

# KABi INSIGHTS

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# HOW CAN SELF-SERVICE TOOLS FOR EMPLOYEES ENSURE EFFICIENCY IN HR MANAGEMENT?

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In any organisation, human resources personnel are burdened with some of the most crucial tasks ranging from identifying and acquiring the right candidates for a job, retaining valuable employees, handling their queries amongst others. While the importance of HR-related tasks can't be undermined, they often require cumbersome manual efforts, and can be time-consuming and repetitive in nature. In this regard, the adoption of a self-service tool can help HR management to allocate more time and resources on strategic aspects of their role. To get a better understanding, self-service tools are primarily hosted on an online portal that allows employees to perform a range of HR-dependent tasks themselves, thereby doing away with the requirement of paper works and any involvement of HR. These portals can be accessed through web browsers using desktops or laptops, mobile or other electronic devices. As self-service platforms use advanced technologies such as AI bots, virtual assistants and automation, it can resolve frequently raised queries by employees and give them access to see the pay slips and access logs related to working hours etc. Self-service systems also make the process of leave management much simpler and easier for the employees as they will be able to readily log, view and monitor their leaves. In essence, these tools complement HR teams right from hiring new employees to their exit interviews.

An HR self-service system acts as a gateway to a consolidated set of information that can result in better

alignment of employee and organizational goals. It reduces cost and can increase employees' productivity as the time spent on searching for HR-related information and the turnaround time in getting a response drastically reduces. This could ultimately yield higher satisfaction levels among employees as a result of optimisation of communication across the organization.

According to a HR survey by Paychex Pulse, HR leaders have chosen to define their role more as a strategic partner rather than that of an administrator. Self-service portals therefore play an important role in refining HR's contribution in the organization by enabling them to allocate more time on strategic aspects that are in line with the organization's objectives, rather than spending time on less productive and more time-consuming administrative transactions.

While the extent of cost reduction will always be the primary focus before implementing a self-service system, the long-term efficiencies in HR management processes can't be side-lined. One efficiency that such a system can deliver is to completely eliminate or significantly reduce errors or inaccuracies in the data collection process as employees will feel responsible for maintaining their own information accurate and updated. This data which is often used as an input for various business intelligence needs such as identifying patterns and predicting workforce trends will be much more reliable, as with the increase

Self-service portals play an important role in refining HR's contribution in the organization by enabling them to allocate more time on strategic aspects that are in line with the organization's objectives, rather than spending time on less productive and more time-consuming administrative transactions.

in the accuracy of data provided there will be improvement in the quality of analysis and business intelligence. Over time, organisations across geographies have also realized the importance of training and employee development programs in order to retain and engage their employees. Therefore, such organizations have started investing more and more in performance management systems. For instance, a range of self-service portals provide employees the space to complete self-evaluations, set targets, input information on their training and development activities. These are also often linked to the annual performance evaluation. It ultimately allows HR managers to concentrate more on value added processes in the performance management.

While wide employee acceptance and efficiencies derived from self-service tools make the case of adopting them worthwhile, there are inevitably some challenges that come along. Since the data is often stored online, security of data becomes vital. Organizations have to ensure that all the information stays protected. If employees don't feel

confident in the ability of the system to safeguard their personal information, it may become difficult to realise the full potential from these portals, which have a huge initial cost of investment associated with them. In addition, if the system is not user-friendly, it can become difficult for users to navigate and may lead to errors initially while getting familiar with the portal. It is therefore necessary to conduct sessions for new users, implement continuous quality checks to help during the initial stage of implementation of self-service tools. However, as the benefits of implementing self-service tools outright any obstacle, it is becoming less of a preference and more of a necessity. Irrespective of the scale, companies across sectors and countries are looking to integrate self-service systems into HR management. As self-service portals alleviate human resources from spending majority of their time in dealing with the burden of addressing repetitive tasks, the end result is efficient, more satisfied and productive employees along with more efficient HR management.■

