These combined factors significantly temper an expatriate's willingness to fully engage in knowledge transfer and active mentorship, thereby stymying the development of true leadership capabilities among Qatari nationals.

3.3.3 Contextual Challenges: Local Realities vs. Global Models

For leadership development initiatives to be successful, they must be highly attuned to the local context (Schnepfleitner and Ferreira 2021). Research highlights several critical challenges that can undermine their effectiveness:

- **Need for Contextual Alignment:** There is often a disconnection between the theoretical, Western-centric models taught in formal programs and the practical realities of the Qatari workplace. Success requires a respected and transparent selection process, alignment with the participants' cultural context, and a well-structured post-program stage to ensure learning is embedded (Schnepfleitner 2017; Schnepfleitner and Ferreira 2021).

- **Complexity of Leadership Factors:** The development of leaders is not a simple process. Within institutions like Qatar University, it involves a complex interplay of intrapersonal, relational, and institutional factors. Effective leadership development must therefore go beyond formal training to include relational aspects like peer support and senior leader influence, while also navigating institutional dimensions like strategic goals and organizational culture (Floyd et al. 2023).

- **Existing Leadership Competency Gaps:** Empirical evidence from Qatar indicates that some top-level Qatari managers are not fully engaged in strategic leadership behaviors, often prioritizing day-to-day operational activities. Critical skills like mental agility, strategic vision, and a willingness to empower employees are often less pronounced, highlighting a "competency gap" that needs to be addressed through specialized training (Mistarihi 2021).

- **Socio-Cultural Barriers:** The preference for secure, high-paying public sector employment, fueled by the "resource curse mentality," leads to a disinterest among many Qatari males in pursuing private sector careers. In 2018, 81% of employed Qataris worked in the public sector, fundamentally limiting the pool of ambitious, private-sector-ready national talent for leadership development (Brannagan and Grix 2023).

- **Negative Expatriate Perceptions:** Studies in Qatar have shown that expatriates may view localization with "unwillingness" or "pessimism," seeing their primary mission as "getting the job done" rather than enabling locals to take over. Concerns over job security lead to a perception of localization as a mere obligation rather than a strategic priority, significantly tempering their willingness to engage in genuine mentorship (Ceric, Williams, and Ramudu 2013).

- **Precarious Employment Environment:** The intricate social exchange in the region shows that foreign workers often experience significant distrust due to supervisor knowledge hiding. To preserve their job security in a precarious environment, they may alter their workplace behaviors, which further complicates the mentoring dynamic (Arain et al. 2020).

The ultimate success of cultivating the next generation of leaders therefore hinges not just on establishing high-quality institutions like the QLC, but on ensuring that the knowledge gained is effectively transferred, adapted, and applied within the unique socio-cultural and organizational context of Qatar (Al Haj Sleiman et al. 2025), a task that falls heavily on the shoulders of expatriate mentors. Addressing these multifaceted challenges requires both robust formal programs and a deep understanding of the psychological and cultural barriers influencing both mentors and mentees.

3.3.4 Mentorship for Women and Youth: Aligning with NDS3

A critical, yet underdeveloped, aspect of Qatarization is the focus on increasing the participation of women and youth in the workforce, a central goal of NDS3 (IMF 2025). Mentorship is a particularly powerful tool for these demographics. For young Qataris entering the workforce, mentorship can bridge the gap between theoretical education and practical workplace expectations, accelerating their integration and productivity. For Qatari women, mentorship and sponsorship are crucial for navigating corporate structures, gaining visibility for leadership roles, and overcoming potential cultural barriers to advancement. Tailored mentorship programs that connect aspiring female leaders with senior role models (both Qatari and expatriate) can create clear pathways to success and help fulfill the national strategic goal of a more diverse, inclusive, and competitive workforce.

3.4 The Influence of '*Wasta*': Navigating Social Capital and Meritocracy

Any evaluation of mentorship effectiveness in Qatar would be incomplete without addressing the profound influence of *Wasta*. This socio-cultural dynamic presents a formidable challenge to the perceived legitimacy and effectiveness of formal, merit-based development programs, creating a parallel system of career advancement that directly impacts the roles of both expatriate mentors and their Qatari mentees.

