

## Enhancing nonprofit organizational capacity: A comparative analysis of an executive master's program in nonprofit management in Saudi Arabia



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### ABSTRACT

Nonprofit organizations (NPOs), currently numbering 10 million globally, play a pivotal role in addressing societal needs and promoting inclusivity in development and decision-making. This study delves into the realm of capacity building within NPOs through an examination of an executive master's program in nonprofit management at the University of Ha'il, Saudi Arabia. It scrutinizes program components, demographics, and student motivations, contrasting this distinctive Saudi and Arab context with established global experiences. This research underscores the strengths of the nonprofit sector, particularly its contributions to community service and job satisfaction. It suggests the potential expansion of such educational initiatives and advocates for increased female participation. Employing a descriptive research design and qualitative methods, the study offers a comprehensive analysis of program content, faculty, and student experiences. Through targeted interviews and specialized literature reviews, the research critically evaluates the program's design, implementation, and impact, informing future enhancements. Comparative analysis with prior research underscores the significance of the Executive Master's Program in Nonprofit Management in preparing professionals for Saudi Arabia's nonprofit sector. Non-financial motivations emerge as crucial in talent acquisition and retention, with key success factors revealed through program analysis, informing nonprofit management education regionally. The study's findings have profound implications for NPOs, policymakers, and educational institutions in Saudi Arabia. Emphasis is placed on strategies focusing on non-financial incentives and professional development. Moreover, the study serves as a blueprint for designing similar programs in neighboring countries, cultivating a dynamic nonprofit sector and a skilled workforce for positive social transformation. Recommendations include expanding nonprofit management education, promoting women's participation, addressing local challenges, integrating global best practices, and catering to diverse professional needs through scholarships, mentorship, and networking opportunities, fostering inclusivity within the sector.

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### 1. Introduction

The importance of nonprofit organizations (NPOs) is increasing, with approximately 10 million organizations globally (Slatten et al., 2021) NPOs play a crucial role in enhancing the quality of life in social and developmental areas by responding to the needs of various societal groups and involving them in the development and decision-making processes

(Matkarimova and Yunusova, 2022). These organizations exhibit greater flexibility in meeting diverse needs, particularly in underserved areas such as health, education, and environmental protection (Bartosova and Podhorska, 2021). As a result, NPOs represent a developing economic force, reflecting a "global association revolution" responding to new challenges that require supporting government and public institution policies (Salamon et al., 1999).

NPOs also play a critical role in employment and work, requiring human resource leadership and manpower in the field and acting as a job creation machine (Leete, 2006). The field of nonprofit management has become increasingly popular and respected, with specific academic programs

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developed to cater to it. Nonprofit management education has emerged as a significant factor in the professional development of managers and leaders of NPOs. Since the 1980s, these programs have experienced rapid growth, thanks to the efforts of researchers and the establishment of academic departments, centers, and programs, including those focused on philanthropy, the nonprofit sector, and civil society. As a result, undergraduate and graduate programs have emerged in various formats across the globe, responding to the demands of practitioners and the need for professionalization (Weber and Brunt, 2022).

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was not isolated from the development of the "Nonprofit Sector" in the world. According to the Saudi "General Authority for Statistics," the number of registered NPOs in the Kingdom has increased with a growth rate that reached 166% from its number in 2017 (2598). The Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of the nonprofit sector that serves the household reached 3.9 billion riyals. Moreover, the number of employees who are working for NPOs reached 72151, and the number of volunteers was 20811. The average weekly working hours are distributed as per the types of jobs in the nonprofit sector, and they are as follows: Full-Time Employee: 37.95, Part-Time Employee: 21.22, and Volunteer: 6.01. The average salary of employees working in the nonprofit sector reached 5796 Saudi riyals (GAS, 2018).

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has set a goal to enable NPOs to achieve greater impact as part of its strategic objectives in the Vision 2030 plan. To achieve this goal, modern administrative and accounting tools that prioritize transparency and sound governance are recommended. Kassem et al. (2021) found that NPO management faced several challenges that required a critical analysis of the sector and solutions to overcome them.

Furthermore, the King Khalid Foundation has made concrete efforts to launch academic programs in Saudi universities that offer specialization in the management of NPOs. This is expected to improve the quality and efficiency of the workforce in the sector. NCNPS's (2021) report on "NPOs Governance" also highlighted the need for manpower rehabilitation, professional development, and capacity building of leadership and employees to enhance the level of efficiency, professionalism, and effectiveness in NPO management.

