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‘Private sector’ Emiratization: job satisfaction and sociocultural influences

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Abstract

Purpose—To gauge the job satisfaction levels of UAE nationals employed in the (‘real’ and quasi-) private sector. Despite private sector Emiratisation (labour market nationalisation) having been in place since the late 1990s and considered a strategic government priority in 2007, the numbers of nationals employed in the private sector as a ratio to those employed in the public sector remains particularly low.

Design/methodology/approach—This study is based on a survey of 653 nationals employed in the non-classic sector (i.e., working at commercially-run entities). The instrument used was based on the Job Satisfaction Survey construct and assessed, inter alia, the impact of sectoral pay and benefit discrepancies and prevailing societal sentiment towards the ‘appropriacy’ of pursuing a non-conventional career path.

Findings—statistically significant relationships between the dependent variable of “continuance intentions” and various predictor variables were observed: β .399 for salary and benefits; whilst sociocultural influences was found to have a significant and negative relationship, β -.423.

Originality/value—This research can help in a) identifying and prioritising the economic and social issues that are impacting the pace of Emiratisation and b) in understanding what incentives and measures can be useful and effective for the operational implementation of labour nationalisation policies throughout the Arab Gulf and therefore adds to the growing body of literature on an Arab Middle East HRM model.

Keywords Arab Gulf labour markets; UAE; Emiratisation; labour nationalisation; job satisfaction; Job Satisfaction Survey.

1. Introduction

Labour nationalisation policies (“programmes” and “strategies”), bottom-up, or top-down, have been on the government agenda in the UAE for almost 20 years (Fasano & Goyal, 2004) yet, progress in the private sector has been limited (Ryan, 2016). UAE nationals make up over half of the government department workforces, but less than two per cent of the private sector workforce (Forstenlechner, Madi, Selim, & Rutledge, 2012). As Issa, Mustafa, and Al Khoori (2013) pointed out, only a small fraction of the UAE’s private sector workforce is made up of UAE nationals and that of all nationals employed the majority work in the classic public sector (namely a bureaucratic position or for the army/police/security forces). The reasons for the current state of affairs are reasonably well documented (Forstenlechner et al., 2012); as is the contention that the status quo is no longer tenable (e.g., Coates Ulrichsen, 2011; Davidson, 2012). It will be noted elsewhere, but stated here, that within the regional context: and throughout this study, the ‘private’ sector will be taken to include commercially-run government-backed entities GBEs. Nonetheless, it is the UAE government’s stated aim to transition to an open and dynamic economy where the ability to think critically, be receptive to change and, to adopt and adapt to the latest technologies will become increasingly important (e.g., Government of Abu Dhabi, 2008; UAE Prime Minister’s Office, 2010).

To date, the bulk of the research on Emiratisation can be seen as focusing on the following four aspects. Firstly, HRD in relation to labour nationalisation policies, practices, perceptions and outcomes (e.g., Al Ali, 2008; Al Waqfi & Forstenlechner, 2010, 2012, 2013) and also with regard to the sociocultural considerations that contribute to the current labour market rigidities and distortions (e.g., Forstenlechner & Rutledge, 2011; Harry, 2007; Ryan, 2016). Secondly, a body of research exists that focuses on the macroeconomics of diversification and regional labour market dynamics in relation to oil rent and, more narrowly (thirdly) that which focuses on job satisfaction and organisational loyalty amongst the UAE’s workforce (e.g., Abdulla, Djebarni, & Mellahi, 2011; M. Ibrahim & Al Falasi, 2014; M. E. Ibrahim, Al Sejini, & Al Qassimi, 2004; M. E. Ibrahim & Perez, 2014).

In sum the key observations are that historically the provision of lucrative government jobs based on citizenship and not merit has resulted in a satisfied society but an unproductive

workforce; a society that is provided with free education but has little incentive (vocationally speaking) to opt for the more challenging specialisations. It is clear that being resource-rich but labour-poor has had a fundamental impact on the UAE's economic structure. The "social-contract" as set out by Forstenlechner and Rutledge (2010) explains why providing government jobs as a way of distributing oil wealth was, initially at least, beneficial for the country's development and welfare gains. The segmentation of the UAE's public and private sectors typifies its divided (and "distorted") labour market. This results in the following somewhat ironic state of labour market affairs: while suitable employment opportunities for UAE national youth in the government sectors reach saturation point, ample employment opportunity exists in the private sector which in theory could easily absorb this cohort.

In terms of gaps in the literature, there are a number, several of which this study will contribute towards filling. The first is that no research has canvassed directly the views and sentiments of UAE nationals working in the private sector as substantial as this study's sample. Indeed, the bulk of other studies have only used qualitative approaches such as the focus group and interview-based research by Farrell (2008) and Marmenout and Lirio (2013), or surveyed Emiratis in the public sector (see e.g. M. E. Ibrahim et al., 2004) or in individual sectors of the UAE economy (see e.g. M. E. Ibrahim & Perez, 2014).

The purpose of this study was to determine the factors influencing the intention of UAE nationals employed in the private sector to continue working in this sector. To go some way towards addressing this a Job Satisfaction Survey (JSS) style questionnaire instrument and scale was devised.

Figure 1 shows the conceptual framework model developed and the following hypotheses were tested:

Hypothesis 1 Salary and benefits significantly impact an individual's intention of remaining in the private sector.

Hypothesis 2 Availability of career development opportunities significantly affect an individual's intention of remaining in the private sector.

Hypothesis 3 The nature of the working environment significantly affect an individual's intention of remaining in the private sector.

Hypothesis 4 Societal sentiments towards UAE nationals working in the private sector significantly affect an individual's intention of remaining in this sector.

[Insert Figure 1, around here]

2. Literature Review

As the literature makes clear, one of the most pressing socioeconomic issues facing the UAE, along with its Arabian Gulf neighbours is how to reduce dependence on non-national labour (expatriate “guest workers”) and in so doing, make better use of national, human capital (e.g., Forstenlechner & Rutledge, 2011; Rutledge & Al-Shamsi, 2015; Ryan, 2016). There is now a considerable literature that focuses on the Arabian Gulf's labour market strains which were set out by Fasano and Goyal (2004). In short, the contention is that by providing well paid government jobs to the majority of citizens irrespective of merit has resulted in unproductive labour and a substantial, in some cases, unsustainably high recurrent wage bill.

