

Views on the “Knowledge Economy Project” of the Arabian Gulf: A Gender Perspective from the UAE in Education and Management

Kasim Randeree, The British University in Dubai, Dubai, UNITED ARAB EMIRATES
Eman Gaad, The British University in Dubai, Dubai, UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

Abstract: This paper investigates the UAE as potentially a successful model for change in the Arabian Gulf region, in issues pertaining to women in education and the necessity for the full participation of women in the workforce and at managerial level in the developing knowledge-based economy. The purpose of the paper is to gauge the opinions and biases of the educated Emirati regarding prevalent gender related issues through qualitative research. The paper focuses on the views of young Emirati men and women on the present and future role of women in Emirati society. The research indicates that in order for K-economies in the region to succeed, they must utilise their entire human resource and encourage increased participation of Arab women in the workplace and their recruitment into senior management levels within organisations. The implications of the research are that there are a number of challenges facing Emirati society and by implication the Arabian Gulf region, which need to be addressed if change and advancement envisaged by the region is to be realised.

Keywords: Knowledge-Economy, United Arab Emirates (UAE), Management, Education

Introduction

THE UNITED ARAB Emirates (UAE) is located at the southern tip of the Arabian Gulf and has three neighbouring countries - Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the Sultanate of Oman. The total area of the UAE is 83,600 km² and it has a tropical desert climate with very little or no rainfall. It is governed by a federal system founded on the 2nd of December 1971. The union is formed of seven emirates: Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah, Ajman, Umm al-Quwain, Ras al-Khaimah and Fujairah, with Abu Dhabi city as its capital (Camerapix, 1998).

The discovery of crude oil and its commercial production in the UAE created a new economic situation that was reflected in the availability of substantial financial resources on one hand, and the investment of such resources by the government for development on the other (Khan 2005). The country has emerged into the mainstream of modernism over the past 40 years, with an economy driven by oil and gas and more recently tourism. The population has been directly influenced by the rapid development witnessed by the country in recent years.

The Emirates are settled by a diversity of cultural groups. In addition to UAE nationals, there are various Arab groups as well as Iranians, Filipinos, Indians and large numbers of Europeans and Americans. These are all known as expatriates or abbreviated at expats (Gaad, 2006).

Though politically new as a country, the UAE is steeped in history and culture. It has enshrined for men and women, both in its Constitution and through

the commitment of the rulers of the various Emirates, the rights and opportunities for education and advancement in any sphere of endeavour (Randeree (a), 2006).

Over two thirds of university graduates in the UAE are women. However, they account for less than 12% of the entire workforce. Furthermore, if the number of employees in the areas of Health and Education were removed, the figure would be substantially less. What is worse is that very few of those who make it to the labour market, make it to the boardrooms or upper echelons of leadership and management.

It is therefore essential to raise the profile of these issues in the region and set a broad agenda for change. A clear understanding of the issues pertaining to gender and management is needed and, importantly, findings need to be disseminated appropriately to encourage best practice in the workplace. In addition, awareness of these issues in a broad societal context needs to be achieved through programs that engage the public at large and stimulate discourse regarding the issues (Cassell, 1997).

Middle East economies generally lag behind global competitors in part because the vast resource of female talent remains untapped. There are therefore many challenges facing the Arab world, the UAE and, by way of example, the city of Dubai. However, due to the advancement and liberal nature of Dubai in comparison to regional cities, the international community looks to Dubai as a model for a new, prosperous and sustainable 21st century Middle East.



Dubai is not without its difficulties, however, as it faces many challenges including future demographics, employment of its national workforce, sustainability issues, educational concerns, as well as diversity and gender problems. In truth, the active participation of women can help in alleviating many of Dubai's problems. The challenge for its rulers and people of power is to engage women in education and employment whilst still moving in step with advanced nations and respecting Arab and Islamic tradition.

Attitudes of women in the UAE are changing. Young women in Dubai are joining the workforce and the challenges they face are a source of much intrigue in the international media (BBC, 2005). Furthermore, women in Dubai are diversifying into sectors and activities not traditionally occupied by women. TV presenters, forensic scientists, Dot Com entrepreneurs, medical professionals and taxi drivers are amongst some of the wider professions where women are playing an active role. Consequently, this research therefore also gauges the sentiments of the next generation of managers and educationalists in gender issues relating to the needs and direction of the Middle East in the growing knowledge-economies.

