

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

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Executive Summary

This report provides an exhaustive literature overview and analysis of how expatriate managers perceive their role in mentoring Qatari talent under the nationalization policy known as Qatarization. As a cornerstone of the Qatar National Vision 2030, Qatarization aims to build a sustainable, knowledge-based economy by increasing the participation of Qatari citizens in the workforce, particularly in the private and semi-private sectors. Expatriate managers, hired for their specialized expertise, are positioned as the primary agents for the on-the-job development and skill transfer necessary to achieve these national objectives. However, their perceptions of this mentoring mandate are shaped by a complex interplay of professional motivations, psychological pressures, cultural dynamics, and organizational support systems.

The analysis reveals a fundamental structural conflict at the heart of the expatriate mentor's role: they are simultaneously tasked with driving immediate business performance based on their unique expertise and transferring that same expertise to a national mentee, which can be perceived as accelerating their own redundancy. This tension creates a persistent sense of job insecurity that often leads to a negative perception of the mentoring role and, in some cases, active resistance to knowledge transfer through strategies of "knowledge hiding."

This core challenge is compounded by significant cross-cultural barriers. Differing communication styles, concepts of hierarchy and time, and the primacy of relationship-building in Qatari business culture can create friction and misunderstanding within the mentoring dyad. Furthermore, the pervasive influence of *wasta*, the use of personal connections to secure opportunities, can undermine and delegitimize formal, merit-based mentorship programs, making them seem ineffective or irrelevant to actual career

progression. Mutual negative stereotyping between expatriates and some national employees regarding work ethic and competence further complicates the establishment of trust, which is the bedrock of any successful mentoring relationship.

Effective mentorship is contingent on robust support from both corporations and government institutions. At the corporate level, strategic human resource management (HRM) must move beyond simply assigning mentors. It requires the implementation of formal, culturally attuned mentorship programs, comprehensive cross-cultural training for expatriates, and, most critically, the alignment of performance management and incentive structures to reward successful mentorship. By making the development of Qatari talent a key performance indicator (KPI) for expatriate managers, organizations can directly mitigate the conflict of interest and repair the psychological contract.

At the national level, a rich ecosystem of mentorship initiatives already exists across various sectors. Strengthening public-private partnerships, creating national recognition for successful mentors, and fostering a broader national mentorship culture are essential policy levers. Ultimately, transforming the expatriate manager's perception of their role from a professional threat to a valued and rewarding mandate is the critical variable for unlocking the full potential of mentorship as a tool for achieving the ambitious goals of Qatarization. This report concludes with a framework of actionable recommendations for policymakers and corporate leaders to build a more effective and sustainable mentorship ecosystem.

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

Qatarization is a government-led strategic initiative designed to increase the number of Qatari citizens employed across public and private sectors, with a stated target of achieving a 50% national workforce in the key Industry and Energy sector.¹ This policy is a central pillar of the Qatar National Vision 2030 (QNV 2030), which aims to transition the nation into an advanced, sustainable, and diversified knowledge-based economy, thereby securing a high standard of living for its people for generations to come.²

The historical roots of Qatarization can be traced back to the Qatari Labor Law No. 3 of 1962, which stipulated that nationals be given first priority for vacant positions.¹ Subsequent decrees, such as the 1997 mandate for at least 20% Qatari employment in private sector businesses, solidified this policy direction.¹ The most comprehensive program was launched in 2000, targeting a 50% national workforce in the energy sector by 2005, a goal that proved ambitious, with actual nationalization reaching only 28% by the deadline.¹ The current iteration of the policy, as articulated in the Third National Development Strategy (2024-2030), sets a more targeted goal of increasing the share of the Qatari workforce in the private and semi-private sectors from 17% in 2023 to 20% by 2030.³

The drivers behind this sustained policy push are multifaceted. Economically, it seeks to reduce the nation's profound dependence on a vast expatriate workforce.⁴ With foreign workers representing over 94% of the total labor force, Qatar has one of the highest shares in the world.³ This demographic reality has given rise to significant national security considerations. As early as 2005, the GCC Secretary-General warned that the "massive presence of expatriates" should be viewed "basically as a national security issue, and not merely as an economic matter".⁵ This perspective frames nationalization not just as a matter of employment statistics but as a crucial strategy for ensuring long-term stability and sovereignty.