Up until the turn of the century, with access to cheap foreign labour there were few attempts to use technology to replace unskilled cheap foreign labour (see, e.g., Muysken & Nour, 2006; Salih, 2010). It has long been said that human resources are used inefficiently because the region's governments believe oil wealth can be used to catch up with industrialised countries without changing their social structures (Elsenhans, 2004). It has also been argued by Al-Dosary and Rahman (2005) that in an attempt to address the ‘national’ unemployment problem during the 1990s, the Saudi government “forced the public sector to hire Saudis for non-existent jobs,” which to a degree has turned the public into a, “vast social welfare system.” Indeed it has been stated that many such positions are essentially sinecures (Niblock & Malik, 2007).

Harry (2007) makes clear the serious challenges facing this region and has argued that within the region there is a policy preference for “expediency rather than solutions” and that this has resulted in “challenges becoming serious problems.” In a critical appraisal he goes on to argue that the private sector has been intent on maximising short-term gain while creating long-term problems. Yet top-down policies have been said to

undermine private sector competitiveness, “by requiring employment of unqualified workers” and acted to deter foreign direct investment and resulted in some degree of “capital flight” (Bremmer, 2004, p. 26).

Throughout this study the term “classic public sector” is used (or implied when referring to “the public sector”), this is based on the distinctions drawn in the seminal work on the subject of the Arabian Gulf’s “social contract” (oil-wealth transmission mechanism between the ruling elites and their respective citizenries) by Forstenlechner and Rutledge (2010). They draw a distinction between the long standing administrative/bureaucratic positions (sometimes being little more than sinecures) and those now offered by the wide range of commercially operated Government-Backed Entities (GBEs). The classic public sector in the Arabian Gulf then represents government agencies such as municipal and federal services central to national governance, utility service providers, police, army, and many elements of the education and health sectors.

The pronounced national/non-national imbalance in the UAE private sector workforce inevitably means that the UAE nationals in the private sector are a minority in the workplace (e.g., Forstenlechner et al., 2012; Issa et al., 2013; Ryan, 2016) and that the government is still the de facto employer of first choice for citizens (Issa et al., 2013). Complicating the situation further, it is said that private sector employers hold negative perceptual biases about the vocational readiness and willingness of UAE nationals to work in a fashion similar to non-nationals (Forstenlechner et al., 2012). In turn, these preferences and perceptions impact on the social appropriateness of various occupations, which, within the regional cultural context carries considerable importance (e.g., Al Ali, 2008; Gallup/Silatech, 2009, 2011; Goby, Nickerson, & David, 2015).

It follows that national unemployment in the Gulf is considered not only a key HRD/HRM concern (Fasano & Goyal, 2004; Harry, 2007) but also a political one. Those citizens who are not able to change by gaining relevant qualifications and skills, and who lack connections (i.e., *Wasta*) are increasingly unlikely to be able to secure well remunerated public sector jobs and, in the view of Harry (2007), will therefore be obliged to accept what was previously unacceptable (e.g., checkout jobs in Saudi supermarkets). Indeed, by not addressing indigenous youth unemployment many of the region’s regimes were impacted directly or indirectly by the “Arab Spring” (Coates

Ulrichsen, 2011; Davidson, 2012). However, despite the fact that regional labour nationalisation strategies have been in place since the early 1990s (Ebrill, 2001; Looney, 1992), the typical private sector response has been to resist and if pushed hard undertake small-scale measures and view them as a cost of doing business as opposed to an HRD related investment (Forstenlechner & Rutledge, 2011).

—that include the government job provision mechanism and the *Kafala* system whereby citizens can import cheap unskilled labour effectively cost free.

Abdalla, Al-Waqfi, Harb, Hijazi, and Zoubeidi (2010, p. 175) have previously stated that if private sector operators can hire non-nationals “at significantly lower wages than nationals due to differences in standards of living and reservation wage between the two groups,” then they will continue to do so. One of the key challenges for private sector Emiratisation, is to reduce the wage differences in a way that does not, “alienate the private sector by burdening it with the cost of Emiratisation” (Abdalla et al., 2010, p. 175).

For Wimalasiri (1995), the following four factors: (1), career progression (2), incentives (3), rewards and (4), training and development, can all directly influence satisfaction levels. According to Walker (2001) a number of factors help increase satisfaction levels (“employee retention”) including: (1) appreciation of work performed (i.e., H1; compensation) (2), learning and promotion opportunities (H2; training) (3), appealing organisational atmosphere; including positive relationships with colleagues and (4), good communication channels with management. It is clear then that job satisfaction levels are affected by a range of intrinsic and extrinsic motivating factors, including the quality of supervision, social relationships with the work group (Armstrong & Taylor, 2014). Yet as Saari and Judge (2004, p. 395) point out, there remains confusion and debate among practitioners on the topic of job satisfaction. Employee surveys, used effectively, can be catalysts for improving employee attitudes and producing organisational change. According to the literature job satisfaction survey feedback helps inform, support and drive organisational change, and thus the ability to manage change. Indeed, the willingness to adapt to change is often considered by HRM practitioners as the most important employee competency at this moment in time.

M. E. Ibrahim et al. (2004) investigate job satisfaction with a focus on the relationship between job performance and satisfaction, conclude that, “in a collectivist culture such as

the UAE, both intrinsic and extrinsic factors can be a source of job satisfaction or dissatisfaction.”