Historical Perspective

There are distinctly four phases through which women and their participation within civil society has evolved through Gulf Arab history (Abdalla, 1996).

The first phase, known as running from the pre-Islamic era up to circa 1900 and was characterised by tribal disputes and the appropriation of water wells and grazing land as well as herding camels (Hourani, 1991). These activities clearly favour male physical abilities.

The second phase, circa 1500-1940, saw an expansion of trade with Europe and Asia and the beginning of seafaring and pearling, activities which were seen as incompatible with Islamic tradition in relation to the participation of women. These new trade links and commercial activities resulted in a movement to coastal inhabitation. These first two phases were characterised by the Bedouin values of family, honour, chastity and the seclusion of women. Participation of women in Arabian Gulf society outside household duties only went as far as agricultural activities, in so much as maintaining date palms and other agricultural produce as well as livestock. Women were especially dynamic in these activities during the absence of male members of the family, who were often away from home for several months at a time on fishing and pearling expeditions.

Historically, therefore, the participation of women outside of domestic duties in Arabian Gulf society was very limited in the pre-oil era. The third phase began during the 1940's and was thus characterised

by the discovery of oil and the first signs of the development of affluent society. This gave rise to education of women which began in earnest in Kuwait (Talhami, 2004) in 1937 and in Qatar in 1956. However, it was only after its formation in 1971 that the UAE began educational programmes which included women. Though oil wealth brought affluence, the absence of economic necessity meant households continued to be supported by the man. Thus, women had opportunity for education but were still denied participation in the workforce outside of healthcare and educational services.

The final phase brings us to the knowledge-based economy, circa 1990 to date, where well educated women, low illiteracy rate, access to global information on women in other societies, non-hierarchical organisational structures and the emergence of women in corporate leadership positions has led to a liberalisation of views in the UAE and has been embraced by Dubai in particular. In recent years, this liberalisation of attitudes in Dubai society has coincided with women being well educated and this has led to the demand for equality of opportunity in employment. Furthermore, growth in the knowledge-economy and the drive for emiratization (a policy for reducing the demand for expatriate workers) has led to a need to utilise the female human resource. In the near future, reduced bureaucratic organisational structures in multi-national corporations will lead to a broader participation of all employees in decision-making and change. Women are well suited to the new post-contingency flat flexible organisational structure and demonstrate many qualities suited for the economy of the future. The emergence of a host of female Emirati role models within Emirati society is testament to that.

As in all Arabian Gulf countries, the legislation in the UAE is based on an Islamic constitution. Gender inequality in the Middle East in general and in the Arabian Gulf region in particular, has socio-economic and political roots as opposed to religious roots. In order to understand this fully, an historical overview of Islam is needed. Such an analysis demonstrates that there is a wide gulf between Islam and cultural practices misconstrued as Islamic. It is thus important for women in the region to be familiar with Islam in its true sense rather than through cultural biases for emancipation and liberation to occur. Islam accords equal rights to both men and women. Yahya M. (2005), an American convert to Islam said:

"At the beginning, Islam was the most revolutionary liberalisation of women's rights the civilised world had ever seen. But afterwards Muslims became ignorant of this and now Muslim countries are the scene of some of the worst abuses of women's rights."

Thus forced marriage, imposed polygamous marriage, female infanticide, female circumcision, honour killings and denial of basic education for girls are just some of the cultural practices wrongfully attributed to Islam. In contrast, Islam gave women rights such as owning property and business, participation in choosing their leaders, freedom of speech, rights to education and inheritance and independent wealth.

The right to education for women is enshrined in Islamic theology. The Prophet Muhammad (cited by Ad-Darsh, 2003) is reported to have said: "*Seeking knowledge is an obligation on every Muslim man and Muslim woman.*" Furthermore, the University of Al Qarawiyyin in Fez, Morocco, for example, was founded by a Muslim woman, Fatima Al-Fihri in 859 and has a claim to being the oldest university in the world.