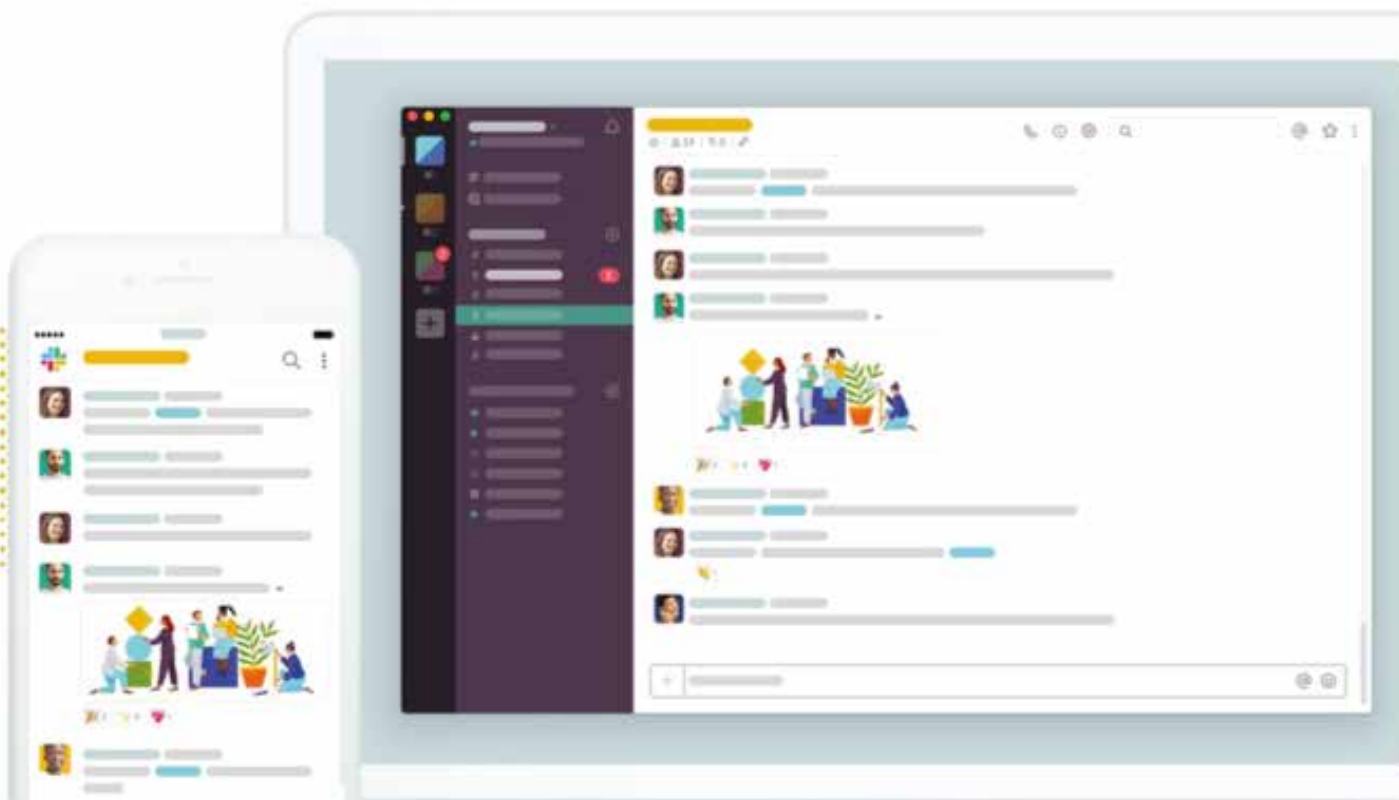


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# CASE STUDY

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Slack (Digital Collaboration Tool)



## CASE STUDY OF SLACK (Digital Collaboration Tool)



According to a McKinsey study, workplace communication technologies can increase employee productivity by up to 25%. On an average, workers spend up to 28% of the workweek to manage emails and around 20% looking for internal information or tracking down co-workers who can provide assistance to execute specific tasks.

Slack was launched in 2013 as a workplace collaboration application. Workplaces of today are people-centric. Businesses are becoming more transparent by giving employees the tools and space to perform well and deliver the best results. Slack is a digital workplace communication tool that allows exchange of information among employees. Collaborative digital software market has a current value of USD 3.5 billion, and is forecasted to grow at nearly 70% in the next three years.

Slack, an acronym for 'Searchable Log of All Conversation and Knowledge' is a cloud-based communication service. It currently has over 10 million daily active users ranging from startups to some of the Fortune 100 companies. Slack was developed as an Instant Messaging (IM) app with a host of additional plugins that facilitate real-time messaging, archiving, and intelligent search functionalities. It is further made more interactive by allowing users to perform video calling, browse flights, approve budgets and evaluate job

candidates within the app.

Businesses of today, regardless of sector or scale, are looking to simplify collaboration and shrink timelines through effective communication. Therefore, Slack provides an interesting value proposition for businesses. Slack allows centralization of notifications into one searchable place which allows teams to further carry on discussions and take actions. What differs Slack from other instant messaging mediums is integration. Slack uses integrations including Dropbox, G-Suite, Salesforce, and Skype in addition to many others. The core features and capabilities of Slack are as follows:

1. It facilitates contextually relevant and segmented communications such as direct messaging, voice and video calls between teams.
2. Synchronized communication, which further enables collaboration across multiple devices and platforms.
3. Integration with third party apps, legacy enterprise software, and custom

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built apps and chatbots.

4. Customizable notifications and advanced searches within documents.

The key functionalities of Slack are as follows:

### **CHANNELS**

Slack's channels help in organizing team conversations in different channels based on project, topic or any other parameter. Each channel enables separate messaging, discussions and notifications by purpose, department or topic to those involved, thereby providing a transparent view of all that's going on.

### **PRIVATE CHANNELS**

For business sensitive and confidential information that needs to be shared, private channels can be created. These private channels cannot be viewed or joined by any other members apart from the authorized ones.