3.4.1 Defining '*Wasta*': From Social Connector to Corrupting Force

Wasta is a well-known Arabic term, deeply ingrained in the culture of the Middle East, that functions as a form of social capital to gain preferential treatment (Al-Thbah 2021; Tlaiss and Kauser 2011). It is an "implicit social contract" that can oblige those in a position of power to provide favorable treatment to others within their group (Al-Thbah 2021). Historically, this served a positive function in resolving tribal disputes and assisting relatives (Al-Thbah 2021; Khalfan 2024). However, with the development of the modern state, the concept has largely shifted from a positive practice to a negative one, often becoming a form of administrative corruption used to obtain jobs, promotions, or services despite a lack of technical or educational qualifications (Al-Thbah 2021).

This practice is rooted in the region's collectivist, high-context culture, which prioritizes personal relationships over professional ones (Khakhar and Alnajadah 2024). In such a context, building strong business relationships is a prerequisite for professional interaction. *Wasta* can therefore be seen as a mechanism for building trust and navigating bureaucracy in a society that is highly relational (S. Ali and Weir 2020). However, this has a clear "dark side," as the practice can lead to nepotism, undermine fairness, and negatively impact organizational performance by prioritizing connections over competence (Al-Twal, Alawamleh, and Jarrar 2024). This dual nature makes *Wasta* a complex and challenging dynamic within organizations, functioning as what one ministry official described as the "shadow system of governance" (Al-Thani 2025).

3.4.2 Meritocracy: *Wasta*'s Direct Challenge to Mentorship

The entire premise of mentorship as a corporate HR intervention rests on the principles of meritocracy: that developing one's skills and competencies is the primary path to career success. This concept is often challenged in the Qatari context where advancement can be tied to connections rather than merit (Schnepfleitner and Ferreira 2021). This dynamic can actively delegitimize the mentorship process for both parties:

- **For the Expatriate Mentor:** As an outsider to the dense local networks where *Wasta* operates, the mentoring role can feel performative and futile. They may invest significant time in developing a mentee's skills, only to see career-defining opportunities awarded to others based on connections (Schnepfleitner and Ferreira 2021; Al-Thani 2025).

- **For the Qatari Mentee:** The incentive to engage in a demanding, skills-based program may be diminished if they believe that cultivating their social network is a more reliable strategy for advancement (Al-Thani 2025).

In this way, *Wasta* does not merely compete with formal mentorship; it undermines its very foundation. Research from the region confirms this challenge, showing that the presence of *Wasta* reduces the incentive to compete on merit (Forstenlechner et al. 2011; Erumban and Al-Mejren 2024) and is often perceived as more important than qualifications for career progression (Tlaiss and Kauser 2011; Baranik, Gorman, and Wright 2021).

3.4.3 Formal HR Processes: The "Hijacking" by *Wasta*

The influence of *Wasta* extends beyond undermining mentorship; it can actively subvert and repurpose formal HR systems from within. Research shows how powerful local actors use *Wasta* to "hijack" core HR processes like performance appraisal, turning them into tools for dispensing patronage to "insiders" and marginalizing "outsiders" (Melhem et al. 2024).

HR managers are central to this dynamic, acting as "relational gatekeepers" who can either perpetuate or curtail the influence of *Wasta* (Alsarhan, Horak, and Darwish 2024). While the official "espoused" culture of an organization may promote meritocracy, the informal, embedded culture of *Wasta* creates a parallel power structure that determines actual outcomes, rendering the formal system a facade (Rahuman and Saif 2025).

3.4.4 The Expatriate Experience: *Wasta* as a Psychological Contract Breach

The tension created by *Wasta* is particularly acute for expatriate managers and Qatari nationals who have been educated or have worked abroad. Research in the culturally similar context of Saudi Arabia found that for individuals accustomed to more meritocratic systems, the prevalence of *Wasta* is often perceived as a breach of the "psychological contract," which is the unwritten expectation that competence and performance are the basis for advancement (Aldossari and Robertson 2015).

This perceived breach, fueled by a sense of injustice, leads to profound job dissatisfaction, demotivation, and ultimately, high turnover intentions (Aldossari and Robertson 2015). This dynamic is highly relevant to Qatar as it directly undermines the goals of Qatarization, which depends on retaining these skilled and internationally-experienced individuals to serve as mentors and leaders.