Beyond economic and security concerns, Qatarization is a vital tool for cultural preservation. In a hyper-globalized environment where nationals constitute a small minority of the resident population, the policy is an explicit effort toward "maintaining Qatar's national identity".³ The policy, therefore, represents a complex blend of human capital development, economic nationalism, and socio-cultural engineering. It is within this high-stakes context that the expatriate manager is asked to perform their mentoring duties. Their

role is not simply a corporate function; it is an activity deeply embedded in a national project of identity, security, and economic transformation, carrying with it a level of political and social pressure that is often unstated in corporate handbooks but is palpable in the workplace.

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.⁶ Their primary function, from a corporate perspective, is to drive business performance, manage complex projects, and ensure operational excellence. They are agents of immediate corporate efficiency and profitability.

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.⁶ This creates a fundamental duality in their role. They must deliver short-term results while concurrently building long-term national capacity, often by developing the very individuals who are designated to eventually succeed them.

This dual mandate creates an inherent structural conflict within the expatriate manager's position. The manager is hired and valued for *what they know*, their unique expertise is the basis of their employment and compensation. Yet, their success under the Qatarization mandate is measured by their ability to effectively *give away what they know* to their Qatari mentees. This dynamic establishes a direct conflict of interest, particularly if the expatriate's continued employment is perceived to be contingent on their unique, non-replicable knowledge. The very act of successful mentorship, of creating a competent and autonomous Qatari successor, can be logically perceived as accelerating one's own redundancy. This is not a matter of individual personality or a lack of goodwill, but a structural paradox embedded within the job description itself. The role simultaneously demands knowledge sharing while implicitly rewarding knowledge hoarding for professional self-preservation. This foundational tension is a primary source of the complex perceptions and challenges that will be explored throughout this report.

1.3 Mentorship as 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 the most effective mechanism for the nuanced process of transferring skills, cultivating leadership potential, and integrating national talent into a globally competitive workforce.⁷

The strategic importance of mentorship is reflected in the proliferation of both governmental and corporate initiatives designed to foster these developmental relationships. The government has established high-profile institutions like the Qatar Leadership Centre (QLC) to offer advanced leadership programs to promising Qatari professionals.⁹ Other public bodies, such as the Qatar National Library with its "Murshidi Program," connect students and recent graduates with seasoned professionals across various industries.¹¹ In the private and semi-private sectors, particularly in the vital energy industry, leading companies like QatarEnergy LNG, North Oil Company (NOC), and QAPCO have institutionalized national development programs where mentorship and coaching are core components.¹² These programs aim to provide Qatari employees with the training, guidance, and on-the-job experience necessary to reach their full potential and assume positions of responsibility.⁸

Mentoring is thus seen as the essential bridge between the theoretical knowledge gained through formal education and the practical, tacit knowledge required to navigate complex corporate environments. It is the chosen tool for building succession pipelines, enhancing the engagement and retention of national employees, and ultimately creating the "high-calibre Qatari workforce" envisioned by national leaders.¹⁴ The effectiveness of this entire strategy, however, rests heavily on the willingness and ability of experienced expatriate managers to embrace their role as mentors, a perception that is far from straightforward.

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

The success of mentorship as a tool for Qatarization is fundamentally dependent on the perceptions of the expatriate managers tasked with its execution. Their willingness to engage deeply and effectively in the development of Qatari talent is shaped by a confluence of psychological, organizational, and interpersonal factors. This section examines the core motivations that can drive positive engagement, as well as the significant challenges and demotivators that create barriers to success. It delves into the expatriate's psychological contract, exploring the tension between their personal career expectations and the realities of a nationalization-focused workplace, and analyzes the specific pressures that define their experience.