M. Ibrahim and Al Falasi (2014) focus on the relationships between employee “Loyalty” (i.e., organisational commitment) and “Engagement” in the UAE. They recommend that regional employers see to implement measures designed specifically to increase organisational loyalty. The most recent contribution in this regard is the work of M. E. Ibrahim and Perez (2014) who examine the direct effects of the different dimensions of “Organisational Justice,” including job satisfaction, on perceived organisational commitment in the context of UAE service organisations. Based on a random sample of 174 employees working in 28 different service organisations, they observe that employee satisfaction has a direct influence on commitment. However, perceptions of the three organisational justice components (distributive justice, procedural justice, and interactional justice) do not have direct influence on employees’ commitment, but they do influence employees’ satisfaction. In addition, employee gender, nationality, and tenure do not influence commitment directly or indirectly through satisfaction.

H1. Salary and Benefits

Salary and benefits have a significant positive effect on an individual’s intention of remaining in the private sector.

While some research suggests that it is not salary alone that makes the public sector more attractive (Gallup/Silatech, 2011), it is often reported as an influencing factor (Farrell, 2008; Marmenout & Lirio, 2013; Nelson, 2004) and that government jobs typically do pay a far higher salary than do like-for-like private sector positions. It happens to be the case in the UAE, like all GCC countries, that comprehensive data on pay is not publically available. Issa et al. (2013) along with Davidson (2009) point out that those in the “classic” public sector can expect to earn several times as much as those in the private sector.

Al Waqfi and Forstenlechner (2012, p. 623) argue that UAE national jobseekers on average have higher salary expectations. A number of consequences arise from this. The first is the perceived fair pay and the reservation wage required by the majority of Emirati job seekers interviewed in this study is comparable to the going rates in the public sector

for national employees with similar skills and experience and secondly, the expected salaries of such job seekers is higher than their reservation wage, which means they are likely to experience pay dissatisfaction even when they accept job offers the private sector.

H2. Career Development Opportunities

Availability of career development opportunities has a significant positive effect on an individual's intention of remaining in the private sector.

It is now widely acknowledged that formal and informal on-the-job training has come to represent a key tenet of an organisation's retention strategies as well as strengthen its human resource capital (in terms of competencies and competitiveness) (Bratton, 2012). While some contend that such strategies are designed to provide workers with a false sense of job security in an era of the boundary less career, the counter argument is that such models are in fact necessary if high-performance work systems are to succeed (e.g., Beer, 2009; Pfeffer, 2007). The broad assumption here is that if traditionally the public sector provides (or individuals believe it provides) more training than does the private sector and, if such training is deemed to be attractive or important, then it will effect private sector continuance intentions.

H3. Nature of Working Environment

The nature of the working environment has a significant positive effect on an individual's intention of remaining in the private sector.

For Spector (1997, p. 2), job satisfaction means, "how people feel about their jobs and different aspects of their jobs." In other words, an individual's affective reaction to their work environment. It is acknowledged that "nature of work" is a sub-dimension of the JSS construct (Spector, 1997), but this study considers this sub-dimension plus satisfaction in a holistic way to be best fitted to this hypothesis. It will be noted that the justification for H3 and H4 (below) are lengthier than those provided for H1 and H2. This is because "the nature of work" and organisational "commitment" and/or "loyalty" are in many ways more fundamentally important SHRM considerations, but are also more holistic and harder to quantify than are salary and benefits and career development opportunities.

In terms of theory, “satisfaction” is based on the way in which employees view the organisation (Locke, 1976); does it meet their needs? It follows that HRM practices that impact the nature and environment have the capacity to directly influence the job satisfaction of employees. The most commonly used research definition of job satisfaction is that set out by Locke (1976, p. 1304), who defined it as a, “pleasurable or positive emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one’s job or job experiences.” It is clear from this definition that both the affect, or feeling, and cognition, or thinking has a significant bearing. It is an individual’s attitude or emotional response to their given task, role and relative position as well as in relation to environmental and socio-cultural conditions related to their role/position/sector.

Another key aspect of the nature of one’s work is channels of communication and organisational culture; it has been argued that a lack of communication is the main barrier to employees’ motivation, and may affect continuance intentions (Ongori, 2007). Inadequate communication between management and employees, between departments and among employees can result in low morale and higher turnover rates. It is regularly stated that the culture and core values present within an organisation can have a direct influence on employee retention (Kerr & Slocum, 2005).

H4. Sociocultural Sentiment

Societal sentiments towards UAE nationals working in the private sector have a significant negative effect on an individual’s intention of remaining in this sector.

As discussed earlier, key factors that are said to influence any given UAE national’s career decision making process will be sociocultural norms and sentiments with respect to what is and what is not a suitable career avenue. Authors such as Harry (2007) and (Al Ali, 2008) stress that presently Arabian gulf society places more prestige to a public sector position as opposed to a private sector one (see also: Al-Asfour & Khan, 2014; Al-Dosary, 2004; Salih, 2010). It is especially the case for female nationals in terms of what Williams, Wallis, and Williams (2013) describe as the “patriarchal bargain” a situation where although fathers explicitly encourage their daughters to pursue tertiary education they require that their daughters adhere to sociocultural norms that can only realistically be followed in public sector employment. Therefore, this study will seek to determine if sociocultural factors have a significant influence on sectoral preferences compared to

pragmatic benefits such as benefits and remuneration. It is the overarching contention of this study that sentiment will play a key role in terms of UAE nationals working in the private sector on the one hand and the attractiveness of this sector, on the other.

3. Methodology and Methods

3.1 Sample Selection

With respect to the sample of employed Emiratis in the private sector, the total population is small and much less than 10,000 (National Bureau of Statistics, 2014). Well over 90 per cent of all UAE nationals work for the conventional public sector, the official retirement age is one of the lowest in the world and, the population is young and many are still in fulltime education. The UAE government HRD entity (at the time TANMIA and the Tawteen Council) were approached and lists of registered nationals who had been placed in (quasi-) and 'real' private sector positions were solicited. A considerable number of these were employed by organisations either under – or similar to – those under Mubadala (the organisation that oversees a great many of the UAE's new wave GBEs) (Mubadala, 2010) and organisations represented a broad range of different sectors of the UAE economy (see Table 1) and included nationals from across all Emirates (see Table 2). Sample members were selected from within a pre-defined target group: Emiratis currently working in the private sector (or, more specifically, employed in organisations that are not part of the classic public sector).