Early Islamic history also sheds light on the position of women in regards to business and management. The city of Mecca, the birthplace of Islam was in fact a major trading centre during the 6th century. It could be argued that its position was economically and commercially stronger in its day than Dubai is today. This is largely due to the fact that Dubai has regional competitors. In contrast, Mecca had a regional monopoly for three distinct reasons. Firstly, Mecca was a centre of religious pilgrimage which made it inviolable and largely immune to tribal wars and conflict. Secondly, it was geographically central to the vital trade routes between of Syria and Yemen, and finally, the Quraish tribe which reside in Mecca was regarded as the noblest of the Arab tribes and thus had a commanding influence over regional tribes on the Arabian Peninsula. Importantly, this trade is referred to in the Qur'an, which states "*For the covenants (of security and safeguard enjoyed) by the Quraish, their covenants (covering) journeys by winter and summer*" (Ali, 1936). In this environment, Khadijah Bint Khuwailid, a businesswoman from Mecca, had a commanding influence over half of the trade between Mecca and both Yemen and the Levant. In today's terms, this would be the equivalent of the founder and CEO of a major international company with tremendous regional and international influence. Furthermore, she was also the first wife of Prophet Muhammad, though, importantly, she was his employer prior to their marriage. She also bore all of his children, except one indicating her balance between personal and professional life, which stands as a source of great pride to the educated Muslim woman of today. She is thus rightly regarded as a great historical role model for Muslim women.

Methodology

The research was conducted in the form of a questionnaire based qualitative survey initially comprising nineteen questions. Interviews were conducted in two forms. Firstly, where possible, the interview was conducted face to face and in English. For participants more comfortable with Arabic as a medium and unable to participate in person, a further set of interviews was conducted by telephone in Arabic. An official bilingual interpreter who was formerly an interpreter for Her Majesty's courts in the United Kingdom conducted these, ensuring that at the translation stage, significant attention could be paid to translating the respondents' comments in a representative manner, to reflect the most accurate meaning. Conducting interviews by telephone is not without its drawbacks, for example, the inability to form an opinion as to the effect of the question itself on the respondent through observing body language or facial expressions. However, after conducting a pilot survey of two participants, the textual response was felt to carry strong and relevant meanings deeming it unnecessary to conduct face-to-face interviews. Furthermore, the questionnaire was revised based on the pilot work, with two questions being removed, one of which was deemed culturally too sensitive and the other resulting in a biased response. Though some questions were yes/no in style, the participants were prompted to elaborate.

All known ethical research procedures were followed and all participants were informed that the data collected would only be used for research purposes. For the sake of narrative, the names of participants recorded in this paper have been changed.

The sample comprised undergraduate students from the Higher Colleges of Technology, Zayed University and United Arab Emirates University (UAEU) and graduate students from The British University in Dubai. The graduate students were also all working professionals including middle to senior level managers from a broad range of sectors, including banking and financial institutions, governmental departments, construction companies, teachers, information technology specialists and the energy sector. The total sample size was thirty, all of which were Emirati nationals, with a ratio of 80:20 female to male participants. The age group was 18-28.

Analysis

The greatest economic contributor to Dubai in terms of raw manpower as defined by gender and nationality, is the Indian male, who accounts for 49.9% of the total workforce of Dubai. This is largely due to the fact that these workers undertake work that the native population would be unwilling to do. Even so, the reliance on expatriate males rather than the

utilisation of native females means that the gender gap continues to grow. However, the scarcity of a

native male population can enhance women’s opportunities in an effort to hasten emiratization.

Table 1: Dubai Demographic World Records (Madar Research Group, 2004)

Parameter	Ratio / %	World Rank
Male to Female Ratio	2.62 male to 1 female	Highest
Workforce to population ratio	68.33%	Highest
Expats as % of population	82.00%	Highest
Population growth	7.00%	Highest
Population over 65 years old	0.65%	Lowest

The demographic data of Dubai indicates that it is a unique city in a global context (Table 1). Dubai has a population of circa 1.1 Millions (under a third of UAE’s 3.7 Millions) but covers a geographic area of only 4.9% of the UAE (Dubai Municipality, 2004). With a female population of only 27%, significant issues of gender and equality are raised. Population growth is extremely high due to the influx of foreign male expatriate workers and with a growth rate of women at only 3%, issues of sustainability and emiratization become prominent. Furthermore, a proportionately high workforce coupled with a reliance on expatriate employees means that issues of working conditions, continuity, transience and stability are raised. Though in 1980 only 8000 women were employed in Dubai compared to over 60000 today, employment levels significantly favour men and is disproportionate compared to the west.