The University of Ha'il launched the Executive Master Program in "NPOs Management" in the Academic Year 2020-2021, which was the first graduate program in the Arabic language that focused on the nonprofit sector in Saudi Arabia and the Arab region. This program aimed to align with the global trend of specialized academic programs and contribute to building capacity in the nonprofit sector. This study intends to analyze the program's content and examine the students' characteristics, and motivations for enrolling in the program. This initiative serves as a model for capacity building in the nonprofit sector that has been adopted in several

countries worldwide and is gradually gaining momentum in the Arab region and the Middle East.

## 2. Literature review

NPOs which are also known as civil society and non-governmental organizations (CSOs; NGOs) and numerous other designations depending on the context. These private, voluntary organizations are self-governed and legally required to apply surplus ("profit") to the pursuit of their mission rather than distributing it to members, officers, or directors" (Toepler and Anheier, 2020).

There are multiple definitions of 'NPOs,' and the Department of Economic and Social Affairs Statistic Division suggested in the U.N. a definition that is represented as: "Nonprofit institutions (NPIs) are legal or social entities created for the purpose of producing goods and services whose status does not permit them to be a source of income, profit, or other financial gain for the units that establish, control, or finance them" (UN, 2003).

These organizations work in various areas. There are ten sub-sectors within the nonprofit sector, including Arts, Culture, Humanities, Education, Environment, and Animals; Health; Human Services; International, Foreign Affairs; Public, Societal Benefit; Religion Related; Mutual/Membership Benefit; Unknown, Unclassified" (Bezboruah and Carpenter, 2020).

These organizations are distinguished from others by their volunteer and nonprofit character, nature of financing, tax systems, and human resources. Their size, formation, financing, and development differ according to their social origins, i.e., the wide social, political, and economic relations that surround them, the pattern of class relationships, and the nature of the relationship of the country with the community (Salamon and Anheier, 1998).

These NPOs are active in areas that do not attract the attention of the government, and at the same time, they are not areas in which the private sector can have any interest. Among the special traits of NPOs is the importance of human capital, as they mostly rely on volunteers and need to implement all elements of management (Organizing, Managing, Control, and Evaluating) to develop their identity, improve their performance, and achieve their objectives (Kicová, 2020).

NPOs have gained a crucial position in contemporary economies and have become the third sector that works efficiently apart from the government and private sectors. These organizations are relied upon to solve many problems related to development and ensure emergency interventions, which are difficult for the administration of public affairs in its official forms to deal with effectively. This demonstrates the fact that the nonprofit sector occupies a strategic position. Additionally, scientific research in this field has grown in popularity over the last four decades. The scientific research has crossed the theoretical foundation, and from the

beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it began to focus on aspects of developing the management of this sector through strategic management, processes of strategic decision-making, strategic management of human resources, and organizational management (Laurett and Ferreira, 2018).

From the above aspects, the concept of "organizational capacities of the nonprofit sector, emerged which is represented in providing the leadership and employees with the skills and tools necessary to analyze the problems and find a successful solution (Despard, 2017). This can be done through a methodology based on the following three Factors:

- 1)"Type of capacity" refers to the nature or domain of the capacity being developed or evaluated.
- 2)"Stage of capacity" refers to the maturity or progress of the capacity being developed or evaluated.
- 3)"Level of capacity" refers to the different dimensions or components of capacity that can be developed or assessed (Zhang et al., 2017).

In this context, there is no doubt that the development of financial capabilities for nonprofit institutions is linked to the efficiency and skill of their managers and employees (Potluka et al., 2017), as well as their success in developing nonprofit collaboration with other organizations to find solutions to the shortage of paid staff, especially in small organizations (Kim and Peng, 2018; Jones et al., 2017).

Organizational capacity is part of a larger field called "nonprofit capacities." This refers to the total number of people, operations, and practices that an organization has access to so that it can do its work and reach its goals. They are shown in (1) financial management; (2) adaptive capacity; (3) strategic planning; (4) external communication; (5) board leadership; (6) operational capacity; (7) mission orientation; and (8) staff management (Shumate et al., 2017).

Human Resource Management is considered an important field in the work of NPOs because the employees who work there are pillars of success in achieving objectives. In fact, they are different from their peers who work in profitable organizations and companies in terms of tasks, objectives, organization, work mechanisms, nature of relationships, and training, as they are a combination of the administrative dimension and the dimension of commitment to a charitable and humanitarian message (Rosnerova and Hraskova, 2020).