4. Feedback and Policy: A Framework for an Enhanced Mentorship Ecosystem

The complex perceptions and challenges faced by expatriate managers in their mentoring roles are not insurmountable. They can be significantly mitigated through a concerted and multi-layered approach involving strategic interventions at both the corporate and governmental levels.

Creating an environment where mentorship is perceived as a rewarding and effective activity requires building a robust ecosystem of support. This involves strengthening the corporate scaffolding through strategic human resource management (HRM) and leveraging governmental and institutional influence to foster a national culture that values and promotes mentorship.

4.1 Corporate Scaffolding: The Role of Strategic HRM

The primary responsibility for creating a successful mentorship environment lies with the individual organizations employing expatriate managers and Qatari nationals. The literature clearly indicates that ad-hoc, informal approaches are insufficient. A meta-analysis by Allen et al. (2004) confirms that mentored individuals report higher compensation, more promotions, and greater career satisfaction, underscoring the tangible benefits of such programs. Success is contingent on deliberate, structured, and well-supported corporate programs. Strategic HRM has a critical role to play in designing and implementing the necessary frameworks to facilitate effective mentorship by moving beyond simple compliance to foster a genuine developmental culture (Budhwar et al. 2019).

4.1.1 Institutionalization: From Ad-Hoc to Structured Programs

To be effective, mentorship cannot be an afterthought; it must be institutionalized. Organizations must shift from informal assignments to structured programs with clear objectives and defined processes. The key components of this institutionalization include:

- **The Case for Formal Programs:** While informal mentoring is often effective, formal programs are a critical tool for ensuring developmental opportunities are distributed equitably and aligned with strategic goals (Ragins and Cotton 1999). They are also crucial for mitigating the risks of negative mentoring experiences, which can be detrimental to mentor creativity and well-being (Hu, Li, and Kwan 2022). Formal programs must be carefully designed to replicate the supportive aspects of informal relationships to be successful (Underhill 2006).

- **Core Principles of a Structured Program:** A UAE-based study proposed a set of core principles for successful programs, including "structured interaction, clear objectives, target dates, regular reflection on challenges, formal evaluation and remedial action" (Kokt and Dreyer 2018). This structure ensures comprehensive support for the mentee's career, emotional, and psychosocial development (Nuis, Segers, and Beausaert 2023).

- **A Holistic Expatriate Lifecycle Approach:** A structured approach must encompass all phases of the expatriate assignment, from pre-departure (setting expectations, cross-cultural training) to repatriation (managing their career upon return) (Jassawalla, Asgary, and Sashittal 2006). This holistic view is crucial, as mentoring is a key instrument in facilitating socialization, retention, and development for expatriates themselves (Feldman, Sapienza, and Bolino 1997).

Leading Practices in Qatar's Energy Sector: Leading companies in Qatar have already demonstrated a strong commitment to this structured approach:

- QatarEnergy LNG has received "We Invest in People" Gold Accreditation for its programs, which blend "70% on-the-job experience and learning, 20% coaching and mentoring, and 10% formal courses" (QatarEnergy LNG 2023).

- Firms like QAPCO, North Oil Company (NOC), and QatarEnergy LNG have established comprehensive national development programs that formally integrate mentoring and coaching as core components of talent development (QatarEnergy LNG 2023; QAPCO 2025b; NOC 2023; NOC n.d.).

- Shell Qatar explicitly states that achieving Qatarization goals requires the dedicated support of experienced expatriate staff for on-the-job coaching and mentoring (Qatar Shell n.d.-a; -b).

It is important to note, however, that even well-designed programs may require more than 24 months to show a tangible impact on mentee productivity (Shore et al. 2024).

4.1.2 Cultural Attunement: The Foundational Role of CCT

Crucially, mentorship programs must be designed with a high degree of cultural attunement. A recurring theme in the literature is the significant deficiency in specific and rigorous Cross-Cultural Training (CCT) for expatriates in the GCC, often because corporations mistakenly believe technical skills are the only prerequisite for success (Tahir and Ertek 2018). This is a critical oversight. Effective CCT is essential for aiding the socialization of expatriate managers and directly contributes to their success and adjustment in a new environment (Neill 2008).