### **DIRECT MESSAGES**

In line with the traditional instant messaging functionality, Slack provides the option of direct messaging to reach a colleague directly. This is a completely private and secure mode of communication.

### **SHARE FILES**

Slack supports the upload and download of files up to 1 GB, whereas to provide a comparison, Gmail allows sharing of files up to 25 MB only. Images, PDFs, documents and spreadsheets can be dropped into Slack and shared with additional comments for later reference.

### **SEARCH**

Messages, notifications and files in slack are automatically indexed and archived. Therefore, Slack has a robust and reliable search functionality that lets a user find key information even within the document shared.

### **NOTIFICATIONS**

Slack enables the users to customize the notifications according to channels, topics etc. This ensures that the user is not interrupted by constant notifications and the user can focus on the top priority.

### **PLATFORMS**

Slack can be used at desk through apps for Mac, Windows and Linux. It also offers mobile apps for iOS, Android and Windows.

Slack encourages employees to question, communicate, brainstorm, and solve problems on a digital platform, thereby encouraging collaboration and innovation. It helps in effectively tackling silos between departments. Further, in case of a virtual or global company, it helps the employees to connect, and share ideas. Slack is one of the many workplace software that companies of today use to facilitate communication and collaboration among its increasingly spanned out employees. Google's Hangout Chat and Meet, Calendar, Facebook's Workplace etc. are other examples. In summary, Slack is a versatile tool that is used by a range of businesses including small companies, large enterprises, freelancers and medium businesses.

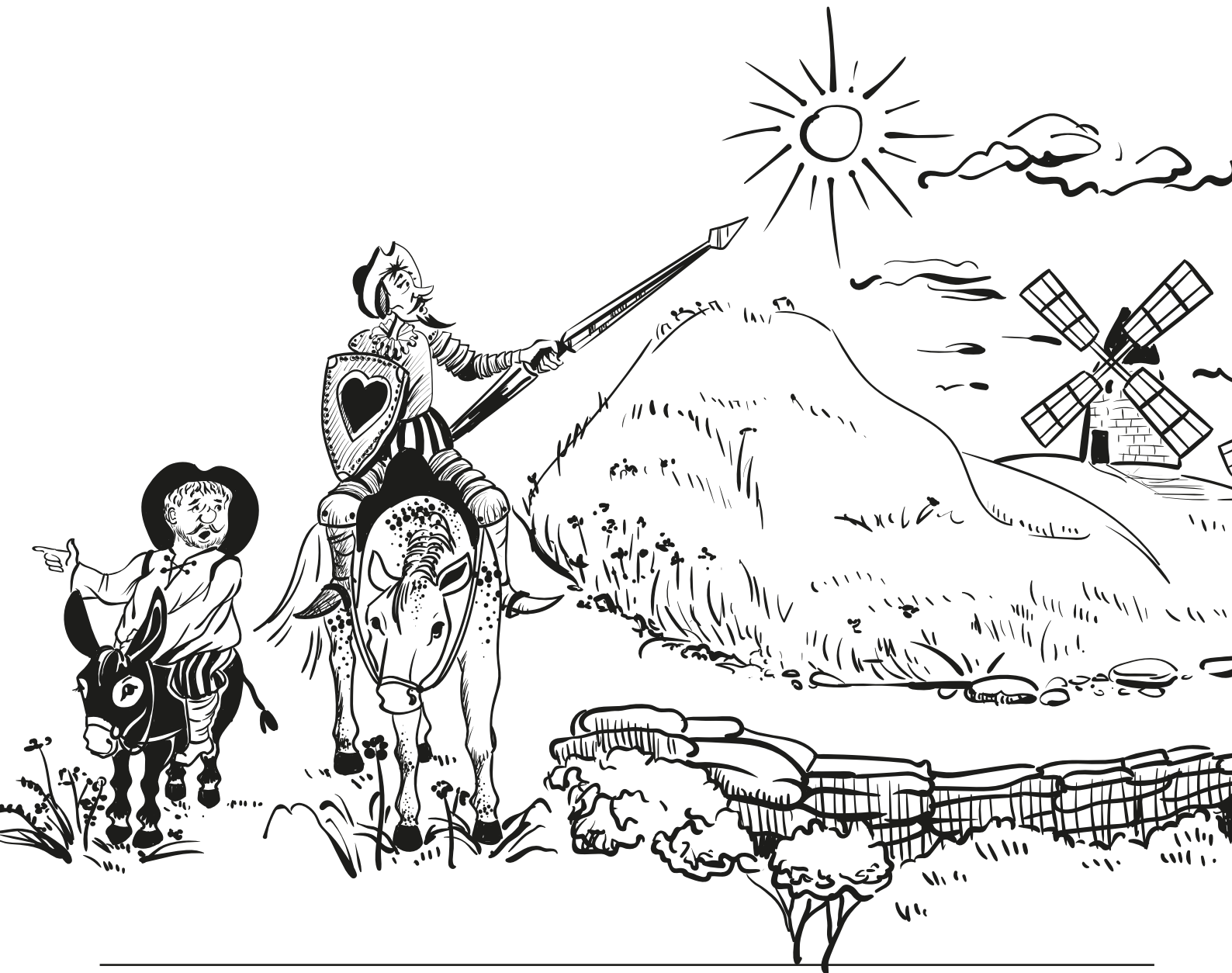
By lowering the barrier to start conversations, Slack has an unintended consequence which is to exponentially increase communication overhead. This can lead to more voluminous and lower quality communication. It is highly likely that if not used in the right manner, workplace software can become another medium of digital noise. ■



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# WHY IS VISUAL STORYTELLING IMPORTANT IN RECRUITMENT?