Despite the lack of knowledge and data about the topic of 'Nonprofit Human Resources' (Cooper et al., 2020), a lot has been written about it during the past decade in the context of concern for social capital and its importance in achieving the objectives of the nonprofit sector. The concept of 'Strategic Human Resource Management' has emerged (Baluch and Ridder, 2021), and researchers have shed light on the importance of "volunteer leadership

development" with the aim of improving the level of efficiency and skills of volunteers (Alizadeh et al., 2021). This is not far from the increasing attention given by research to the concept of "Organizational Citizenship Behavior," considering that the cultural dimension and social behavior are among the most important dimensions of 'Human Resources Development' (Rurkkhum and Bartlett, 2018).

Also, there is a pressing need to conduct periodic evaluations of the capacities of Board Members in NPOs and the extent of the efficiency of their individual and group participation in governance and decision-making processes, and thus the extent of their success in providing "added value" to their organizations. Some studies mentioned that more training and orientation opportunities should be provided in the following fields: mission, strategy, funding, and public image; board composition; program oversight; financial oversight; CEO oversight; board structure; and meetings, in addition to the importance of providing the job description of each position or vacant job (Millesen and Carman, 2019).

On the other side, some experimental research stressed the importance of "shared leadership" of NPOs through developing supportive environmental factors, i.e., mindsets, cultures, practices, operations, roles, and structures, which can enhance the climate of psychological empowerment, confidence, safety, and a common objective. From here, these researchers recommend developing strategies to build the capacities of the leadership of NPOs and including them in the curriculum of Nonprofit Management Education (Freund, 2017). Also, the researchers designed a standard for the practices of human resources management in NPOs and analyzed its effect on the job satisfaction of the employees who work there, using a set of variables related to the psychological requirements, active work, development potentials, social relationships, leadership, and the degree to which the organization is consistent with its principles (Bastida et al., 2018).

Since the main job of NPOs is to find innovative solutions for complicated problems in various fields, it became imperative for the human resources working there to fulfill some conditions, such as the ability to create an atmosphere of innovation and strengthen the culture of creativity through providing factors including The availability of job flexibility, work motivation, financial motivation, the quality and reputation of the organization, and the importance placed on work are all factors that affect employee satisfaction. (Ronquillo et al., 2021).

Even though the nonprofit sector has become more important, it still faces significant challenges in terms of human resources due to the growing need for social services and the emergence of new needs during crises. According to the findings, organizations in this sector have difficulty attracting and retaining highly skilled leaders. Leadership development training has emerged as a key strategy to create a group of qualified leaders capable of addressing structural and organizational challenges

faced by civil society organizations, playing a decisive role in building nonprofit capacities by expanding individual and group capacity equally (Ivanovska, 2022).

Today, there is a consensus on the importance of developing administrative knowledge, governance skills, and nonprofit management. This has led to an increase in academic programs for the nonprofit sector, with more students pursuing bachelor's, master's, and Ph.D. programs globally (Toepler and Anheier, 2020). The scope of graduate studies and diplomas has also expanded in many countries, and the experiences and methodologies have diversified to form an important asset known as "civil society education" and "nonprofit management education" (Mirabella et al., 2015). As early as the mid-1990s, there was a significant increase in the number of colleges and universities in the United States offering programs to teach managers of NPOs (Mirabella, 2007).

The database of "nonprofit management education" collected by Mirabella (2007) showed that 343 schools or universities have offered "sessions" for the NPS since 2018, 251 of them offer sessions at the graduate level, and 144 of them offer sessions at the undergraduate level (Brunt et al., 2020). In the field of graduate studies, academic scientific research has witnessed remarkable growth over the past decades and covered various themes. An analytical study highlighted the increase in the number of theses and research conducted on graduate studies in the "nonprofit sector" since 1986, with 80.2% of them done in the United States of America. The topics were distributed along five axes of interest, which are: (a) resources (human and financial); (b) organizational effectiveness and performance; (c) organization development (context, processes, and culture); (d) intra-organizational context (leadership, structure, etc.); and (e) interaction and collaboration (with other organizations, government, etc.). Findings demonstrate an emerging interdisciplinary field in the study of the formal nonprofit sector (Shier and Handy, 2014).