The cultural context directly impacts the feedback process, which is central to mentoring. For instance, research on Western-based health curricula in Qatar found that the local culture's high power distance made students reluctant to give direct feedback to supervisors (Wilbur, Bacha, and Abdelaziz 2017). An untrained expatriate mentor may misinterpret this indirect communication as agreement, thereby failing to provide effective guidance.

To be effective, organizations must invest in a comprehensive CCT curriculum that is delivered both before arrival and on an ongoing basis. The training must be practical and cover several core areas:

- **Foundations of Qatari Culture:** Islamic tradition, family/community solidarity, and typical behavioral norms.

- **The Qatari Corporate World:** Hierarchy, intermediaries/networking, and local communication styles (verbal and non-verbal). (Wilbur, Bacha, and Abdelaziz 2017; Waxin, Kumra, and Zhao 2020).

- **Effective Management Techniques:** Prudence, active listening, culturally sensitive feedback, encouraging initiative.

- **Navigating Social Norms:** Awareness of sensitive topics and *Wasta*.

- **Family adjustment:** Family adjustment: Provide CCT and practical support to spouses/partners, because assignment failure often stems from family non-adjustment (Tahir and Ertek 2018; Erogul and Rahman 2017).

4.1.3 Incentive Alignment: Linking Rewards to Mentorship Goals

The most powerful lever available to corporations is the alignment of their performance management and reward systems with Qatarization objectives. This directly addresses the core conflict that drives negative perceptions of mentoring.

- **Resolve the Core Conflict through KPIs:** The structural paradox where developing a successor is perceived as a threat to one's career is empirically supported by research showing that localization policies can induce job insecurity and lead to negative outcomes like burnout and intentions to quit (I. Ali et al. 2020). This conflict can be resolved by fundamentally altering the incentive structure. A recent survey on corporate culture in the GCC found that only one-third of boards actively monitor or measure culture, indicating a clear gap that formal KPIs can fill (GCC BDI, Nasdaq Governance, and APCO 2023).

- **Make Mentorship Mission-Critical:** The most critical policy change is to formally and transparently integrate the successful development of Qatari mentees into the key performance indicators (KPIs) of expatriate managers. Research in the UAE identified that a best practice for successful nationalization was "linking expatriate performance with achieving the targets of the WL [workforce localization] program" to hold them accountable (Waxin, Kumra, and Zhao 2020). When an expatriate's annual performance review, bonus eligibility, and potential for future international assignments are explicitly and heavily weighted on their demonstrated success in mentoring, the dynamic shifts. This transformation realigns the psychological contract, turning the Qatari mentee from a perceived replacement into a key project critical to the mentor's own advancement (I. Ali et al. 2020; Minbaeva 2005).

- **Leverage Non-Monetary and Intrinsic Rewards:** Beyond purely financial metrics, companies should leverage non-monetary and intrinsic rewards. Public recognition or opportunities for further training can be powerful motivators (Šajeva 2014). Mentoring also provides intrinsic rewards for the mentor, including a "sense of usefulness" and "a sense of respect and recognition," which fosters a deeper sense of achievement (Šajeva 2014). Establishing systems for mentor recognition and tools to measure mentorship outcomes are potential "leverage points" that enhance the success and sustainability of a mentorship culture (Ren et al. 2024). Building trust is essential for the efficacy of these implicit, subjective rewards (Haesebrouck, Van Den Abbeele, and Williamson 2021). High-level recognition, such as Qatar's "Qatarization Crystal Awards," serves as a successful model for celebrating this contribution (QatarEnergy LNG 2023). Local industry leaders like QAPCO have embedded this approach in their systems with awards like the "Shukran Award" to acknowledge outstanding contributions (QAPCO 2025a).

By weaving formal KPIs together with meaningful public and intrinsic rewards, organizations can fundamentally shift the expatriate manager's calculus, making successful mentorship a non-negotiable component of both corporate strategy and personal career advancement.

4.2 Policy Levers for Change: The Role of Government and Institutions

While corporations hold the primary responsibility for implementing effective mentorship programs, the Qatari government and its affiliated institutions play an indispensable role in creating a national ecosystem that encourages, supports, and rewards these efforts. The tangible benefits of mentorship, ranging from favorable behavioral changes to improved career outcomes, justify this investment of public resources in strengthening mentorship frameworks (Eby et al. 2008). This top-down approach is strategically aligned with the Qatar National Vision 2030, which aims to transform the nation by developing its human capital (GSDP 2008; Schnepfleitner and Ferreira 2021).