Approximately 20% of the labour force in the wider Middle East are women. Though all women in Dubai (Emirati and expat) represent only 11% of the total workforce, Emirati women seem to be doing rather well amongst nationals, representing 41% of the total Emirati workforce in Dubai. However, one third of all female employees in Dubai are housemaids (who account for only 5.5% of the total workforce) and only two sectors, education and healthcare, demonstrate employment levels where women exceed men. Furthermore, the majority of Emirati women work for the federal government, (Dubai Municipality, 2004).

Dubai’s 2010 vision for a knowledge-based economy is a strategy for developing the model for growth and development in the region. A knowledge-based economy as defined by the World Bank rests on 4 pillars (Madar Research Group, 2003), known as “infrastructure”, “incentives”, “innovation” and “intelligence”. Infrastructure relates to the information society infrastructure and the dissemination and processing of information and how effectively a society gives people access to affordable and effective information and communications. Incentives relate to the economic and institutional framework, providing a stable macro economy, a competitive

environment, a flexible labour market and adequate social protection. Innovation, or innovation systems brings together research and business activities in commercial applications of science and technology, with emerging sectors such as pharmaceuticals, bio- and nano-technologies and wireless communication systems. Finally, intelligence refers to education systems, where citizens acquire, share and use knowledge. Tertiary education takes time to build research and cultural assets as well as the experience to build partnership with business (Madar Research Group, 2003).

The support for women in education and in the workforce is well supported by those in power. HH Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al-Nahyan, the former President of the UAE, said (as cited by Sayed, 2001):

“The means to develop a country and modernise its infrastructures is a magnificent burden that should not be taken up by men only. The loss would be huge, for women will be paralysed without any participation and productivity. It would lead to an unbalanced rhythm of life. Hence, women’s participation in public life is required and we must be prepared for it.” And: *“Nothing could delight me more than to see woman taking up her distinctive position in society. Nothing should hinder her progress. Like men, women deserve the right to occupy high positions, according to their capabilities and qualifications.”* (United Arab Emirates Yearbook, 2003)

Such participation has been established since 1974 with the creation of the Dubai Women’s Development Society, a pioneer of the women’s movement in the UAE. The UAE Women’s Federation was established a year later. Committees formed within this organisation established a variety of women’s activities. These committees include those dedicated to religious affairs, childcare, social affairs, cultural affairs, sports, heritage and the arts. Some of their activities include running nurseries and kindergartens thus permitting mothers to go out to work. Other activities include the dissemination of nutritional

information for pregnant women and new mothers, a United Nations Development Programme for reviving the close association of some of the country's women with the land, classes for tailoring, embroidery and housekeeping, missions to rural areas and mothering and childcare classes supported by UNICEF. Furthermore, they facilitate the free borrowing of library books, an activity that has indicated rising levels of social and literary consciousness in areas formally of high illiteracy (United Nations, 2003). These activities are on the whole supportive of traditional values but do not address the broader issues relating to the knowledge-based economy and the participation of women therein.

According to the World Economic Forum (2005), access to education is one of the primary indicators of women's status and is the root of women's emancipation. Though the UAE has the second highest GDP in the Gulf, it is lowest in terms of percentage GDP spent on education. However, the number of girls completing secondary education is 88% and 69% of Emirati graduates are women. Furthermore, according to World Bank statistics, female illiteracy dropped from 29% to 21% between 1990 and 2000, whereas male illiteracy only dropped from 29% to 25% during the same period.

Emirati society is based strongly on family ties. Lewis (1997) states "*Formal 'family friendly' policies, including flexible or reduced hours of work and periods of leave, designed to help employees to balance work and family demands have the potential to challenge traditional models of work and organizational values.*" In this regard, the UAE is already ahead of the game. Centralised families allow for day care provision within the family unit. This, together with the ease of hiring domestic help in the UAE allows working mothers the growing freedom and flexibility to join the workforce. For its part, the federal government has facilitated this activity by enshrining its support for women and their rights in the workplace into law. UAE Labour Law thus ensures that a woman's remuneration is equal to that of a man's if she performs the same work, that she receive 45 days maternity leave with full pay and even allows breaks for breastfeeding, or leaving work one hour early for 18 months post partum (Ministry of Labour UAE, 1980).