[Insert Table 1 here]

[Insert Table 2 here]

3.2 Procedure

All 653 respondents were contacted first by email by the respective organisation's HR departments (the majority of the HR managers contacted) who agreed to participate in this research and distributed the survey to employees and followed up the email which helped to ensure a good response rate (the email had links to (1) the questionnaire (2), participant information details and (3), a consent form providing complete details about why the information was being collected and stressing that personal details would remain

confidential and the information gathered would only be used for academic purposes (i.e., not commercial ones). The survey took approximately 20 minutes in duration. Firstly, a pilot study was conducted (n=31) to ensure that the questions (and their Arabic translations) were clearly worded and logical. The pilot survey was carried out at the author's place of work, which can be considered as quasi-private in that it is a commercially-run, GBE. Following the pilot study, some items were dropped and some reworded. The survey items utilised in this study consisted of 34 items designed to provide data to fit this study's conceptual framework (22 likert scale job satisfaction items – 3 of which were later dropped and 12 demographic items) (see Figure 1). Aside from demographic questions and those based on the JSS scale, a number of items (4 items) were designed to better gauge sociocultural influences which were based on an extensive series of labour market-based surveys conducted in the 2000s and reported on by Nelson (2004). The items reported on, unless otherwise indicated, are 5-point Likert statements ranging from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree” (see Table 3).

[Insert Table 3 around here]

4. Results

Turning first to the sample demographics, that more females responded may indicate more females work in this sector compared to males—various authors indicate this is likely to be the case (see Table 2) (e.g., Marmenout & Lirio, 2013; Rutledge & Al-Shamsi, 2015). Other noteworthy observations, are firstly: four fifths of the sample held a university degree or higher and secondly that two thirds are privately educated. Noteworthy observations include how many (37.2%) had actually completed their internship at the same entity; almost two thirds had not been with the current employer for a particularly long time and just how many working in this sector had also members of the family already working there (close to 70%).

As highlighted in Table 3, each of this study's forecast factor groupings had high Cronbach alphas (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2015): α .945 for “continuance

intentions”; α .893 for “sociocultural influences”; α .969 for “salary and benefits”; α .941 for “training opportunities”; α .944 for “nature of the job” and, α .871 for “organisational commitment.” Yet when testing for multicollinearity some of these items and indeed factors were found to be redundant, as shall be discussed later. As a rule, a tolerance below .30 is considered a cause for concern because at least 70 per cent of the variance of the given IV is shared with some other IVs. These demonstrate inter-item correlation – the extent to which items are a consistent measure – to be high ($>.8$), and in instances close to possible item redundancy (Lance, Butts, & Michels, 2006; Loewenthal, 2001, p. 61). The Tolerance/VIF figures are suitable, all being below 5 (O'Brien, 2007). Specifically: salary and benefits .394/2.535; sociocultural .446/2.242; professional development .954/1.049 and, the working environment .516/1.937. Likewise, a VIF of 5 or more is generally considered to constitute the existence of multicollinearity between the IVs. The VIF values for “Nature of the job” and “Loyalty: were 6.744 and 6.019 were considered high. Dropping either from the model would have resulted in a satisfactory set of VIF values. It was decided that as an IV “Nature of the job” was of more relevance and interest (see Table 4).

[Insert Table 4 around here]

Looking at sample differences with respect to the dependent variable, “private sector continuance intentions” the following observations can be made (see Table 6). With regard to gender and home Emirate no statistically significant differences were observed. With regard to age, we can say that the younger somebody is, the less likely they will be to intend to continue in the ‘private’ sector (the survey data was coded in four groups with oldest coming first). Younger members of society are significantly more influenced by sociocultural barriers and least satisfied with the professional development opportunities on offer. With regard to level of educational attainment, the higher one’s qualification is the more likely it will be that they intend to remain in the ‘private’ sector (1 = secondary school; 4 = postgraduate). In terms of educational attainment levels, a number of differences are observable across the range of factors. A key observation is that it is those with an undergraduate degree report being the least likely to want to remain in the private sector and be most susceptible to the sociocultural stigma (as perceived) attached to this

sector. With regard to type of education (1 = Government; 2 = Private; 3 = Overseas) there is a positive and significant relationship. With regard to salary (1 = <\$5,000 p/c/m; 5 = >\$8,000 p/c/m) there is also a positive and significant relationship. In all respects those with the lowest salaries were less likely to want to remain and less satisfied with the job satisfaction factors. Lastly, with regard to the number of immediate family members working in the 'private' sector (1 = none; 3 = two or more) there was also a significant positive relationship. In terms of having exposure to the private sector, Table 5 shows that having one or more family member working in the private sector shows that this significantly increases an individual's private sector continuance intentions.

[Insert Table 5 around here]

In terms of the other factors depicted in Table 6 and their relationship to the dependent variable, "private sector continuance intentions" the following observations can be made. With respect to those considering further education (1 = no; 2 = yes), a positive and significant relation is observed. With respect to years participating in the workforce prior to the current position (1 = <6 months; 7 = >5 years), a positive relationship was observed – this augments the observation in relation to age. With respect to years at current employer (1 = <6 months; 7 = >5 years) there is also a significant positive relationship. With respect to vocational internships, not having completed one had a significant and negative relationship with one's continuance intentions. Conversely, those that had completed an internship with the 'private sector' organisation that they are currently working with were significantly more likely to intend to continue in this sector.

[Insert Table 6 around here]

Analysis in relation to the dependant and independent variables (DV; IV) delineated along demographic lines was also carried out. Of note is the gender differences that were apparent (see Table 7). Male respondents were significantly more likely to be adversely affected by sociocultural influences pride (or "prestige) and were significantly less happy with the nature (or "environment") of work in the private sector. While females were significantly more loyal to the given entity there was in fact no significant difference between the genders when it came to continuance intentions. That said, the means (3.175 for males to 3.343 for females) do indicate it is the men who are less likely to consider this sector for the longer term.