Ott and Dicke (2021) indicated that in the year 2019, the number of research and Ph.D. theses crossed 53,500, the number of books published in English reached 24,400, and the number of peer-reviewed research papers published in academic journals reached 313,200. Also, the number of universities that offer programs in the "nonprofit sector" increased from 17 in the year 1990 to 218 in the year 2016. These institutions and programs are characterized by a variety of contents, which include traditional academic courses in social sciences and humanities, in addition to specialized programs for the following degrees: MPA (Master of Public Affairs Administration), MPP (Masters of Public Policy), MBA (Masters of Business Administration), and MSW (Masters of Social Work) degrees (Ott and Dicke, 2021).

With the increasing demand for nonprofit management education, new program offerings

increased, and while the longitudinal data follows the development of postgraduate programs in NPME, its curricula, and its statutes, we know little about the course of undergraduate programs (Weber and Burunt, 2020).

Over the past three decades, the development of the nonprofit sector has been driven by professionalization (a focus on practitioners) and academicization (a focus on a scholarly or academic field). "The interplay, although not without tension, has facilitated the development of graduate education, as the research and professionalizing impetus naturally focus on graduate students because practitioners in the field tend to already possess bachelor's degrees" (Brunt et al., 2020).

Saudi scientific research, despite its limitations, was not isolated from these global interests. The latest peer-reviewed research published in English has addressed the importance of this sector, especially as it enjoys a special status in the country's public policies and represents one of the main goals of Saudi Vision 2030. In this context, Barhem and Alwehabie (2013) addressed the topic of strategic planning in NPOs in Saudi Arabia and recommended the necessity of enacting legislation and approving auditing and review systems, as well as striving to build a solid institutional base for strategic planning (Barhem and Alwehabie, 2013).

Other researchers have looked at how organizational innovation affects the effectiveness of nonprofits in Saudi Arabia. Al-Shammari et al. (2014) looked at the two parts of organizational innovation—the innovative process and innovative learning—and how they can be used to predict how well an organization will do.

Other studies, on the other hand, have looked at organizational culture and how it affects NPOs. They have clarified that the critical success factors in the culture of continuous improvement include effective leadership, proactive teams, teamwork, and employee empowerment. They emphasized that "an organization can empower its employees through training, development, motivation, and encouraging employee participation. Training and development ensure that employees are prepared and ready to take on the broader tasks or activities of the Continuous Improvement initiative" (Almaiman and McLaughlin, 2016). Moreover, Saudi scholars have directed their research endeavors toward the examination of partnerships forged between charitable organizations and stakeholders within the realm of development cooperation. They have underscored the paramount significance of the governance model's efficacy implemented within such partnerships (Kassem et al., 2020).

Khan (2020) looked at how the nonprofit sector in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is becoming more professional, which means moving from a volunteer model to a paid employee model. The study focused on how important it is for the government to help the sector so that it can continue to contribute to the national economy. The topic of human resources in the Saudi Arabian nonprofit sector has received

increasing attention in recent studies. [Alsaif et al. \(2022\)](#) conducted research on a sample of 201 nonprofit sector employees in Saudi Arabia using a questionnaire to examine awareness of important HR practices such as work design, human resources planning, polarization, selection, training and development, motivation, performance evaluation, and job satisfaction. The researchers found that employees in Saudi NPOs have a positive view of adopting these practices, and emphasized the importance of incentives as a critical HR practice for NPOs in Saudi Arabia to motivate employees and improve their performance.

Within the same scope of scholarly interest regarding human resources in the Saudi nonprofit sector, additional researchers have encapsulated the challenges inherent in this domain. These challenges encompass the observation that a majority of personnel within Saudi NPOs lack specialization within their respective fields or functions. Moreover, a dearth of comprehensive training programs for professional development within NPOs has been noted. Furthermore, numerous NPOs contend with constraints related to limited financial resources and inadequate financial management proficiency. There is also a notable absence of robust governance structures, as well as a limited familiarity with, and experience in, strategic planning and the execution of strategic initiatives ([Salih and Dolah, 2023](#)).

Based on this literature review, it becomes clear to us the importance of human resources in the work of NPOs and the urgent need to improve the performance of these resources through education in the nonprofit management sector. While we have a relative knowledge of the types of academic programs in the nonprofit sector, the institutions that offer them, and the certificates they grant, our knowledge is still limited regarding the demographic characteristics of students studying in these academic programs, program features, and factors affecting the decision to continue education ([Wilson and Larson, 2002](#)). Given that the Executive Master's program in NPO Management at Ha'il University represents the inaugural initiative of its kind in the Arabic-speaking Kingdom and, by extension, the broader Arab region, there exists a scholarly imperative to comprehensively examine this program. This examination should encompass an exploration of its pedagogical content, an investigation into the overarching profile of its enrolled student body, and, notably, a rigorous inquiry into the motivating factors that led these individuals to enroll in this program.