With these demographics in mind, the participants of the research project were first presented with an open-ended question 'what are the challenges facing Emirati women in the UAE?' 'Nadia', a second year undergraduate engineer at UAEU alluded to equality, stating '*I think it is the mentality of some people. They find it difficult to accept that we are just like men*'. 'Moza', a final year undergraduate student in Education at the same university indicated the need for women to stay abreast of technological advance-

ment in order to be competitive in the workplace. She states '*I would say the technological age (is a challenge facing Emirati women) in the UAE. Technology is (developing) so fast and some may be left behind. They (women) were neglected for many years and now when they are allowed to catch up ... they are so behind. For my generation ... it is OK (we are doing well) - I think we are pioneers or something like revolutionaries.*' Three further female participants cited '*cultural practice*' as the main challenge facing Emirati women. Another female, working in the aviation sector, stated that women would have '*more responsibilities than they could handle*'. One male participant referred to '*parental pressure*' and '*cultural stereotyping*' as the main challenge. 'Mohammed' felt that '*many women could be doing a great job but may lack opportunities because of parental pressure or the expectations of society.*'

On the question, 'Where do you see Emirati women in 10 years time? 50 years time?', 'Fatima', a female graduate who has been teaching for three years in a government school stated '*(there will be) more ministers, like Sheikha (Lubna) Al-Qassimi, (Minister of Economy and Planning and the UAE's first female government minister) and many brain surgeons. Perhaps (there will be) more (women) running rich companies.*' 'Fatima' interestingly concluded, '*...never a Prime Minister though!*'

'Sarah' commented '*I would expect a better appreciation of what a woman can do in this country, though she went on to admit 'I think maybe in 10 years time no radical changes (will have taken place in addition) to what has already been achieved.*'

'Habib', a male telecommunications professional, commented that Emirati society would be more open in the future, concerning the participation of women in the workforce, a development that he personally disliked. Furthermore, 'Assad' who works in the construction sector as a project manager, opined that Emirati women would be similar to their European counterparts within the next decade, playing a full part in the workplace. However, he continues, saying that in 50 years time, they would have returned to raising children as their primary occupation. This opinion, he says, is based upon the low birth-rate which Europe is experiencing, resulting in government driven incentive schemes to encourage women back to childrearing. He believes that a similar cycle would be mimicked in the UAE.

'Hind', a female Engineering student from UAEU was asked 'why are you studying engineering?' she replied '*I chose this career as a challenge. I wanted to be like my brother... He is an engineer and so am I.*' When prompted regarding her views on women who study engineering she replied '*I think they are doing a good job. I would say "Go girls!", I hate being told not to be this or that because I am a girl.*'

On the same question however, 'Khalid', a male Engineering undergraduate student thought that *'they seem to be doing good ...I hear they get better marks than us ...not sure if they are brighter but I think they have more time on their hands to study while the boys ...you know ...go out and socialise.'* When he was asked about men who are studying Education as a major, he replied *'well it is not a very popular career for a man here ...people may not accept that.'*

In contrast, when a male undergraduate student at UAEU majoring in Education was asked about his choice he replied *'I always wanted to be a teacher. I have admired those teachers, mainly Syrian and Egyptian (nationals) in my school days and wondered why we do not have (many male) Emirati teachers. I wanted to be one of them. When I was deciding for the university, a friend of mine enrolled the year before and told me about the monthly allowance¹ that made it even more attractive. I know it may not be popular, but I do not care, I am doing something I like. I want to be a teacher to serve my country.'* However, when asked to comment on his views on women who choose to specialise in an Engineering discipline, he was less encouraging. He added *'why would they do that? They will find many obstacles ...for instance they may end up in an office and will never be (allowed on) a building site ...these places are mostly for men ...I do not think an Emirati woman would fit (in) there.'*

A second year undergraduate student in Education in her reply to the question 'why are you studying Education?' she replied *'Well, I have not really chosen this (teaching) as a career. I was a gifted student with very high grades and I even won an award from the Ministry (of Education) for outstanding achievement, but my family are from Ras Al-Khaimah (and are) a little conservative and they would not allow me to work in a mixed environment after graduation. The only (nearly) male-free environment is in a school, so I enrolled in education ...not because I love teaching but because I (would) love to work after graduation.'*

On the question 'what jobs do you think are off limits for Emirati women?' the most popular answers among the men were high ranking government officials, construction workers, police officers, brain surgeons, mechanical engineers, pilots, judges and military officers.