[Insert Table 7 around here]

The results of the stepwise linear regression model are presented in Table 8. The model's R^2 is .745 is acceptably high (Cameron & Windmeijer, 1997). The coefficients are: β .399 for benefits on continuance intentions; β -.423 for sociocultural influences; β .163 for professional development opportunities and, β .072 for the nature of the job. In other words, the analysis shows that “salary and benefits” significantly and positively predicted continuance intentions ($\beta = .399$, $t(652) = 12.619$, $p < .001$); “sociocultural influences significantly and negatively predicted continuance intentions ($\beta = -.423$, $t(652) = -14.239$, $p < .001$); “training opportunities” significantly and positively predicted continuance intentions ($\beta = .163$, $t(652) = 8.013$, $p < .001$) and, “nature of job” significantly and positively predicted continuance intentions ($\beta = .072$, $t(652) = 2.613$, $p .009$).

[Insert Table 8 around here]

5. Discussion

This research illustrates that salary clearly does have a positive significant effect on an Emirati's intention of remaining in the private sector. Considering the four hypotheses tested in this study, H1—as “salary and benefits”—is a very strong predictor of continuance intentions (α .969; 4 items; β .399, $p = < .001$; on “continuance intentions”). It can also be observed that views between the salary bands were significantly different. Those with the higher salary (31,000AED or more, which equates to USD8,400 p/m) were more likely to intend to continue in the private sector compared to those with salaries below USD5,400 p/m (20,000AED). This finding corroborates earlier works, for example of the work environment factors that Abdulla et al. (2011, p. 138) tested for, salary and benefits were found to be the most powerful determinant of job satisfaction. Although salary can be seen by a larger percentage of labour in the industrialised West as a source of appreciation and recognition (Locke, 1976), it is argued that in the UAE, particularly for

nationals, it also has significance for pride and prestige in a tribal sense and secondly in a slightly broad Arab patriarchal sense (Williams et al., 2013).

Socio-cultural perceptions of working in the private sector are, according to the findings of this research, a key deterrent to attracting and retaining nationals in the private sector. In terms of H4, it is clear that sociocultural influences do have a significant and negative impact on continuance intentions predictor (α .893; 4 items; β -.423, $p = < .001$; on “continuance intentions”). Put differently, the more an individual is swayed by what society thinks in relation to the appropriacy of pursuing a private sector career, the less likely will be their intention of remaining in this sector.

Abdulla et al. (2011, pp. 138-139) also find that an important factor determining job satisfaction is “public perception” which, it was argued, “shows that respondents thought that they were viewed favourably by the public”. This is underpinned by earlier job satisfaction research in “collectivist cultures” where employees report high satisfaction levels based on the social perception and status of the sector in which they work (e.g., Abu Elanain, 2009; Huang & Vliert, 2004).

The second hypothesis was: “availability of career development opportunities has a significant positive effect on an individual’s intention of remaining in the private sector,” was also found to be a significant predictor (α .914; 3 items; β .163, $p = < .001$; on “continuance intentions”). A broad assumption is that – given the costs involved in training and providing career development opportunities – traditionally the public sector provides (or individuals believe it provides) more training than does the private sector. The results make clear that such training is deemed to be attractive and effects private sector continuance intentions.

The third hypothesis was: “the nature of the work/environment has a significant positive effect on an individual’s intention of remaining in the private sector,” this again was found to be accepted: α .944; 4 items; β .072, $p = < .001$; on “continuance intentions”. In other words, the nature of the job, the work environment did have a positive relationship on the likelihood of an individual remaining in the private sector. Private sector jobs are considered to be more stressful and challenging, with employees often facing commercial deadlines, requiring language skills in English as well as Arabic and interacting with colleagues from diverse, multi-cultural backgrounds.

In terms of educational attainment levels (refer back to Table 4), it is immediately obvious that those with a “university degree” are the least satisfied and are least likely to intend to remain in the private sector. This at first is hard to interpret but it has been mentioned that with a degree many UAE graduates feel that they should be able to get a suitable job (i.e., a government job) (Al Waqfi & Forstenlechner, 2012, 2014). The UAE government is keen for nationals to accept non-conventional jobs and it may be seen as a patriotic duty by some. The same general point in terms of “somehow” acquiring a different vocational mentality from spending time in education overseas can be observed. In terms of where an individual’s education was obtained. It is clear to see that those who have graduated from a Federal institution are much less likely to want to stay in the private sector compared to those who graduated from a local/overseas private institution.

The number of family members working in the private sector also had a significant impact in a number of respects. This so called ‘normalisation’ of pursuing private sector careers (Forstenlechner & Rutledge, 2011) does seem to be reflected, to a degree, in the findings from the study’s survey. Those who had two or more immediate family members already in the private sector were much less concerned about Emiratis society’s views on private sector careers, much more content with the nature of the job and significantly more loyal to the organisation.

Overall these findings underscore why the public sector remains attractive and this does complicate the likelihood of private-sector Emiratisation being a success in the short-term. While the usual factors are again exemplified, the pull that salary and benefits constitute (Al Ali, 2008; Issa et al., 2013) and the push of sociocultural influences (Forstenlechner & Rutledge, 2010; Harry, 2007). One key point of nuance is that sociocultural influence from the perspective of UAE nationals currently working in the private sector had more of an impact on men than women. This is revealing as from the other side it is women who are facing issues in term of gaining access to this sector.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

The stepwise multilinear regression model found the following significant relationships (predictors) of a given individual’s likelihood of the planned behaviour of continuing in

the private sector for the foreseeable future. A significant regression equation was found ($F(4, 648) = 472.510, p < .000$), with an R^2 of .745. Participants' predicted continuance intentions is equal to $3.054 + .399 (IV_1) - .423 (IV_2) + .163 (IV_3) + .072 (IV_4)$. All four IVs were significant predictors of continuance intentions. Put differently, the factor most likely to retain UAE nationals in the private sector is the provision of high salary and generous benefits; the factor most likely to lead UAE nationals to leave is the sociocultural 'stigma' attached to working in this sector. Furthermore, the greater the provision of career development opportunities and clarity on promotion pathways along with the satisfaction with the working environment were also found to have a positive significant impact on continuance intentions.