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.¹⁵ For expatriate managers, this contract is often multifaceted, including transactional elements like high compensation and benefits, and relational elements such as promises of career development, organizational support, and a degree of job security for the duration of their assignment.¹⁵

The policy of Qatarization, however, can introduce a significant strain on this psychological contract. Research conducted in Qatar's construction industry has found that the "increasing trend of Qatarization exhibits a negative impact on effective and continuance commitment" among expatriate employees.¹⁶ This indicates that the policy is widely perceived as a direct threat to job security, a fundamental component of the psychological contract. When expatriates perceive that the organization's commitment to nationalization policies supersedes its commitment to them, it can lead to feelings of violation, reduced trust, and diminished organizational commitment.¹⁵

This is not a singular event but can be experienced as a form of chronic psychological contract breach. An expatriate manager may accept a position based on a set of perceived promises regarding their role, value, and career trajectory within the organization. However, the continuous implementation of Qatarization, the hiring of a national mentee, the announcement of new quotas, the visible fast-tracking of local talent, serves as a constant reminder of the precariousness of their position. Each policy-driven action can reinforce the perception that the employer's long-term commitment to the expatriate is secondary to its obligation to fulfill state mandates. This persistent state of perceived insecurity fundamentally alters the expatriate's relationship with the organization. It can transform their perception of tasks directly associated with the policy, such as mentoring, from a developmental opportunity into a professionally risky and unrewarding obligation.

2.2 Navigating the Labyrinth of Challenges

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, many face significant organizational and interpersonal

barriers that temper their enthusiasm and effectiveness. These factors can be categorized across career, organizational, interpersonal, and policy domains, as detailed in Table 1.

Table 1: Perceived Motivators and Demotivators for Expatriate Mentors in Qatar

Factor Category	Perceived Motivators (Drivers for Engagement)	Perceived Demotivators (Barriers to Engagement)	Supporting Literature
Career & Performance	- Fulfilling a key performance indicator (if formally included). - Personal satisfaction from developing others. - Opportunity to build a legacy and a strong local team.	- Mentoring is time-consuming and detracts from core, measured business goals. - Lack of formal recognition or reward for mentoring efforts. - Fear of training one's own replacement, leading to job insecurity.	17
Organizational Support	- Clear and structured formal mentorship programs. - Strong commitment from top management. - Access to cross-cultural training and resources.	- Lack of organizational support and clear guidelines. - Inadequate HR policies to manage the process. - Perceived inequity in compensation and benefits between expats and nationals.	7
Interpersonal & Cultural	- Building strong, trusting relationships with Qatari colleagues. - Reciprocal learning and gaining local insights. - Genuine desire to help and bridge cultural gaps.	- Communication barriers (language, style). - Perceived lack of commitment or different work ethic from mentees (stereotyping). - Navigating cultural norms like <i>wasta</i> and paternalistic leadership expectations.	18

Policy & Environment	- Contributing to a national strategic goal (Qatar Vision 2030). - Aligning personal role with the country's development.	- Ambiguity and inconsistent application of Qatarization policies. - Pressure to meet quotas regardless of candidate suitability. - Overall sense of precariousness due to nationalization focus.	5
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2.2.1 Job Security and the Knowledge Hiding Dilemma

The most acute challenge shaping the expatriate manager's perception is the threat to their own job security. This is not merely an abstract fear but a tangible pressure that directly influences behavior in the workplace. A seminal qualitative study conducted within a Qatari oil and gas company uncovered a stark reality: expatriate "mentor-coaches," in an effort to protect their positions, consciously resisted developing their Qatari mentees.¹⁸ They employed subtle techniques to limit the transfer of critical knowledge, effectively transforming the learning environment into a "site of struggle" where the mentor's power, derived from their expertise, was in direct conflict with the mentee's need for development.¹⁸

This phenomenon is not isolated. Further research on knowledge transfer in both Qatar and Saudi Arabia identified a deliberate "Deter-Defer-Delay strategy for knowledge hiding" that was explicitly linked to expatriate job insecurity.¹⁹ This strategy involves intentionally withholding or concealing knowledge that has been requested, thereby slowing the mentee's progress and preserving the mentor's status as the indispensable expert. This perception is corroborated by local managers in the neighboring UAE, who report that senior expatriates are often not keen on training nationals and actively try to "keep locals away to secure their own senior positions".²⁵ This dilemma 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).