### 3. Methodology

This is descriptive research that relies on the qualitative approach. It employs the content analysis tool and the interview tool. The research material consists of:

- A document file that includes a description of the master's program and the courses it contains, as

well as 14 resumes of faculty members who taught during the academic year 2022–2023.

- Conducting interviews with 15 registered and attending students in the second year and 14 registered students in the first year.
- Conducting an interview with the initiator of the program.
- Interviewing the program's academic advisor.

The research deals with a new initiative that is unique of its kind in the local and regional Arab environment but still didn't go the distance that is necessary for evaluation and comparison. That is why the work was descriptive for the documentation of the experience from a scientific perspective and the extraction of some general indicators that contribute to understanding the development of the 'Nonprofit Sector' and its effort towards 'professionalism' in the countries that witness rapid social change

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Program specification: Executive master program

The Executive Master of NPOs Management program was launched in the academic year 2020/2021 at the College of Business Administration at Ha'il University for the benefit of bachelor's degree holders. Annual fees are required for enrollment in the program, which lasts for four academic semesters, with the final semester dedicated to preparing a graduation research project. The official motivations for creating this program can be classified as:

1. Developmental policy: The program contributes to achieving the goal of empowering the nonprofit sector as included in the Saudi Arabia Vision 2030 strategy.
2. Academic: There were no similar programs at the higher education level in the Arabic language in the Gulf and Arab region.
3. Nonprofit sector needs: The program meets the demand for specialized and qualified professionals with knowledge and skills.

The program objectives are:

1. To train qualified graduates to manage the nonprofit sector and develop their professional competencies based on the best global practices.
2. To provide an opportunity for graduates and nonprofit sector workers to develop their skills and knowledge in NPOs management.

The program targets a range of professions within the nonprofit sector in the following fields:

1. NPO leaders (board members, executive directors).

2. Sector managers: Development, quality and innovation, financial and accounting management, human resources, developmental and social projects, donor relations, awareness and social services, and volunteer management.

#### 4.2. Content of teaching

It provides basic knowledge on the axes of interest through 13 compulsory courses with 36 credit hours, which are listed in [Table 1](#).

**Table 1: Study courses**

Level	Courses
1	The foundations of "NPO management" Methods of research Management of NPOs governance
2	Marketing management in "management of NPOs" Management of human resources in NPOs Development of financial resources
3	Entrepreneurship and social innovation Accounting standards for NPOs Leadership in NPOs
4	Volunteers management Management information systems in NPOS Development projects management
5	Specialized readings in 'nonprofit sector'
6	Graduation project

#### 4.3. Faculty members in the executive master's program in NPO management

The number of faculty members in the academic year (22/2023) reached 14 teachers, distributed across the following specialties: Business administration (four), technology management (one), higher education administration (one), accounting (one), organization, work, and technology (one), executive leadership (one), industrial engineering (two), financial grants (one), and statistics (two). Out of the 14 faculty members, 13 hold a Ph.D. from Western universities, such as the United Kingdom and the United States, as well as Malaysia and China. One faculty member obtained a master's degree in statistics from King Saud University. Most of the faculty members are Saudi nationals, and two are Arab expats. There are two faculty members who own private establishments specializing in training and research; one faculty member manages a NPO; and four faculty members are involved in nonprofit sector activities. Among the faculty members, there are two associate professors and nine assistant professors.

#### 4.4. The students in the executive master's program in NPO management

Interviews were conducted with 29 Master's students during the academic year 2022–2023 (14 students in the first year and 15 students in the second year). The students' distribution was as follows:

- Students by gender: All students are male, with a percentage of 100%.