The women, on the other hand differed greatly, with one commenting *'we can do anything a man can do ...well I think the only one that is off limits would be ...a male model. Ha ha! (Laughter).'* Another said *'I can do anything a man can do, full stop!'*

When asked 'what are your thoughts about women in senior managerial positions?', many women commented that they are *'pioneers and revolutionaries'*, whilst some men thought they *'did good for themselves'* and if they reached that level they must have *'earned it.'* Another stated *'I respect and admire them.'* Another responded, *'It is acceptable. Though they know less than men (do).'*

As for the question 'who are your role models from history and in modern times?' almost all participants cited the late Ruler of Abu Dhabi and President of the UAE, Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al-Nahyan. From contemporary role models, most frequently cited was Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, the Ruler of Dubai and Prime Minister of the nation. One female participant mentioned her mother who had left school to marry, but then returned to study later in life, eventually completing secondary school at an adult education college, at the age of 45.

When asked 'do you think Arab culture is supportive or restrictive to Emirati women?' all participants agreed that it was supportive. When asked 'are you aware of any special labour laws relating to women?' none of the participants was aware of any, with the exception of maternity leave, correctly cited by two respondents. None of the participants were aware of a law relating to the availability of a reduction of working hours for breast-feeding mothers. However, one Emirati female who recently had a child and at the time worked in a government department, stated she would not exercise the right, even though now she was aware of it, as it may cause animosity with male co-workers.

When asked if they thought 'women made better managers than men', all female and most male respondents stated equality based upon qualification, skills and experience, though a few male respondents did say they thought men were better managers, saying women lagged behind in experience, exposure to different situations and lacked skills.

On the question 'whether or not women are crucial to successful implementation of emiratization policy', most agreed they were, recognising that low Emirati population is one of the drivers for the need for a high proportion of expatriate workers. However, none commented as to whether greater participation would have an adverse effect on long-term birth rate. Men seemed more concerned with cultural and religious implications of the wider participation of women in the workforce, though many men and women stated that the overriding issue is that of freedom of choice.

When asked 'are women better teachers than men?' all male participants agreed that women are

¹ Each male undergraduate student in education is awarded a stipend of AED 2000 (approximately US\$ 550) per annum by the government (Gaad, 2004).

better teachers than men are, citing better communication skills, greater emotional intelligence and being better able to relate to children. In contrast, all female participants agreed that they are not. Ironically, a female undergraduate student majoring in Education, remarked *'I (always) sign up (for my classes) with a male lecturer. Female teachers maybe good at teaching, but from my experience, men are (more) generous with marks!'*

Continuing Challenges for Women

There are numerous myths that are associated with the role of women in organisations. Although stereotyping of women has been around through history and many are untrue, it is particularly interesting that many of these characteristics are actually attributes in the knowledge-based economy. For example, it is often said that women are naturally too emotional for business decision making. In fact, emotion and more specifically "emotional intelligence" is highly desirable in the knowledge-based economy and assists in decision making particularly in aspects of human resources. According to Handy (1994), the management style of women fulfils the demands of new organisations better than their male counterparts. Contrary to some views expressed in this research, Handy argues that women are better managers because of their qualities of adaptability, the ability to juggle several tasks at a time, are overall more interested in getting things done rather than seeking status or title, they are more instinctive and intuitive than men, tough but tender, focussed but friendly. Further criticism, particularly in the Middle East is that a woman's role as mother and housewife would be impossible if she were to take on an additional role outside the domestic arena. However, these judgements are being proved wrong by the growing number of energetic young women in the region who are proving that a balanced life is possible, together with growth in western-style day-care centres in addition to centralised family support.

Furthermore, there are many concerns that family members of women seeking employment have in regards to their female relatives entering the workplace. These are often cultural and religious concerns, for example that a woman would have to touch a man she barely knows, she would have to work nights and that she would have to have one-on-one meetings with men, all of which are cultural taboos.

It is important that these issues be approached in a sensitive yet appropriate way. It is perfectly in keeping with Arab and Islamic tradition for women and men to interact in matters of business provided it is done in a manner that respects these traditions. For example, in the west, it is considered very normal for one man and one woman to conduct a business

meeting in a closed office. In the Islamic world however, it would be construed as unseemly to conduct a business meeting in such a manner. Contrary to the implication, this does not mean that a meeting could not take place but rather that the meeting should include others where possible or that it is conducted in an open plan office or more public business environment (Randeree (b), 2006).