2.2.2 Perceived Skills Gaps and Mutual Stereotyping

The effectiveness and enthusiasm of an expatriate mentor are also heavily influenced by their perceptions of the mentee's capabilities, commitment, and work ethic. The literature reveals persistent negative stereotypes held by some expatriates and employers regarding a "lack of professional competencies, skills, work commitment, and enthusiasm among national employees".²⁴ These perceptions are often fueled by observations of a different work culture, where factors such as a strong preference for public sector employment, with

its higher compensation, greater job security, and more favorable working hours, can be misinterpreted as a lack of ambition for private sector roles.⁴

Furthermore, some expatriates perceive a "sense of entitlement" among national employees, which can create friction and act as a barrier to building a productive mentoring relationship.¹⁹ These stereotypes, however, are not one-sided. Research indicates that nationals also stereotype expatriates, often based on nationality, which can lead to social exclusion, a greater perceived cultural distance, and ultimately, poor knowledge transfer.¹⁹ This dynamic of mutual stereotyping creates a tense and challenging interpersonal environment. According to one study, such tensions were a direct source of reduced self-confidence among Qatari mentees, further poisoning the mentoring relationship and hindering genuine development.¹⁸ Breaking down these preconceived notions is a critical, yet difficult, first step for any effective mentorship to begin.

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

Evaluating the effectiveness of expatriate-led mentorship under Qatarization requires moving beyond the manager's internal perceptions to assess the tangible outcomes of the mentoring process. The ultimate success of these relationships is measured by their ability to facilitate genuine knowledge transfer, cultivate leadership skills, and bridge the significant gaps in both technical competency and cultural understanding that exist in a highly diverse workforce. 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, including the pervasive influence of *wasta*, on the perceived value and effectiveness of formal development programs.

3.1 The Dynamics of Cross-Cultural Knowledge Transfer

At its core, mentorship is a process of knowledge transfer. Expatriate managers are viewed by their organizations as crucial vehicles for disseminating critical knowledge, spanning technical expertise, organizational routines, and corporate culture, from global headquarters to the local Qatari workforce.⁷ However, the path of this knowledge is fraught with cross-cultural complexities. The primary challenge lies in transferring

tacit knowledge, the intuitive, experience-based "know-how" that is difficult to codify, as opposed to *explicit* knowledge, which can be easily documented in manuals and procedures. The successful transfer of tacit knowledge depends almost entirely on the quality of the interpersonal relationship between mentor and mentee.

This relationship is profoundly influenced by differing cultural norms. Research on cross-cultural management in the Middle East consistently highlights significant variations in communication styles, perceptions of hierarchy, and the fundamental approach to building professional relationships.²³ A qualitative study in Qatar found that a mutually respectful and trusting relationship is the paramount factor for success, and that even a shared language or cultural background does not guarantee positive mentoring outcomes without it.¹⁸ Expatriate managers must therefore develop a high degree of cultural intelligence to navigate these differences effectively. Table 2 outlines several key cultural dimensions that can create friction and misunderstanding in the mentoring dyad.

Table 2: Key Cross-Cultural Dimensions and Their Impact on Mentoring in Qatar

Cultural Dimension	Typical Western Expatriate Approach (Low-Context)	Typical Qatari/GCC Approach (High-Context)	Potential Impact on Mentoring Relationship	Supporting Literature
Communication	Direct, explicit, task-focused. "Sandwiching" bad news is a technique, not a default.	Indirect, relational, face-saving is crucial. Meaning is derived from context. Silence can mean agreement.	Expat's direct feedback may be perceived as harsh or disrespectful. Mentee's indirectness may be perceived as lack of clarity or commitment.	²³
Hierarchy & Power Distance	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, hindering learning. Mentor may misinterpret	¹⁸

			deference as lack of initiative.	
Relationship vs. Task	Task-oriented. Build trust through competence and delivery.	Relationship-oriented. Trust must be established <i>before</i> business can be done effectively.	Expatriate may try to "get down to business" too quickly, appearing cold or untrustworthy. Mentee may prioritize social connection over immediate task completion.	19
Concept of Time	Monochronic: time is linear, deadlines are rigid.	Polychronic: time is flexible, relationships can take precedence over schedules. Use of "Inshalla" (God willing).	Expatriate may perceive missed deadlines as lack of discipline. Mentee may perceive the mentor's focus on punctuality as overly rigid and disrespectful of other priorities.	23