- Students by age: Most students are young, with a percentage of 52% between 24 and 30 years old, 38% between 31 and 40 years old, and 10% above 40 years old.
- Students by place of residence: The majority of students come from outside the Ha'il region, with a percentage of 90%, while only 10% are from the Ha'il region.
- Students by academic major (bachelor's degree): The highest percentage of students are from the religious and Sharia major (41.4%), followed by business administration (24.2%), engineering and computer science (17.2%), literature (10.4%), and finally science (6.8%).
- Students by profession: All students have professional activity. They primarily work for NPOs (72.4%), then in the education sector (13.8%), the private sector (10.4%), and finally the government sector (3.4%).
- Students by years of professional experience: The largest percentage of students have short experience of no more than 4 years (38%). While the percentages of those with experience between 5 and 10 years (20.7%) and those with experience between 11 and 15 years (20.7%) are close, they are followed by those with experience between 16 and 20 years (6.9%) and those with experience exceeding 20 years (13.7%).
- Students by funding source for their master's studies: Donor organizations from the nonprofit sector cover the tuition fees for slightly more than half of the students (51.7%). The percentage of self-funded students is 27.6%, while 20.7% pay for their studies through both self-funding and donor funding.
- Students by activity in the nonprofit sector and volunteering: All students have a close relationship with the nonprofit sector since all of them volunteer and take part in civil society associations.

To address this point, the following aspects will be discussed.

##### 4.4.1. Motivations for working in the nonprofit sector

The motives for choosing to work in the nonprofit sector among students can be divided into three groups based on statistical importance.

1. The first group consists of idealistic and moral motives, with community service, volunteering, and charity work being the most important motives for students to work in the nonprofit sector, followed closely by self-improvement and the search for innovation and creativity, and finally, the presence of a better work climate.
2. The second group consists of motives related to social reputation and professional status, with the search for social reputation ranking fifth out of 11 motives and promotion and professional status ranking sixth.

3. The third group consists of material motives, which rank at the bottom of the overall list of motives, with salary ranking second to last,

followed by the motive of not being able to find work in the government or private sector (Table 2).

**Table 2: Motivations for choosing to work in the nonprofit sector**

Motivation	Very weak 1	Weak 2	Average 3	High 4	Very high 5	Weighted mean	Order
Community service, voluntary work, charitable work	-	-	2	5	22	4.69	1
Self-development	-	-	2	12	15	4.45	2
Creativity and Innovation	1	-	1	11	16	4.41	3
Better work environment	-	1	7	3	18	4.31	4
Achieving a good social reputation	3	1	8	8	9	3.66	5
Promotion and professional position	5	8	6	5	5	2.90	6
There is good salary and more financial incentives in 'Nonprofit Sector'	6	10	7	6	-	2.45	7
Did not get a job in other sectors (government or private)	19	7	2	1	-	1.48	8

**4.4.2. Motivations to enrol in executive master of NPOs management**

The motives of students to enroll in a Master's program can be classified into two categories according to their statistical significance: In the first category, self-development professionally and academically, developing competencies and skills was ranked as the top motive, followed by seeking

knowledge, enhancing their resumes, and achieving high academic positions. In the second category, practical and material motives, the motive of professional promotion held a less significant position, followed by searching for another job in the nonprofit sector. The lowest-ranked motive was receiving a scholarship from the institution where the student is employed (Table 3).

**Table 3: Motivations for enrolling in executive master's in nonprofit organizational management**

Motivation	Very weak 1	Weak 2	Average 3	High 4	Very high 5	Weighted mean	Order
Development of competence and skills	-	-	-	5	24	4.83	1
Seeking knowledge	-	-	2	5	22	4.69	2
Enriching CV	-	1	1	6	21	4.62	3
Getting a high academic position	1	-	3	5	20	4.48	4
Getting professional promotion	9	1	6	5	8	3.07	5
Getting another job in 'nonprofit sector'	9	1	9	6	4	2.83	6
I got a scholarship from the institution I work in	22	2	2	1	2	1.59	7

**4.4.3. Students' perceptions of the nonprofit sector in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia**

Students' perceptions of the "nonprofit sector" in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia can be classified into three categories based on their statistical importance:

1. First category: Exemplary image: Students have an exemplary image in their minds about the "nonprofit sector," as a job that serves the community without achieving material objectives occupies the first position. This is followed by the job providing work and investment opportunities.
2. Second category: Lack of resources: Students think that the nonprofit sector lacks "trained management competencies," which occupies the first position, followed by a lack of financial resources and a lack of support from the private sector for NPOs. These two aspects are equally ranked with the "weakness in renewal and innovation" in the work of the sector.
3. Third category: Insufficient evaluation of societal aspects: The aspect "there is weakness in the culture of participation in society" is ranked highest in the students' evaluation, followed by "lack of job security" in the nonprofit sector. The search for leadership for social prestige and the

lack of standards of governance and good management" in the sector occupy the last two positions (Table 4).