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Employees drive organizational performance. Every good thing that a company hopes to accomplish hinges on the commitment and talent of its employees. Be it customer relation, completing a task, or nurturing organizational culture, employees are the key. Getting the right people in the right roles is crucial for organizational success.

More companies are coming up and prospective applicants have many choices. It is both challenging and highly important to catch their attention, so that the company has better chances of recruiting the right talent. Employer brand building has become as important as customer facing advertising.

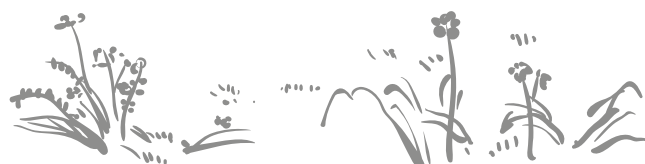
According to Deloitte Human Capital Trends 2019 report, finding qualified talent tops the list of employer's biggest challenges. 77% of the respondents from Middle East consider talent access to be an important issue. With the rise of social media and the resultant information overload, traditional text-based method of posting a job description and hoping a great candidate comes by is ineffective. New age employees look at many aspects of a company's profile before joining. They search for information on the company's brand, culture, team and the overall experience. Job seekers are more likely to apply for positions with an engaging online presence than one with a stale and non-existent one. Providing extensive and engaging information has become a necessity.

Visual storytelling is a powerful way to do just that as providing extensive, relevant information in an engaging way has become much needed. Standing out amidst the noise can be accomplished through creative and meticulous storytelling. Everyone loves a good story, and employer profiles which are attention grabbing, easily understandable, and emotionally involving are the best tools of communication. It is worth mentioning that almost 50% of the human brain is involved in visual processing and thus the importance. Internet users spend 88% more time on pages that feature a video than those without. An interesting statistic shows that the number of active UAE users in YouTube equals to 82% of the population, and 61% of the population are active on Instagram. These stats highlight the potential of visual storytelling. A short clip on a day in the life of an employee in a particular role, highlighting their traits and skills, is more understandable, relatable and engaging to a candidate than a long

paragraph describing the job.

Visual storytelling captures the candidates' unwavering attention. It helps candidates understand the role and the organization as well as having a high recall value. Stories, especially visual ones, lead to high emotional investment and forms the first step to a great employee engagement. Visual storytelling helps in articulating a company's brand and provides a clear picture of what the company stands for, what is it like to work there and what the organization is working towards. Much talked about organizational values, culture and HR policies can be easily communicated. Visual storytelling aids in increasing the quality of the reach out and also helps in reaching out to more candidates. It helps the organization reach out to not only top talent but also to the right fit. By the way a story is structured and channeled, it could serve as targeted job advertising.

Visual storytelling is not an option but a necessity these days. Crafting a good story and improving engagement is the road forward. A byproduct is that it builds a sense of community in the current employees and they are more invested in the firm. ■



## AT EXPO 2020 DUBAI, UAE NATIONALS HAVE A UNIQUE OPPORTUNITY TO GAIN VALUABLE SKILLS AND SERVE THEIR COUNTRY



### FATIMA AL LOUGHANI

*Head of Expo Academy and Emiratisation – Human Resources, Workforce and Volunteers, Expo 2020 Dubai, PhD Researcher*

As Head of Expo Academy and Emiratisation at Expo 2020 Dubai, Fatima Al Loughani is responsible for overseeing the integration of UAE national talent before, during and after the next World Expo. She leads Expo 2020's internship, government mobilisation, knowledge transfer, inclusion and talent development programmes.

Fatima also heads the Expo Generation Programme, designed to create a lasting legacy of knowledge and expertise within the UAE's national workforce and ensuring the UAE has access to a world-class pool of national talent for generations to come. This supports the UAE Government's Emiratisation strategy by providing exciting job opportunities for UAE nationals, contributing to the country's long-term success.

Fatima's work involves engaging with and recruiting Emiratis from multiple sectors, enabling them to create a global impact and work in a fast-paced environment while facilitating the delivery of the Middle East, Africa and South Asia (MEASA) region's first ever World Expo.

With a Master's Degree in Human Resources and Development, Fatima has more than 15 years of experience across a wide range of industries. Before joining Expo 2020, she worked for a number of leading companies including Schlumberger, Etihad Airways, Total ABK, IKEA, Dubai World and Abu Dhabi Ports.