The results of this study can indicate areas where policy reform would improve the successful implementation of the Emiratisation process. Clearly any attempt to increase mandatory quotas for private-sector companies will face obstacles in the short run without complimentary reforms to address the key determinants of Emirati job satisfaction as set out in this study. What is perhaps "the key" concern is the distortive effect of the classic public sector's salary and benefits. While this point is not a revelation, it is the first large-scale study to confirm this. At the macro level delinking non-core benefits from public sector jobs has considerable merit. As this study's survey findings highlight clearly, more than anything else it is the public sector's "salary and benefits" that attract UAE nationals. It therefore follows, this is the issue that more than anything else negatively affects private sector Emiratisation retention levels. As has previously been argued by Al Waqfi and Forstenlechner (2012, p. 623), there is a need to consider the impact of, "pay policies in the public sector on Emiratisation efforts and policies, as they effectively hinder private sector employment." Mechanisms to extend the welfare component of pay to those citizens working in the private sector will need to be implemented. Subsidizing wages of citizens in the private sector to bridge the gap between the efficiency and welfare components of pay might be a reasonable alternative. Funding of these subsidies can be secured through fees imposed on employers who recruit foreign workers. Selective application of such fees on employers depending on number of foreigners recruited and affordability to pay might be needed to ensure fairness and avoid excessive burdens on certain employers.

Furthermore, as the results of this study has also shown training and career development opportunities are another factor that positively influences an individual's private sector

continuance intentions. Therefore an HRM recommendation would be for government agencies to develop and fund needs-based career development training options for private companies in sectors that are seen to be making good progress with Emiratisation these off-site/on-site courses could be provided for free.

Tackling the socio-cultural 'stigma' attached to working in the private sector is however, perhaps more challenging from a policy maker's perspective. This study has illustrated the negative impact of 'socio-cultural' perceptions on private sector employment, where it is believed that society attaches more prestige to those working in the public sector.

However, this is not surprising given the current realities of public sector versus private sector employment where the latter provides relatively higher salaries and benefits and less stress and pressure. It is perhaps significant that this study's findings indicate that male Emiratis are more sensitive to these socio-cultural perceptions than females, which relates to the patriarchal nature of UAE society centred on a male 'bread-winner'. Therefore if reforms are undertaken to improve salaries and benefits as well as working hours in private sector employment for nationals concomitant with a package of policy reforms such as those mentioned above then over time private sector employment of nationals will become more commonplace and 'normalised'.

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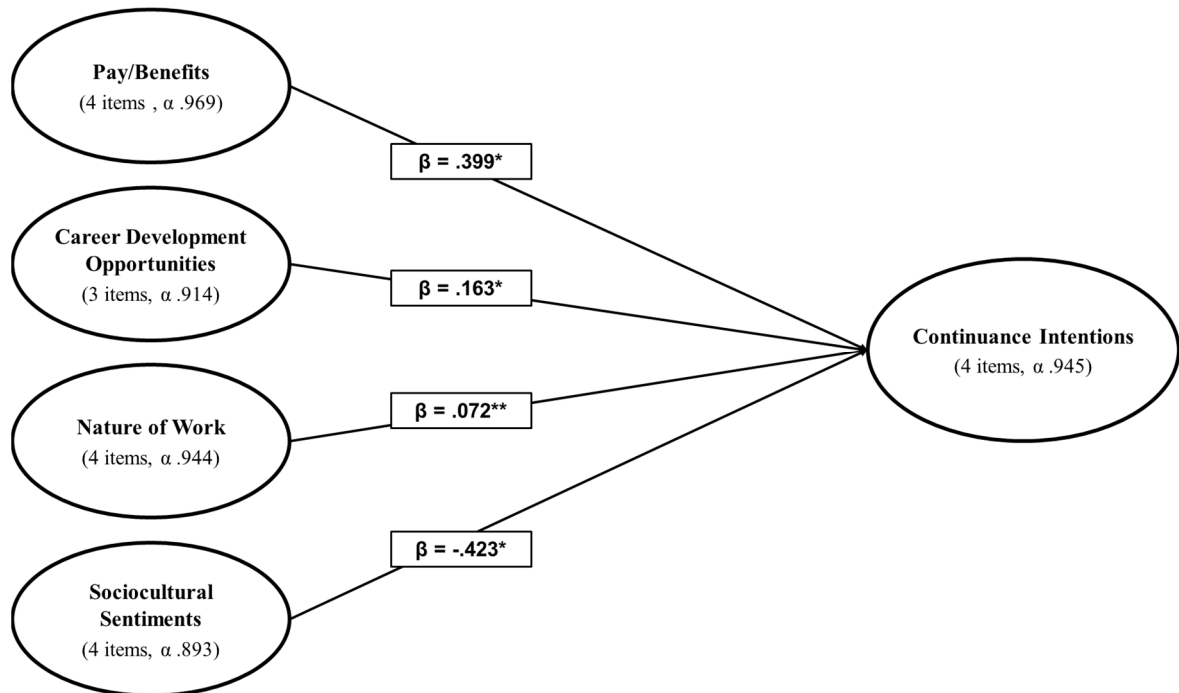
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Figure 1: Conceptual Framework Model



Note: *p < .05; **p < .10.