**5. Results and discussion**

The research findings showed that the Executive Master of NPOs Management program was established due to an academic group's recognition of the significance of the "nonprofit sector" in community development, the need to support the sector by providing necessary human resources, and the role of universities in this field. The program was initiated by a nonprofit donation forum called "Donor," which is regularly hosted in the Ha'il region. One of the faculty members, who was also a consultant at a charitable organization, coordinated the projects and enlisted the help of a second faculty member from a large university in Riyadh, who was an expert in the "nonprofit sector," and hired him as a scientific consultant. However, according to an interview with the scientific consultant of the program, the project related to the Master of NPOs Management was presented to major universities in regions with many NPOs but failed due to administrative reasons.

**Table 4:** Students' perceptions of the nonprofit sector in the kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Motivation	Very weak 1	Weak 2	Average 3	High 4	Very high 5	Weighted mean	Order
Community service without gaining profits	2	2	7	4	14	3.90	1
Providing job opportunities	-	2	8	10	9	3.90	1
Providing investment opportunities	3	2	11	6	7	3.41	2
Lack of trained management competencies	3	4	8	10	4	3.28	3
Lack of necessary material possibilities	5	4	11	4	5	3.00	4
Lack of support by private sector	6	7	9	4	3	2.69	5
Lack of renewal and innovation	7	5	10	4	3	2.69	5
Weakness in the culture of 'participation' in the society	7	5	10	5	2	2.66	6
Weak job security	7	7	8	4	3	2.62	7
Getting social prestige for 'Nonprofit Leaderships'	8	10	6	3	2	2.34	8
Weakness in commitment to the standards of governance	22	5	1	1	-	1.34	9

This conclusion is in line with what [Weber and Brunt \(2022\)](#) said about how new scientific fields appear when researchers in higher education formalize unofficial research communities. According to the theory of "Scientific Intellectual Movements" (SIMs), SIMs arise "when scholars and/or practitioners are dissatisfied with practices or expectations in a field or set of fields, structural conditions ensure access to key resources (employment, intellectual prestige, and organizational resources), micro mobilization contexts (conferences, research retreats, and academic departments) exist, and there is a developing intellectual identity" ([Weber and Brunt, 2022](#)).

Concerning the content of the "Study Program," it was found that 54% of the courses are about practical management (marketing, governance, finance, human resources, accounting, and information systems), while 15.3% of the courses are about development and social issues (volunteer management, development projects). 15.3% of the total is spent on courses that help students develop their skills (like entrepreneurship, social innovation, and leadership). The same amount is spent on courses that teach research methods and theoretical readings in the "nonprofit field." [NACC's \(2015\)](#) publications show that this program is in line with the general trends that many other programs at universities around the world follow.

Research results showed that the students who enroll in the Executive Master of NPOs Management program are male, recent graduates, engaged in various professional activities, and have a range of experience levels between low and medium. Furthermore, most of these students are from areas outside of the region where the program is offered, resulting in a need for long-distance travel and accommodation during their studies. Despite receiving support from donors, a significant portion of students still have to bear some of the costs associated with their education, including tuition fees, transportation expenses, and living arrangements. These characteristics suggest that students possess a strong desire to specialize in the nonprofit sector, in addition to their prior experience working in and volunteering in this field. Moreover, the student's initial academic specialization seems to play a role in their decision

to pursue the Executive Master of NPOs Management, with 41.4% of students possessing a religious background.

The results of the study also shed light on the key motivations driving students to pursue a career in the nonprofit sector and enroll in the Executive Master of NPOs Management program. Idealistic and moral motives, such as community service, creativity, and innovation, were the primary motivations cited by students, followed by a desire for self-development both academically and practically. While material motives such as salary and professional advancement were secondary, they were still part of a broader idealistic framework that students held regarding the nonprofit sector's role in serving the community and its developmental potential.

These results are consistent with previous research highlighting the importance of non-utilitarian incentives in encouraging employees to choose work in the nonprofit sector ([Alonso and Lewis, 2001](#)). These motivations include unselfish components such as loyalty, identification, and good-spirited cooperation ([Vandenabeele et al., 2014](#)). While motivations towards work may involve salary, material benefits, and experience, they also involve high goals, desire, and equity ([Rexhaj, 2011](#)). Additionally, personal factors such as self-development and skill acquisition are more important than economic factors, as the desire for promotion with the current employer did not have a significant impact ([Wilson and Larson, 2002](#)).