Fatima also completed Wharton Executive Education's Dubai Leadership Programme in 2007, and obtained a Master's Degree in Global HR Management from the University of Liverpool in 2015. She is currently researching the transformational leadership of Dubai as part of a doctorate with the University of Strathclyde Business School, and is due to complete her studies in 2020.

For six months from 20 October 2020, Expo 2020 Dubai will welcome more than 200 international participants, including 192 countries plus millions of visitors, to the World's Greatest Show of human brilliance and achievement.

Organised under the theme 'Connecting Minds, Creating the Future', Expo 2020 will be the first World Expo to be held in the Middle East, Africa and South Asia, and a defining moment in the history of the UAE.

It is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for the UAE to share its warm hospitality, rich heritage and ambitious future with nations from every corner of the globe, while also an unprecedented opportunity for Emirati nationals to gain valuable experience in organising and delivering a truly global event, developing a meaningful, long-lasting legacy of world-class future talent.

In line with the UAE's National Agenda 2021 and the Eight Principles of Dubai, Expo 2020's broad Emiratisation strategy is open to nationals of all ages, backgrounds and skills and is designed to ensure that UAE citizens play a central role in delivering an exceptional World Expo.

Three core approaches make up the programme, all focused on ensuring a cross section of Emirati nationals, including People of Determination, are given the opportunity to gain experience from Expo 2020 Dubai.

Expo 2020's Internship Programme, which will eventually train 300 UAE nationals, allows young Emiratis to benefit from the significant amount of diversified talent and expertise required to stage a global event of this magnitude. It serves as a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for Emirati youth to tap into some of the minds of the world's most talented professionals and gain exposure to the working world.

Open to both Emirati undergraduates and recent graduates, regardless of their level of experience, the scheme enables interns to experience a working environment, while applying their academic learning in practice and developing core competencies for future employment. It is a solid framework to inspire their career selection and provides significant professional exposure to a high-level global event.

Successful candidates are placed in a position relevant to their field of study. Recent graduates can enjoy internships lasting up to three months at Expo 2020, while undergraduate placements are based on the requirements of students' universities.

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With Expo 2020 a national milestone for the UAE, government participation also plays a vital role in ensuring its success, providing a range of benefits to the six-month World Expo that includes more local experience and a more active role for government in its delivery.

Expo 2020's Secondment and Assignment Programmes aim to attract 400 UAE government and institutional staff to work in the run up to Expo and during the event, harnessing the significant pool of national talent that will help to deliver an exceptional World Expo, visited by millions from across the world.

Providing opportunities for government and institutional staff to participate in the biggest event ever staged in the Arab world, these programmes also nurture talent to ensure the successful delivery of future projects, in turn securing a better equipped workforce post-Expo as part of the event's meaningful legacy.

The pre-event Secondment Programme offers roles lasting for 12-24 months and brings together existing talent to help deliver the World's Greatest Show, while at the same time offering participants professional experience as they build fresh skills in a new industry.

The Assignment Programme, endorsed by and managed in partnership with Dubai Government Human Resources Department, will employ government and institutional staff during the six-month event, although roles may begin earlier to include testing, training and an operational readiness period. The programme will be considered part of the employee's period of service and will be included in the calculation of their pension or retirement benefit.

Finally, the Expo Generation Programme, formerly known as the 'Expo 2020 Academy', serves as the third pillar of Expo 2020's Emiratisation strategy, designed to create a lasting legacy of knowledge and expertise within the UAE's national workforce.

Tasked with recruiting, training and mobilising 350 Emirati graduates and young professionals, the programme offers a unique opportunity for fast-track management and leadership skills training prior to taking up pivotal roles within the Expo 2020 team.

The selected applicants will undergo an intensive and comprehensive six-week training programme where they will be introduced to Expo 2020 Dubai, its content, divisions, people and guest groups, before being assigned to operational and management roles. Around 70 per cent of training under the Expo Generation Programme involves

on-the-job learning, with the remainder focused on mentoring and structured coaching. After graduating, they will go on to help lead and run the operation of Expo 2020.

The Expo Generation Programme is open to English-speaking Emirati high school graduates, diploma or bachelor degree holders aged between 18 and 35. Since its launch in June 2019, the scheme has received more than 2,000 applications, with 47 candidates recently taking part in the first group assessments. The first ten candidates will form a pilot class that will start in November 2019, before the programme welcomes a total of 350 recruits in different batches between January and March 2020.