Table 1: Sample Demographics; Industry, Experience and Salary

| Sector of economy | Number | Per cent |
|------------------------------------|---------------|-----------------|
| Manufacturing (w. aviation) | 241 | 36.9% |
| Banking and Finance | 180 | 27.7% |
| Telecommunications (w. ICT) | 101 | 15.5% |
| Healthcare and Hospitality | 131 | 20.1% |
| Internship w. your employer | | |
| Yes | 243 | 37.2% |
| No, with another entity | 131 | 20.1% |
| No internship undertaken | 279 | 42.7% |
| Years worked w. employer | | |
| <2 | 377 | 57.7% |
| 2–5 | 109 | 16.7% |
| >5 | 167 | 25.6% |
| Family in this sector | | |
| None | 197 | 30.2% |
| One | 362 | 55.4% |
| Two or more | 94 | 14.4% |
| Salary range | | |
| < USD5,000 p/c/m | 156 | 23.9% |
| USD5,000–8,000 p/c/m | 336 | 51.5% |
| > USD8,000 p/c/m | 161 | 24.7% |

Note: n=653

Table 2: Sample Demographics; Gender, Age, Emirate and Education

| Gender | Number | Per cent |
|------------------------------|---------------|-----------------|
| Male | 284 | 43.5% |
| Female | 369 | 56.5% |
| Age | | |
| > 35 | 43 | 6.6% |
| 30–35 | 241 | 36.9% |
| 25–30 | 219 | 33.5% |
| < 25 | 150 | 23.0% |
| Emirate | | |
| Abu Dhabi | 263 | 40.1% |
| Dubai | 141 | 21.5% |
| Sharjah | 103 | 15.0% |
| Fujairah | 39 | 6.0% |
| Ras Al Khaimah | 65 | 10.0% |
| Ajman | 35 | 5.2% |
| Umm Al Quwain | 17 | 2.2% |
| Education (Level) | | |
| Secondary School Certificate | 16 | 2.5% |
| College Diploma | 89 | 13.6% |
| Undergraduate | 398 | 60.9% |
| Postgraduate | 150 | 23% |
| Education (Location) | | |
| Federal | 245 | 37.5% |
| Private, local | 275 | 42.1% |
| Private, overseas | 133 | 20.4% |

Note: n=653

Table 3: Survey Items

| Sub-dimensions | M | SD | α |
|--|------|------|-------------|
| 1. (DV) Continuance Intentions | | | .945 |
| I am happy to work in the private sector | 2.91 | 1.22 | |
| I would move to the public if I could secure employment there (R) | 2.83 | 0.95 | |
| I intend to continue working for this organisation for the foreseeable future | 3.00 | 0.98 | |
| Working in the private sector is better than what most Emiratis think it to be | 3.31 | 1.29 | |
| 2. (IV1) Salary and Benefits | | | .969 |
| In my present occupation, I am satisfied with my salary (financial compensation) | 3.00 | 0.88 | |
| In my present occupation, I am satisfied with my days of annual leave | 2.86 | 0.92 | |
| In my present occupation, I am satisfied with my weekly working hours | 2.87 | 0.93 | |
| In my present occupation, I am satisfied with my level of job security | 2.52 | 0.69 | |
| 2. (IV2) Sociocultural Influences | | | .893 |
| Most Emiratis do not understand the need for private sector Emiratisation | 3.22 | 0.78 | |
| Society sees public sector employment as more appropriate for Emirati women | 3.93 | 0.60 | |
| I believe the government should provide all citizens with government jobs | 3.42 | 0.86 | |
| Society attaches more prestige to individuals who have jobs in the conventional public sector (including the army and police force) vis-à-vis the private sector | 3.62 | 0.60 | |
| 3. (IV3) Career Development Opportunities | | | .914 |
| In my present occupation, I am satisfied with my training opportunities | 3.49 | 0.86 | |
| I am happy with the training opportunities available to me | 3.28 | 1.02 | |
| There are opportunities to discuss my career development and progression | 3.46 | 0.69 | |
| 4. (IV4) Nature of the job | | | .944 |
| I do not face a lot of stress in my job in the private sector | 3.55 | 1.00 | |
| I am happy working along non-nationals (peers and managers) | 3.82 | 1.14 | |
| My colleagues help me when I have a work problem/I have a mentor at work | 3.77 | 0.47 | |
| I am happy to use English (alongside Arabic) as an when necessary | 3.83 | 1.15 | |

Note: Items above are those subjected to statistical analysis; those relating to loyalty were dropped as multicollinearity testing indicated they were similar to those that together comprise “Nature of the job.”

Table 4. Multicollinearity; IV Coefficients

| | Collinearity Statistics | |
|---|-------------------------|-------|
| | Tolerance | VIF |
| Salary and benefits | .394 | 2.535 |
| Sociocultural influences | .446 | 2.242 |
| Career Development opportunities | .954 | 1.049 |
| Nature of the job | .516 | 1.937 |

Note: Dependent variable: "continuance intention."

Table 5: Differences along Demographic Lines

| | Continuance intention | Sociocultural influences | Salary and benefits | CD opportunities | Nature of the job |
|---|--------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------|----------------------|
| Age | | | | | |
| > 35 ^a | 4.2256 | 2.9234 | 4.4436 | 4.1024 | 4.3130 |
| 30–35 ^a | 3.5264 | 2.8607 | 3.6084 | 3.2459 | 3.7228 |
| 25–30 ^a | 3.2169 | 3.5618 | 3.0170 | 3.7480 | 2.7369 |
| < 25 ^a | 2.6617 | 3.6009 | 2.7593 | 2.3723 | 3.0217 |
| J-T ^b | .000* | .000* | .000* | .000* | .000* |
| Highest education level | | | | | |
| Secondary school certificate ^a | 4.2500 | 2.8863 | 3.5454 | 3.1227 | 4.3636 |
| College diploma ^a | 3.6428 | 3.3065 | 3.1547 | 3.1784 | 3.8839 |
| Undergrad. degree ^a | 2.3222 | 3.8881 | 2.3448 | 3.2258 | 3.385 |
| Postgraduate degree ^a | 4.3187 | 2.8796 | 3.7390 | 4.0056 | 4.5156 |
| J-T ^b | .000* | .000* | .000* | .000* | .000* |
| Type of education | | | | | |
| Federal institution ^a | 2.9305 | 3.6456 | 2.8182 | 3.0852 | 2.8444 |
| Private - local ^a | 3.4464 | 3.1933 | 3.4237 | 3.2641 | 3.3651 |
| Private - overseas ^a | 3.5306 | 2.7368 | 3.7844 | 3.6226 | 3.8574 |
| J-T ^b | .001* | .000* | .000* | .008* | .000* |
| Salary | | | | | |
| < USD5,000 ^a | 2.9068 | 3.7031 | 2.9739 | 2.4011 | 2.7006 |
| USD5–8,000 ^a | 3.3651 | 3.1193 | 3.3807 | 3.5576 | 3.5214 |
| USD>8,000 ^a | 3.4234 | 3.1648 | 3.3258 | 3.5117 | 3.2970 |
| J-T ^b | .015* | .089 | .011* | .000* | .004* |
| Family members working in 'private sector' | | | | | |
| None | 2.5160 | 3.6436 | 2.8736 | 3.1588 | 2.7474 |
| One | 3.3245 | 3.3140 | 3.2458 | 3.3361 | 3.3253 |
| Two or more | 4.6403 | 2.3174 | 4.1937 | 3.2485 | 4.1522 |
| J-T ^b | .000* | .000* | .000* | .474 | .000* |