The public sector's role can be understood across four key functions: mandating, facilitating, partnering, and endorsing (Ward 2004). Qatar already possesses a diverse landscape of public and private initiatives aimed at talent development, and the key to maximizing their impact lies in greater integration, partnership, and the fostering of a national mentorship culture through these levers.

Table 4: A Comparative Framework of Public and Private Mentorship Initiatives in Qatar

Initiating Body	Program/Initiative	Target Audience	Key Features
Government/ Public Sector	Qatar Leadership Centre (QLC)	Qatari professionals	Three-track leadership programs (Rising, Government, Executive); world-renowned academic partners.
	Ministry of Labour (MoL)	Private Sector Employees	Nationalization plan focused on empowering Qataris in priority sectors.
	Qatar National Library (QNL)	Students, recent graduates	"Murshidi Program" offering one-on-one mentorship from diverse professionals.
Energy Sector	QatarEnergy LNG	National Graduates	National Graduate Development Program (NGDP) with structured Individual Development Plans (IDPs).
	North Oil Company (NOC)	Qatari Graduates	National Development Programme with role rotations, skilled mentors, and steering committee.
	Shell Qatar	Qatari Employees & Graduates	Structured talent management with on-the-job coaching and international assignments.
Financial Sector	QFC Regulatory Authority	Qatari Graduates	"Al Masar" five-stage graduate program with professional training, coaching, and mentoring.

Note: This framework synthesizes information on key national mentorship initiatives discussed throughout the report (QLC n.d.-c, n.d.-d; MoL 2025b; Ahmad et al. 2023; DIC n.d.; QatarEnergy LNG 2023; NOC 2023, n.d.; QAPCO 2025b; Fakhouri 2019; Qatar Shell n.d.-a, -b; QFCRA n.d.).

4.2.1 The Qatar Leadership Centre (QLC): A National Hub for Development

At the forefront of the state's efforts is the Qatar Leadership Centre (QLC), established by Emiri Resolution in 2008. The QLC is mandated to identify and develop Qatari talent in government bodies and private sectors, equipping them with the skills to excel in leadership roles (QLC n.d.-d). The Centre offers a suite of prestigious programs tailored to professionals at various career stages through its National Leadership Program, which includes three distinct tracks: the Rising Leaders Program, the Government Leaders Program, and the Executive Leaders Program (QLC n.d.-c).

These programs are delivered in collaboration with world-renowned academic institutions. For example, the QLC offers an Executive Master's in Leadership program in partnership with Georgetown University, aimed at empowering participants with practical management skills and advanced leadership policies (QLC, n.d.-a). Through its Institutional Programs, the QLC also partners directly with Qatari government and private sector organizations to design specialized courses, seminars, and mentorship tailored to their specific needs (QLC, n.d.-b).

4.2.2 National Policy: Legal and Strategic Frameworks

The government's commitment to mentorship and talent development is embedded in its legal and strategic frameworks. A cornerstone of this is the National Qualifications Framework (NQF), developed by the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MOEHE) (MOEHE n.d.-a). The NQF is a mandatory reference tool designed to align education and training with labor market needs, enable alternative pathways to tertiary education, and establish occupational standards for relevant professions (Grainger et al. 2012; Supreme Education Council (SEC) 2011). Its core objectives of improving the transparency, comparability, and recognition of qualifications align with global trends (UNESCO et al. 2023).

This strategic direction is further supported by several key initiatives:

- **Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET):** A formal national policy for TVET, guided by the Office of TVET within the Ministry of Education and Higher Education, supports this strategic direction (UNESCO-UNEVOC 2020).

- **Labour Law No. (14) of 2004:** Specifically, Labour Law No. (14) of 2004, Art. 27, mandates that employers of non-Qatari experts or technicians must train an appropriate number of Qatari workers to develop the skills necessary to take over these positions (MoL 2004). This legal requirement has been reaffirmed and modernized in the Third National Development Strategy (Almeer, Bhatti, and Babar 2025).