Expo 2020 is an opportunity for every Emirati national to give back to their country by helping deliver the most inclusive World Expo in history. In the process, they will receive crucial training and experience across a broad range of professional disciplines, working alongside the world's foremost professionals. This will ensure the UAE has access to a world-class pool of national talent for generations to come. ■

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# GROWING IM- PORTANCE OF HR IN THE GCC RETAIL INDUSTRY

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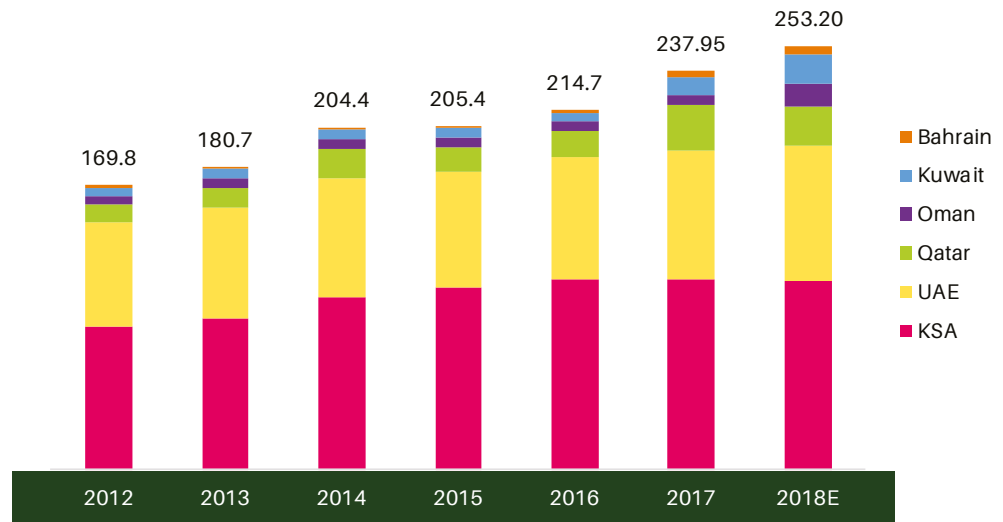


## INTRODUCTION

The retail sector has played a vital role in the growth story of the GCC economy. Fast-changing retail trends have heavily influenced the role of Human Resources (HR) in the industry, which started off as an operational function and has now become strategically important to a business. The need for effective human research management practices has been increasing rapidly as we observe structural changes in this dynamic and competitive environment.

With rising population and higher disposable income, the GCC retail market has flourished over the years. The regional governments' diversification efforts have yielded positive results and retail giants, both domestic and global, have intensified investments in developing the retail infrastructure in the region. The rising penetration of smart-phones and use of social media platforms, gradual improvement in logistic proficiencies, and improved access to secure payment gateways, have all helped in increas-

### RETAIL SALES IN THE GCC (USD BILLION)



Source: Zawya, EIU, AT Kearney, Ministry of Statistics, Alpen Capital

ing penetration levels resulting in the overall industry growth. The retail sales in the GCC has seen a compounded annual growth rate of 7% between 2012 and 2018 with UAE and KSA emerging as the biggest contributors to this growth.

Despite the challenges due to an influx of e-commerce ventures, the GCC retail industry has continued to invest in resources to meet the demands of the tech savvy shoppers. Brick and mortar stores are investing heavily on technology to reach out to the digitally-driven consumers who are increasingly inclined towards shopping online than to visit shopping malls.

## ROLE OF HR IN THE RETAIL SECTOR

The boom within the retail sector in the GCC region and its corresponding spike in demand for talent has underscored the necessity for effective hour systems. The performance of human resources has special signifi-

cance in retail because the staff operates in an exceedingly distinctive atmosphere. HR was initially seen as a support function and used majorly to concentrate on hiring and managing the exit of an employee. Over the years, the prime focus of every retailer was on sales and brand building along with expansion strategies. However, this poses huge challenges with respect to dealing with the short supply of qualified, future-ready talent, sustaining high performance and retaining key talent. Therefore, the key operational requirement for an HR in the retail industry of the GCC region would be on how organizations can sustain high performance whilst battling economic challenges and talent shortages.

## JOBS

Most of the job positions are occupied by expatriates who account for the majority of labour force in the region. The recent initiatives by various governments towards nationalization of jobs has constrained the

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sector. At the entry level, the main job profiles include those of a customer sales personnel that are often staffed with fresher's with minimum education requirement but good communication skills. The industry also offers various job positions for those with a knack for management. Depending on the scope of activity, various managerial positions exist including that of sales manager, finance manager and business development roles. The salary range for retail professionals in Dubai is a minimum of USD 1,361 per month. Merchandisers can expect USD 1,089, and Store Managers can earn a minimum of USD 2,178. Expatriate retail professionals can also enjoy a host of other benefits from tax-free salary, airfare, accommodation, health insurance, and training opportunities.

### REQUISITE SKILLS

The skillset needs of those working in the retail industry varies with their roles and responsibilities. However, on a broad note, having a presentable personality and cheerful attitude help professionals in customer service segment. Good communication skills, ability to converse or familiarity with multiple languages such as Arabic, English, Spanish, Russian and Hindi would be beneficial. Teamwork, ability to work with people from multiple nationalities, multi-tasking and paying attention to detail are other traits, which shall set up one's candidacy apart from others.

### RETAIL INDUSTRY CHALLENGES FOR THE HR

The retail industry poses particular challenges for the HR as employees deal directly with customers and HR managers must consider both short-term and long-term

objectives.