3.2 Bridging Critical Skills Gaps: A Sectoral Analysis

A primary objective of mentorship within the Qatarization framework is to address specific, identified skills gaps within the national workforce. These gaps are not uniform across the economy but vary by sector and occupational level. A recent and detailed policy brief by the

International Labour Organization (ILO) focusing on Qatar's financial sector provides a clear example.²⁶ The study found that while the sector is "top-heavy" with managers, there are notable skills gaps, particularly among administrative staff. For managers, the most essential and lacking skills included "Leadership & mentoring" itself, highlighting a cyclical challenge. For administrative staff, crucial gaps were identified in soft skills such as "Time management" and "Communication & relationship building".²⁶

These findings underscore the critical role of on-the-job mentorship. While formal education can provide foundational knowledge, it is the day-to-day guidance from an experienced expatriate manager that can effectively transfer the nuanced skills of leadership, professional communication, and effective time management in a corporate context. The government's Third National Development Strategy (2024-2030) acknowledges this imperative, prioritizing the alignment of educational outputs with the specific needs of the labor market and launching initiatives to bridge these identified skills gaps.³ In this strategic vision, the expatriate mentor is the designated agent for translating policy into practice at the individual employee level.

3.3 Cultivating the Next Generation of Qatari Leaders

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 in the future.⁴ This ambition elevates the function of mentorship beyond simple training to encompass a more holistic developmental process that includes coaching, sponsorship, and role modeling.⁷

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.⁹ These programs, often delivered in collaboration with world-renowned academic institutions, provide theoretical knowledge in areas like strategic thinking, change management, and institutional innovation.⁹

The role of the expatriate manager is to act as the crucial link between this formal, classroom-based learning and its real-world application. A mentor in this capacity is expected to provide their Qatari mentee with opportunities to lead projects, navigate complex organizational politics, participate in strategic decision-making, and gain visibility with senior leadership. This is the essence of sponsorship, actively advocating for a protégé's advancement. However, the effectiveness of this crucial function is often severely constrained by the challenges of trust, job security, and knowledge hoarding previously

discussed. Without a genuine commitment from the expatriate mentor to champion their mentee, the development of true leadership capabilities can be significantly stymied.

3.4 The Pervasive 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*. Translating loosely to "connections" or "influence," *wasta* is a deeply embedded socio-cultural practice where personal, familial, and tribal networks are leveraged to secure advantages, including jobs, promotions, and business opportunities.²⁷ Its impact on human resource management is pervasive, often creating a parallel system of career advancement that operates independently of, and sometimes in direct opposition to, formal meritocratic processes.²⁸

This presents a formidable challenge to the perceived legitimacy and effectiveness of formal mentorship programs. 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. *Wasta*, however, offers an alternative path where advancement is contingent on social capital rather than demonstrated performance.

This dynamic can actively delegitimize the mentorship process in the eyes of both the mentor and the mentee. For the expatriate manager, who is typically an outsider to the dense local networks where *wasta* operates ²⁸, the mentoring role can begin to feel performative and futile. They may invest significant time and effort in developing a mentee's skills, only to see career-defining opportunities awarded to others based on connections. This can lead to the perception that their developmental work is ultimately irrelevant to the mentee's actual career trajectory.

For the Qatari mentee, the incentive to fully engage in a demanding, skills-based development program may be diminished if they believe that cultivating their social network is a more reliable and efficient strategy for advancement. When an employee observes that promotions and desirable assignments are more effectively secured through who they know rather than what they know, the perceived value of the mentorship relationship plummets. In this way, *wasta* does not merely compete with formal mentorship; it has the potential to undermine its very foundation, shifting the perceived locus of control for career success away from individual development and toward network cultivation.