- **Qatar National Occupational Classification (QNOC):** To create a unified language for the labor market, the Ministry of Labour has developed the QNOC, which organizes economic sectors and human resources across all competencies based on the International Standard Classification of Occupations (ISCO). This manual facilitates the

flow of data and helps stakeholders design occupational training and mentoring programs based on labor market needs (MoL 2023).

Such frameworks are critical, as international standards emphasize the need for a robust regulatory environment to ensure the quality and effectiveness of apprenticeships and other work-based learning programs (International Labour Conference (ILC) 2019). The government operationalizes these frameworks through practical services such as the University Degree Equivalency/Attestation Service, which validates certificates against the Ministry's regulations (MOEHE n.d.-b), and the Profession Modification Service, which requires that education degrees be certified before a resident's professional title is changed, directly linking recognized qualifications to the labor market (MoL 2024a).

4.2.3 Sector-Specific Action: Public-Private Partnerships

The Qatari government actively facilitates partnerships to embed leadership and mentorship development across the economy. This approach aligns with international best practice, which highlights that successful apprenticeship and training systems depend on robust implementation at the local level, requiring collaboration between employers, training providers, and government agencies (OECD/ILO 2017). This strategy is also a key pillar of regional development visions, such as Saudi Arabia's Human Capability Development Program, which aims to "activate greater partnerships with the private and non-profit sectors" (Human Capability Development Program (HCDP) 2024).

In addition to initiatives in the education sector, such as the Centre for Educational Development (Al Haj Sleiman et al. 2025), government-led bodies are mandating and structuring professional development in other critical sectors:

- **Healthcare Sector:** The Ministry of Public Health, through its Department of Healthcare Professions Accreditation Section (DHP-AS), has implemented a mandatory Continuing Professional Development (CPD) Program. This program requires all licensed healthcare practitioners to engage in continuous learning to maintain their license to practice in Qatar (Ministry of Public Health (MOPH) 2024).

- **Aviation Sector:** The Qatar Civil Aviation Authority (QCAA) mandates a Competency Based Training and Assessment (CBTA) framework to ensure a competent workforce for a safe and efficient air transportation system (QCAA 2021).

- **Public Works Sector:** The Public Works Authority (Ashghal) has established the Ashghal Certification Programme to ensure that only qualified and registered professionals, such as architects and engineers, take part in Ashghal projects (Ashghal n.d.).

- **International Partnerships:** The Ministry of Labour actively collaborates with international bodies like the International Labour Organization (ILO) and has signed bilateral agreements with numerous countries to adopt international best practices and support the labor reform agenda (MoL 2021).

4.2.4 National Culture: Fostering a Mentorship Ecosystem

Beyond specific programs, governmental and institutional levers are crucial for shaping a national culture that values mentorship. This includes public recognition, certification, and awareness campaigns that frame mentorship as a vital component of national development.

- **Formal Recognition and Certification:** The government can play a powerful role as a convener, strengthening the links between its national-level programs and corporate mentorship initiatives. Furthermore, the state could create a formal "National Mentor Certification" program. Such a credential, recognized by the Ministry of Labour, would be a valuable professional asset, benchmarked against globally recognized standards from bodies like the European Mentoring & Coaching Council (EMCC) and the International Coaching Federation (ICF) (European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) 2021). This is particularly critical because multinational corporations in the region often fail to provide adequate Cross-Cultural Training (CCT), a gap a government-endorsed standard could fill (Tahir and Ertek 2018). By professionalizing the role of the mentor through a certified, standards-based framework, Qatar would be adopting a strategy that mirrors European best practices, which emphasize the importance of enhancing the pedagogical skills and professional status of in-company trainers (European Commission 2025).

- **National Awards and Public Awareness:** The government can also expand its system of recognition for contributions to nationalization. The Qatarization Crystal Awards in the energy sector are a successful model that could be replicated across other key industries (Salari 2024; Qatar News Agency (QNA) 2023). A powerful regional parallel is the NAFIS Award in the UAE (Nafis Award n.d.). Establishing prestigious national awards for companies with best-in-class mentorship programs would create healthy competition and elevate mentorship from a compliance activity to a mark of corporate excellence and national contribution (QAPCO 2025a). These efforts can be amplified through strategic public awareness campaigns to inspire young jobseekers (Emirates News Agency (WAM) 2022) and build a national identity around human capital (Almutairi and Kruckeberg 2019).