Furthermore, articles 27 and 28 (Ministry of Labour UAE, 1980) stipulate that women are not required to work nights between the hours of 10 pm and 7 am, nor do they have to do dangerous or arduous work or work detrimental to health or morals. It can also be said that in addition to male stereotyping of women, the self-image amongst many Arab women of inferiority to men is potentially a more harmful obstacle to professional achievement.

The research thus indicates that in order for the region to succeed, it must utilise its entire human resource and encourage increased participation of Arab women in the workplace and their recruitment into senior management levels within organisations.

This study revealed interesting responses that needs a reflective look into what needs to be done in Emirati society to improve societal attitudes towards and expectation from women. Participants' responses to the challenges facing Emirati women in the UAE revealed alarming comments that call for broader discourse. Despite a call for a change of attitude of men towards women from some participants calling for a change in the *'mentality of some people'*, it was also clear from responses of some participants including women, that women have to be *'competitive in the workplace'* if they are to achieve anything in a male dominant society. Phrases like *'women are now allowed to catch up'* indicate clearly the helplessness of many women who are awaiting the *'go ahead'* by men after years of denial of their rights and potentials.

The issue of parental pressure and/or the expectations of society also were stressed by some participants. This will require a change of society's attitudes towards the role of women in society. It is known however that changing societal attitudes towards an issue is not the easiest thing to achieve. Change always threatens a culture (Deal and Kennedy (a), 1982). Changes in elements of culture create a deep sense of personal and collective loss (Deal and Kennedy (b), 1982). The old ways will not be transformed easily, unless the old ways are clearly inadequate for a majority of people (Lieberman 1990).

With regard to the question, 'where do participants see Emirati women in 10 years time? How about in 50 years time?' the study revealed some interesting responses. While female participants looked forward to more Emirati female personalities in senior posi-

tions in the corporate world, all participants cautiously avoided any insightful comments about political ambitions or expectations of women in society.

It is important for women in the Middle East as well as Emirati women to have role models in order to encourage them, as well as their families into understanding that their participation in society is desirable and welcome. Although female historical figures have existed throughout Arab and Islamic history, living personalities have only recently become familiar. Most highly renowned is Sheikha Lubna Al Qasimi, UAE's Minister of Economy and Planning and the first female UAE minister, who is also CEO of Tejari, an online strategic procurement facility. Sheikha Lubna emphasises family values and a balanced personal and professional life. Significantly, she was included in Forbes' "Women to Watch in the Middle East" list about which she stated "I hope

my inclusion on the 'Women to Watch' list provides encouragement and inspiration for women across the UAE who are considering a professional career." (www.forbes.com, 2005).

It may be concluded therefore that although women in Emirati society have come a very long way towards achieving full equality, societal attitudes need to change further in regards towards their role if it is seen to be anything more than merely an increase the number of women in the workforce. Though Emirati society has therefore made great strides in this direction, it needs to go further in understanding that equal opportunity is more than a courtesy, but rather the right of all citizens. Many still need to be educated that women do not have to prove that they are as intelligent or capable as men are and are fully functional members of society (Webb, 1997).