4. Feedback & 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 Strengthening the 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. Success is contingent on deliberate, structured, and well-supported corporate programs.⁷ Strategic HRM has a critical role to play in designing and implementing the necessary frameworks to facilitate effective mentorship.²² Leading companies in Qatar, particularly within the energy sector, have already demonstrated a commitment to this approach. Firms such as 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.¹² Shell Qatar explicitly states that achieving Qatarization goals requires the dedicated support of experienced expatriate staff to provide on-the-job coaching and mentoring.³¹ These examples provide a model for broader implementation across other sectors.

4.1.1 Designing and Implementing Formal, Culturally-Attuned Mentorship Programs

To be effective, mentorship cannot be an afterthought; it must be institutionalized. Organizations should move from informal assignments to creating structured programs with clear objectives and defined processes. This includes establishing clear guidelines on the roles and responsibilities of both mentor and mentee, implementing goal-setting frameworks like the Individual Development Plans (IDPs) used by QatarEnergy LNG¹³, and building in regular mechanisms for feedback, reflection, and formal evaluation.³⁰

Crucially, these programs must be designed with a high degree of cultural attunement. They must acknowledge and proactively address the potential for misunderstanding arising from the cultural differences outlined in Table 2. Program materials and mentor training should equip expatriates with an understanding of high-context communication, the importance of face-saving, differing perceptions of hierarchy, and the relational nature of Qatari business culture. This proactive approach can help prevent common points of friction and build a stronger foundation of trust.

4.1.2 The Critical Need for Pre-Departure and In-Country Cross-Cultural Competence Training

A recurring theme in the literature on expatriate management in the GCC is the significant deficiency in specific, relevant, and rigorous cross-cultural training (CCT).²⁰ This is a critical oversight, as studies show that expatriates who are not adequately prepared for the cultural context can experience job deprivation and poor adjustment, while those who receive CCT adjust more rapidly and effectively.³⁰

Organizations must invest in comprehensive CCT for expatriate managers, both before their arrival in Qatar and on an ongoing basis in-country. A wide range of corporate training providers offer specialized programs for expatriates in Qatar that focus on precisely the skills needed for effective mentorship.³² A typical curriculum should cover:

- **Foundations of Qatari Culture:** Including the role of Islamic tradition, family and community solidarity, and common values and behavioral patterns.
- **The Qatari Corporate World:** Understanding hierarchy, the importance of intermediaries and networking, and communication styles (both verbal and non-verbal).
- **Effective Management Techniques:** Focusing on prudence, active listening, providing feedback in a culturally sensitive manner, and encouraging initiative.
- **Navigating Social Norms:** Including an awareness of sensitive topics and practices like *wasta*.

By equipping expatriate managers with this cultural toolkit, organizations can significantly reduce the stress and misunderstanding that often derail mentoring relationships, allowing them to focus on the substantive work of skills development.

4.1.3 Aligning Incentives and Performance Management with Mentoring Objectives

Perhaps the most powerful lever available to corporations is the alignment of their performance management and reward systems with Qatarization objectives. The core conflict driving negative perceptions of mentoring is the structural paradox where developing a successor is perceived as a threat to one's own career. This conflict can be directly resolved by fundamentally altering the incentive structure.

The most critical policy change an organization can implement is to formally and transparently integrate the successful development of Qatari mentees into the key performance indicators (KPIs) of expatriate managers. 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 entire dynamic shifts. The task is no longer a peripheral, risky obligation but a central driver of their own professional success. 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. This single strategic move addresses the job security dilemma at its root and changes the fundamental perception of the mentoring role from a threat to a vital opportunity.

4.2 Governmental and Institutional Levers for Change

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. Qatar already possesses a diverse and growing landscape of public and private initiatives aimed at talent development and mentorship, as illustrated in Table 3. The key to maximizing their impact lies in greater integration, partnership, and the fostering of a national mentorship culture.