5. Conclusion

The perception of the expatriate manager is the critical, and often overlooked, variable in the success of mentorship as a cornerstone of Qatar's nationalization strategy. This analysis reveals this perception is the logical outcome of a series of structural, psychological, and cultural pressures. The expatriate manager's role is defined by a central paradox: a mandate to develop local talent that directly conflicts with the rational instinct for professional self-preservation. This unresolved tension fosters an environment where mentorship is viewed as a threat, knowledge transfer is inhibited, and the full potential of Qatar's human capital remains unrealized. The challenges are compounded by a complex cultural milieu, where the dynamics of high-context communication and the parallel system of career advancement through *Wasta* can delegitimize formal, merit-based development.

However, these challenges are not intractable. Charting a path forward requires a deliberate re-engineering of the incentive structure at both the corporate and governmental levels. At the

corporate level, organizations must move beyond passive compliance and build a robust strategic framework that realigns performance management to explicitly and substantially reward successful mentorship. At the national level, the government must continue to act as a catalyst, strengthening the ecosystem of support to foster a national culture of mentorship. The ultimate goal is to transform the expatriate manager from a temporary holder of expertise into an incentivized and empowered agent of national development, turning a compliance burden into a strategic partnership that will serve as the true engine of a diversified, knowledge-based economy.

Key Takeaways:

1. **The Central Paradox Creates a Chronic Psychological Contract Breach:** The core conflict, where expatriate managers are mandated to train their own replacements, is widely perceived as a direct threat to their job security. This fosters a rational, defensive incentive to engage in "knowledge hiding" and constitutes a continuous breach of the psychological contract, eroding trust and commitment from the outset.

2. **Cultural Intelligence (CQ) is as Critical as Technical Skill:** The success of cross-cultural knowledge transfer, particularly of tacit "know-how," depends heavily on the Cultural Intelligence (CQ) of both the expatriate mentor and the Qatari mentee. A lack of CQ leads to miscommunication, broken trust, and failed mentoring relationships, regardless of the mentor's technical expertise.

3. **'*Wasta*'s' Parallel System Invalidates Meritocracy:** The pervasive influence of *Wasta* presents a direct challenge to the merit-based foundation of formal mentorship. It can delegitimize the entire process, creating cynicism and reducing the motivation for both mentors and mentees to invest in developmental work when an alternative path to advancement exists.

4. **Realigning Incentives Is the Critical Solution:** The most powerful tool to resolve the central paradox is to realign performance management systems. By making the successful development and advancement of Qatari mentees a core, heavily-weighted Key Performance Indicator (KPI) for expatriate managers, their personal success becomes directly linked to the success of their mentees, turning a threat into an opportunity.

5. **A Structured Corporate Framework is Essential:** Effective mentorship cannot be left to chance. Organizations must move beyond ad-hoc assignments to a formal, institutionalized framework that includes structured programs, clear objectives, and mandatory, rigorous Cross-Cultural Training (CCT) to equip mentors with the skills needed to navigate the local context.

6. **Government Must Act as an Ecosystem Catalyst:** Beyond corporate action, the government has a crucial role in fostering a national culture of mentorship. This is achieved by strengthening the ecosystem through enhanced public-private partnerships, creating prestigious national awards for mentor and company excellence, and establishing formal certification standards to elevate the status and quality of mentorship as a key contributor to national development.

7. **Targeted Mentorship for Women and Youth is a Strategic Imperative:** To fully realize the goals of NDS3, mentorship programs must be intentionally designed to support the advancement of women and youth. Tailored sponsorship and mentorship are critical tools for building a diverse leadership pipeline and integrating the next generation into a competitive, private sector-driven economy.

The ultimate goal is to transform the expatriate manager from a temporary holder of expertise into an incentivized and empowered agent of national development, turning a compliance burden into a strategic partnership that will serve as the true engine of a diversified, knowledge-based economy. By understanding their perceptions and systematically addressing the structural and cultural factors that shape them, Qatar can build a more effective, sustainable, and collaborative model for developing its next generation of leaders.

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