- **High employee turnover** – Retail is known for its notoriously high rate of employee turnover. Any retail organization's 70 percent staff would consist of front-line sales staff who are either freshers or less experienced. Training and development are difficult and time consuming if you constantly have to recruit new people. It is also more difficult to build customer loyalty if customers keep seeing a new face every time they enter your store. Recruiting the right people and building a rapport with employees through games and informal social outings can aid in improving employee collaborations and retention. The scarcity of an experienced talent pool in the GCC's retail industry means that the HR needs to focus on building in-house talent capability.

- **Talent management** – Retaining staff in an industry, which calls for long working hours, working on weekends, and without a concrete career path, is a big challenge for the HR department of retail companies. Retail industry is one of the largest employers of staff in its sales team and the demand continues to increase with the expansion of modern retailing. However, the industry is also coping with high attrition rates and this will continue as more players enter the market and the workforce has a greater choice of employers. The HR departments are going out of the way to adopt new ways of recruiting and retaining the talent including social media such as Facebook where fresh talent can easily be attracted.

- **Managing a diverse pool of workforce** – A diverse



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workforce helps a retailer better connect with its marketplace and usually leads to better ideas and results. From the HR, the challenge is to manage diversity and promote a spirit of tolerance, teamwork and collaboration while avoiding major conflicts. Diversity discussions can go a long way in help encourage employees to discuss their differences.

- **Job insecurity** – There is a high level of job insecurity amongst the retail staff, especially at the entry level, since retail is a target-driven job. HR departments play a very significant role of a catalyst and as an internal training department by which employees can meet their desired productivity levels. Coming up with various incentive plans, motivating employees at various levels and building a sense of belongingness are vital parts of the HR agenda.

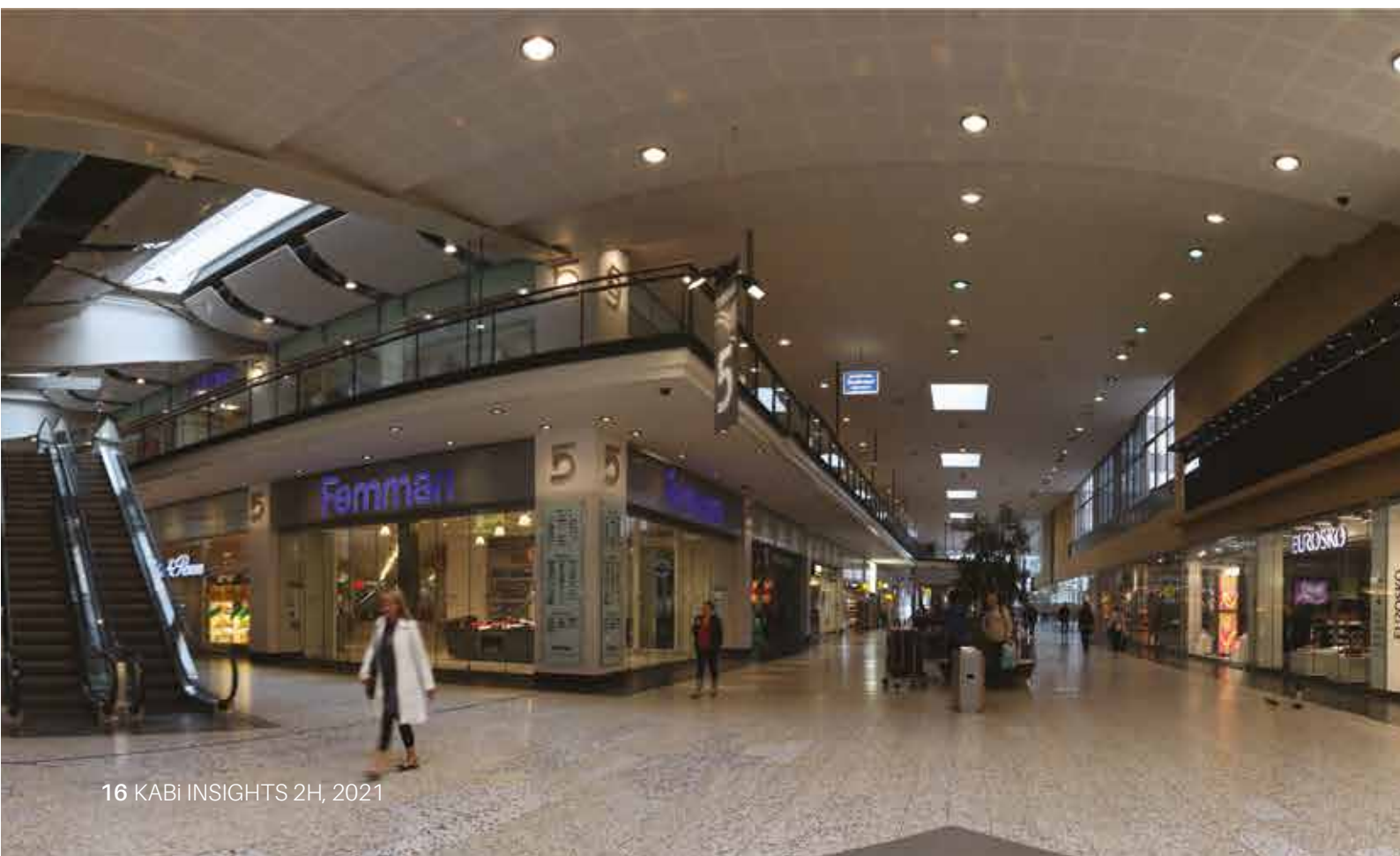
- **Managing compensation expectations** – The retail industry operates with razor thin margins and, therefore, managing compensation expectations in a situation of scarce talent is a key challenge. People at entry level are keen about their pay package than about the organization. So building a compensation mix, which is unique and motivating, is a key challenge.