Table 3: A Comparative Framework of Public and Private Mentorship Initiatives in Qatar

Initiating Body	Program/Initiative	Target Audience	Key Features	Supporting Literature
Government/Public Sector	Qatar Leadership Centre (QLC)	Qatari professionals at various career stages	Three tracks (Rising, Government, Executive);	9

			collaboration with world-renowned institutions.	
	Ministry of Labour	Private Sector Employees	Nationalization plan focused on empowering Qatari professionals in priority sectors like education.	35
	Qatar National Library (QNL)	High school/university students, recent graduates	"Murshidi Program"; one-on-one mentorship from professionals in diverse fields (Medicine, Tech, Business, etc.).	11
	Digital Incubation Center (DIC)	Tech startups and entrepreneurs	Dedicated lead mentors, access to network of expert mentors in business, tech, marketing.	36
Energy Sector (Private/Semi-Private)	QatarEnergy LNG	National Graduates	National Graduate Development Program (NGDP) with structured	13

			Individual Development Plans (IDPs).	
	North Oil Company (NOC)	Qatari Graduates (Engineering, Science)	National Development Programme with role rotations, skilled mentors, and a steering committee.	12
	QAPCO	Qatari Nationals	Qatarization Program with training, guidance, and mentorship from experienced employees.	8
	Shell Qatar	Qatari Employees & Graduates	Structured talent management, on-the-job coaching, mentoring, international assignments.	31
Financial Sector	QFC Regulatory Authority	Qatari Graduates	"Al Masar" five-stage graduate programme with professional training,	38

			coaching, and staff mentoring.	
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4.2.1 Enhancing Public-Private Partnerships in Talent Development

The government can play a powerful role as a convener and facilitator, strengthening the links between its national-level programs and corporate mentorship initiatives. For example, graduates of the prestigious Qatar Leadership Centre programs could be formally paired with senior expatriate mentors in the private sector to ensure their strategic learning is immediately applied in a practical business context.

Furthermore, the state could create a formal "National Mentor Certification" program. Expatriate managers who successfully complete a rigorous, culturally-attuned "train-the-mentor" program and can demonstrate a track record of successfully developing Qatari talent could be awarded this certification. Such a credential, recognized by the Ministry of Labour, would be a valuable professional asset, signaling a manager's proven ability to operate effectively in the region and enhancing their attractiveness for future senior roles within Qatar and the broader GCC. This would create a powerful non-financial incentive that directly rewards excellence in mentoring.

4.2.2 Policy Recommendations for Fostering a National Mentorship Culture

Beyond specific programs, the government can shape the national conversation around talent development. This can be achieved by launching public awareness campaigns that celebrate success stories of mentorship under Qatarization, highlighting both the Qatari professionals who have risen to leadership roles and the expatriate mentors who guided them.

Additionally, the government could 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 like finance, technology, and healthcare. Establishing prestigious national awards for companies with best-in-class mentorship programs, measured by tangible outcomes such as the promotion of Qatari nationals into senior management, would create healthy competition and elevate the status of mentorship from a compliance activity to a mark of corporate excellence and national contribution.

5. Conclusion: Synthesizing Perceptions and Charting a Path Forward

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 of the available literature reveals that this perception is not arbitrary but 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 often conflicts with the rational instinct for professional self-preservation. This fundamental tension, if left unaddressed, 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. The subtle yet powerful dynamics of high-context communication, differing views on hierarchy, and the primacy of relational trust demand a high level of intercultural competence that many expatriates are not adequately prepared for. The parallel system of career advancement through *wasta* further complicates the landscape, creating the potential to delegitimize formal, merit-based development programs and breed cynicism among both mentors and mentees.

However, these challenges are not intractable. Charting a path forward requires a deliberate and dual approach that addresses the root causes of negative perceptions. At the corporate level, organizations must move beyond the passive assignment of mentors and build a robust strategic framework. This framework must include formal, culturally-attuned programs, mandatory and rigorous cross-cultural training, and, most critically, a realignment of performance management systems to explicitly and substantially reward successful mentorship. By making the development of Qatari talent a core KPI, companies can transform the role from a perceived threat into a clear opportunity for career advancement, thereby repairing the expatriate's psychological contract.

At the national level, the government must continue to act as a catalyst, strengthening the ecosystem of support through enhanced public-private partnerships and policies that foster a national culture of mentorship. By integrating corporate programs with national leadership initiatives and creating prestigious forms of recognition for both companies and individual mentors, the state can elevate the status of this crucial developmental activity.

Ultimately, the success of Qatarization hinges on transforming the expatriate manager from a temporary holder of expertise into an incentivized and empowered agent of national development. 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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