Note: n=653 (Age bands: > 35, 43; 30–35, 241; 25–30, 219; < 25, 150. Educational attainment bands: Secondary School Certificate, 16; College Diploma, 89; Undergraduate, 398; Postgraduate, 150. Type of education: Federal, 245; Private - local, 275; Private - overseas, 133. Salary bands: <USD5,000 p/c/m, 156; USD5,000–8,000 p/c/m, 336; >USD8,000 p/c/m, 161. Family members in the private sector: None, 197; One, 362; Two or more, 94.); df=1; a Likert 1–5 scale was used. ^a Mean Rank. ^b J-T = Jonckheere-Terpstra Test; Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed). * p = <0.05.

Table 6. Demographic Factors and Continuance Intentions

| | On (DV) “Continuance Intentions” | |
|---|----------------------------------|----------------------|
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | Pearson ^a |
| Gender | .446 | .030 |
| Home Emirate | .600 | .021 |
| Age | .000 | -.268** |
| Highest education level | .000 | .292** |
| Type of education | .000 | .172** |
| Salary | .001 | .124** |
| Family members working in ‘private sector’ | .000 | .352** |
| Other factors | | |
| Considering further education | .000 | .208** |
| Years of previous work experience | .000 | .202** |
| Years with current employer | .000 | .148** |
| Completed a vocational internship? | .012 | -.098* |
| Completed internship with current employer? | .006 | .106** |

Note: n=653. a Pearson correlation R values * <.05; ** p = <.01.

Table 7: Variables in Relation to Gender

| | Continuance intention | Sociocultural influences | Pay and benefits | Training opportunities | Nature of the job | Loyalty |
|---------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------|------------------|------------------------|-------------------|---------|
| Male ^a | 3.1752 | 3.4746 | 3.1664 | 3.3739 | 3.0110 | 3.0083 |
| Female ^a | 3.3430 | 3.1125 | 3.3497 | 3.1900 | 3.4693 | 3.4714 |
| KWT ^b | .254 | .013* | .202 | .204 | .002* | .001* |
| Chi-Square | 1.300 | 6.159 | 1.629 | 1.617 | 10.077 | 10.709 |
| J-T ^c | .254 | .013* | .202 | .204 | .002* | .001* |
| Std. J-T Statistic | 1.140 | -2.482 | 1.276 | -1.272 | 3.174 | 3.272 |

Note: n=653 (male, 284; female, 369); df=1; a Likert 1–5 scale was used. ^a Mean Rank derived from Kruskal Wallis Test. ^b KWT = Kruskal Wallis Test, Asymp. Sig. ^c J-T = Jonckheere-Terpstra Test; Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed). * p = <.05.

Table 8: Regression Results

| Model | R | R Square | Adjusted R Square | Std. Error | Change Statistics | | | | |
|-------|-------------------|----------|-------------------|------------|-------------------|----------|-----|-----|--------------|
| | | | | | R S Change | F Change | df1 | df2 | Sig F Change |
| 1 | .000 ^a | .618 | .617 | .63418 | .618 | 1052.523 | 1 | 651 | .000 |
| 2 | .000 ^b | .717 | .716 | .54605 | .099 | 228.099 | 1 | 650 | .000 |
| 3 | .000 ^c | .742 | .741 | .52189 | .025 | 62.571 | 1 | 649 | .000 |
| 4 | .000 ^d | .745 | .743 | .51956 | .003 | 6.830 | 1 | 648 | .009 |

ANNOVA

| Model | | Sum of Square | df | Mean Squares | F | Sig. |
|-------|------------|---------------|-----|--------------|---------|-------------------|
| 4 | Regression | 510.203 | 4 | 127.551 | 472.510 | .000 ^d |
| | Residual | 174.923 | 648 | .270 | | |

Coefficients

| Model | B | Unstd. Co. Error | Std. Co. Beta | t | Sig. | Correlations | | | Collinearity Statistics | |
|--------------|-------|------------------|---------------|---------|------|--------------|---------|-------|-------------------------|-------|
| | | | | | | Zero Order | Partial | Part | Tol. | VIF |
| 4 (Constant) | 3.054 | .289 | | 10.574 | .000 | | | | | |
| BENEFITS | .497 | .039 | .399 | 12.619 | .000 | .786 | .444 | .250 | .394 | 2.535 |
| SO-CUL | -.691 | .049 | -.423 | -14.239 | .000 | -.785 | -.488 | -.283 | .446 | 2.242 |
| TRAINING | .208 | .026 | .163 | 8.013 | .000 | .333 | .300 | .159 | .954 | 1.049 |
| NATURE | .081 | .031 | .072 | 2.613 | .009 | .620 | .102 | .052 | .516 | 1.937 |

Note: Dependent variable: "continuance intention". ^a Predictors: (Constant), Salary and benefits; ^b Predictors: (Constant), Salary and benefits, Sociocultural influences; ^c Predictors: (Constant), Salary and benefits, Sociocultural influences, Training opportunities; ^d Predictors: (Constant), Salary and benefits, Sociocultural influences, Training opportunities, Nature of the job.