References

- Abdalla, I., (1996) Attitudes Towards Women in the Arabian Gulf Region, *Women in Management Review*, 11, 1, 29-39.
- Ad-Darsh, S. M., (2003) Issues in Islamic Education: Islam and the Education of Muslim Women, *The Muslim Educational Trust*, 12, 11, 27.
- Ali, A.Y., (1936) *The Holy Qur'an*, The Islamic Propagation Centre International, London, UK, 864.
- BBC News, (2005) BBC News UK Edition, "Young in the Middle East", news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/in_depth/middle_east/2005/young_in_the_middle_east, accessed 5th September 2005.
- Camerapix, (1998) *Spectrum Guide to United Arab Emirates*, Kenya: Camerapix Publishing International, 5.
- Cassell, C., (1997) The Business Case for Equal Opportunities: Implications for Women in Management, *Women in Management Review*, 12, 1, 11-16.
- Deal and Kennedy (a), (1982) *Corporate Cultures: The Rites and Rituals of Corporate Life*, Reading, M.: Addison- Wesley, 157-8.
- Deal and Kennedy (b), (1982) *Corporate Cultures: The Rites and Rituals of Corporate Life*, Reading, M.: Addison- Wesley, 139.
- Dubai Municipality, (2004) *Statistical Yearbook 2004: Population and Vital Statistics*, Table SYB 04-02-01.
- Gaad, E., et al, (2006) Systems Analysis of UAE Education System, *International Journal of Educational Management*, 20, 4, 291.
- Gaad, E., (2004) Pre-Service Teachers Attitudes Towards a Career in Special Education in the United Arab Emirates, *College Student Journal*, 38, 4, 619-632.
- Handy, C., (1994) *The Empty Raincoat*, Hutchinson, London, UK.
- Hourani, A., (1991) *A History of the Arab Peoples*, Faber and Faber Ltd., London, 104.
- Ibid.
- Khan, L., (2005) *A Study of Primary Mainstream Teachers' Attitudes Towards Inclusion of Students with Special Educational Needs: A Perspective from Dubai*, unpublished Masters dissertation, The British University in Dubai, UAE.
- Lewis, S., (1997) 'Family Friendly' Employment Policies, *Gender, Work and Organization*, 4, 1, 13.
- Lieberman, A., (1990) *Schools as Collaborative Cultures: Creating the Future Now*, London, The Falmer Press, 132.
- Madar Research Group, (2004) *Dubai Knowledge Economy 2003-2008*, 2, 8.
- Madar Research Group, (2003) *Dubai Knowledge Economy 2003-2008*, 1, 13.
- Ministry of Labour UAE, (1980) *Federal Law No. 8, 1980 on Regulation of Labour Relations*, Ministry of Labour UAE, Articles 27/8, 12.
- Ministry of Labour UAE, (1980) *Federal Law No. 8, 1980 on Regulation of Labour Relations*, Ministry of Labour UAE, Article 31, 13.
- M., Y., (2005) Women's Rights and Equality in Islam, Islam for Today, www.islamfortoday.com/womensrights2.htm, accessed 1 September 2005.
- Randeree (a), K., (2006) The Impact of Historical and Cultural Effects on the Advancement of Women in the K-Economy in the Arabian Gulf Region: Participation of Women in the Arabian Gulf, *International Journal of Knowledge, Culture and Change Management*, 6, 1, 65-68.
- Randeree (b), K., (2006) The Participation of Women in Dubai's Knowledge-Based Economy, Women as Global Leaders Conference 2006: Communities in Transition, 12 - 14 March 2006, Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates.
- Swibel, M., (2005) Forbes.com, "The 100 Most Powerful Women: Women To Watch In The Middle East", www.forbes.com/2005/07/28/lists-powerful-women-middle-east-cz_ms_05powom_0728middleeast.html, 25 August 2005.

- Talhami, G. H., (2004) Women, Education and Development in the Arab Gulf Countries, *The Emirates Occasional Papers*, The Emirates Centre for Strategic Studies and Research, 53, 16.
- United Arab Emirates Yearbook, (2003), *United Arab Emirates Yearbook 2003: Social Development*, 231.
- (The) United Nations, (2003) *The Arab Human Development Report (AHDR) 2003: Building a Knowledge Society*, United Nations Development Programme/Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development, 2003, New York, USA, 23.
- Webb, J., (1997) The Politics of Equal Opportunity, *Gender, Work and Organization*, 4, 4, 159.
- World Economic Forum, (2005) *Women's Empowerment: Measuring the Global Gender Gap*, 7.

About the Authors

Dr. Kasim Randeree

Dr. Kasim Randeree is a Lecturer for the Faculty of Business at The British University in Dubai in the United Arab Emirates. Dr. Randeree has an academic career spanning the past 15 years, with experience both in the United Kingdom and the Middle East. He is dedicated to the development of contemporary Middle Eastern society and has worked in the past at the United Arab Emirates University in Al Ain, The American University in Dubai as well as conducting research across parts of the Arabian Gulf and North Africa. He has a broad portfolio of research with related current interests in the legacy of early Muslim practitioners to contemporary management and the advancement of Arab women in the Middle East. A number of postgraduate research students are active in these areas under Dr. Randeree's supervision. He has numerous supporting publications both internationally and across the region.

Dr. Eman Gaad

The British University in Dubai, UNITED ARAB EMIRATES