Research on doctoral students who tend to lean towards jobs in the government and nonprofit sectors, rather than the private sector, showed that they possess distinctive personal traits and care about public affairs, while they do not place much importance on the uncertainty of career prospects ([Li and Horta, 2022](#)). Other research indicates similarities among students enrolled in various graduate programs in the nonprofit sector (i.e., nonprofit management and philanthropic studies), and the main motivator that attracts them to these programs is their nonprofit nature ([Kuenzi et al., 2020](#)). Furthermore, other researchers have highlighted the importance of service learning in instilling altruistic factors among leaders and employees ([Basinger and Bartholomew, 2006](#)). As other research shown, which focused on the motives



for choosing graduate studies in the nonprofit sector, "public service motivation" (PSM) is an important incentive that means social motives, values, and individual readiness for social solidarity behavior regardless of location or place (Bozeman and Su, 2015); thus, the nonprofit sector represents the best field for these students to embody altruistic values, commitment to the public good, empathy, and self-sacrifice. Therefore, public service motivation is one of the important motives behind choosing to work in NPOs (Ward and Miller-Stevens, 2021).

While there are multiple theories and approaches to the subject of motivation for working in the nonprofit sector, it can be said that "it is possible that the existing motivation theories can be applied to the nonprofit sector, but as we have indicated, these theories may be adapted, extended, or even reformulated in several ways given the specific nonprofit constraints" (Schepers et al., 2005). For example, Perry (2000) proposed a process theory of PSM that identified a system of interconnected social, educational, cultural, and work environment contexts, mainly consisting of motivational context, organizational characteristics, individual characteristics, and self-regulatory processes and behaviors.

Beghetto (2004) clarified that one of the most important areas of research in motivational beliefs for students is to explore achievement goal orientations, which define commitment or avoidance behavior. These goals ultimately serve as a basis for how students define their own competence. These goal orientations can be divided into two main patterns: mastery-approach goals and performance-approach goals.

From these perspectives, it can be concluded that human resource management practices and organizational behaviors have a clear influence on levels of job satisfaction, which can be defined as "a pleasurable or positive emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one's job or job experiences" (Andjarwati et al., 2019). Its basic levels include recruitment, selection, training, development, and performance.

This research focuses on a new experience in the field of higher education specializing in nonprofit sector management. This unique experience in the Saudi and Arab context, though difficult to compare with the established global experiences that have been around for over four decades, highlights the importance of the motivations that drive students to enroll in this new academic track. The conclusions drawn confirm that the sector's strength lies in its nonprofit nature, passion for serving the community, achieving job satisfaction, and the subsequent psychological well-being that may be missing in other work areas. This research opens up prospects for further exploration of issues related to the feasibility of expanding education in nonprofit sector management to undergraduate levels or within the framework of community service programs in Saudi universities. It also raises the issue of developing women's participation in such programs to keep up

with their increasing role in the public and civil society.

The study focused on a novel experience in the realm of higher education, specifically Nonprofit Sector Management. This program is a distinctive undertaking within Saudi Arabia and the Arab region. While it is challenging to compare with international experiences established four decades prior, it is crucial to highlight the importance of motives that encourage students to pursue this academic path. The study's findings underscore the nonprofit nature of the sector, dedication to community service, job satisfaction, and psychological fulfillment, which may not exist in other work sectors. The research opens up possibilities for further investigation into the feasibility of expanding education in Nonprofit Sector Management, potentially offering bachelor's degrees or incorporating training courses into community service programs at Saudi universities. Additionally, the study raises the topic of women's participation in such programs, aligning with their current roles in public affairs and civil society.

The study has important implications for the nonprofit sector in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The results of the study show that the Executive Master Program in Nonprofit Management is an important part of building the capacity of NPOs and keeping up with the strategic trends of the sector. This local experience could be valuable for other countries in the region that face similar challenges. The study shows how important nonprofit motives are for encouraging good work practices in the nonprofit sector and public service. It also shows how important it is for NPOs to build the skills and professionalism of their employees. The results of this study can help policymakers and leaders of nonprofits decide how to improve their staff's skills and build their organizations' capacity.

This study has some limitations that need to be acknowledged. First, the study's sample size was relatively small, consisting of only a group of students enrolled in the program during the academic year 2022–2023. Therefore, the results may not be generalizable to other populations.

Second, the study's focus on the motives of students may have limited the analysis of other factors that affect capacity-building in the nonprofit sector. Finally, the study's reliance on self-reported data may have introduced some bias into the results. Further research is needed to address these limitations and provide a more comprehensive understanding of the factors that contribute to nonprofit capacity-building in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

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## Compliance with ethical standards

## Conflict of interest

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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