- **Seasonal demand fluctuations** – Retailers often experience seasonal demand fluctuations and end up hiring temporary staff. These temporary workers are often equipped with fewer skills and training and are therefore unable to serve customer needs promptly. They may further alienate permanent staff that must pick up the slack. A store meeting at the start of the

busy season is a good way to help temporary workers learn the system and get accustomed to the work environment.

## CONCLUSION

The GCC retail industry has witnessed challenging times in recent years with oversupply of commercial space coupled with the rise of e-commerce in the region. However, the long-term fundamentals of the sector remain intact with rising oil prices and measures undertaken by the regional governments such as streamlining the retail infrastructure and strengthening the investment landscape. Mega events are also expected to have a positive impact on the retail sector. Adoption of digitalization, rise of private labels and preferences for healthy lifestyle have provided new opportunities and revenue streams for traditional retailers. The retail sector is expected to regain positive momentum on the back of a proactive government complemented by factors such as an expanding population base, high GDP per capita and a growing tourism sector. ■





# A SHIFT TO ALGORITHMS

## RECRUITMENT IN THE MAKING - WHEN ALGORITHMS COME INTO PLAY

**R**ecruiting candidates who are of proven caliber and apt for the position, who are likely to accept the offer and likely to stay in the long term is crucial to the recruitment process and the overall image of the company as an employer.

The talent acquisition industry is affected by the crisis of companies looking in the wrong direction to find talent for hard-to-fill jobs. In many cases, the job descriptions are unrealistic, and companies don't have a clear idea of the talent pool in the region. Large, reputed organizations receive huge volumes of applications, making shortlisting and selection a cumbersome, error-prone and costly process. Further, there are high chances that manual screening may select the first few candidates whose profiles match with the job requirements, thus missing out on more competent ones.

Human resources managers are increasingly depending on data-driven algorithms that assist in hiring decisions from a vast pool of potential candidates. Recruiting algorithms (predictive recruitment) processes hundreds of data points on a person and analyses thousands of positions in a few tenths of a second, thus making the best decision much before the recruiter.

Algorithms can be applied in various skill scenarios, enabling the employers to see minor modifications to the job descriptions can return different results in real time. Further, with employer feedback, these algorithms can learn to expand the search for new candidates that are more ideal for the job description.



Research proves that there is an increase in the percentage of passive candidates as compared to those who are actively on the search for jobs. This means that about 80% of the talent pool are open to listen to recruiters' offers (Forbes). In fast growing and technology-intensive industries, people change jobs, on an average, every two years, which means that 1 out of 4 candidates is interested in a new job. Artificial Intelligence, analytics and machine learning algorithms can identify such candidates. These tools can also predict candidates who are likely to switch jobs by analyzing multiple factors like how long the person has been in the current job or position or whether the company is downsizing, etc.

Talent is scarce for hard-to-fill tech jobs like machine learning, data science, front-end development and cybersecurity. In such instances, employers themselves are in a position where they cannot pinpoint the

**“Human resources managers are increasingly depending on data-driven algorithms that assist in hiring decisions from a vast pool of potential candidates.”**

requirements. Recruitment technology can make apt suggestions in terms of reducing years of experience, lowering the educational requirements or checking if a skill can be

learned during the job.

Recruitment process is time and cost intensive, with billions of dollars spent on job advertising. Even after people apply, companies on average spend approximately \$4000 per candidate on interviewing, scheduling and assessments (Forbes). It is highly likely that open positions remain unfilled due to factors including lack of proper communication between the HR manager and the respective department head. Algorithm-based recruitment ensures that companies have candidates in the pipeline for a certain position which leads to more successful hires. Further, algorithms can identify potential candidates, thus making the hiring process more proactive than the traditional reactive one.

Algorithms deployed at the front line of HR decision making is a huge disruption to the recruitment industry. However, one of the most noted drawbacks of algorithm-driven decision making in recruitment is that when the algorithms are done incorrectly, it can reinforce discrimination in hiring practices. Algorithms generate results based on past data, thus there is a high risk that applicants may be excluded on the basis of gender, age, race, disability, etc. Amazon's hiring algorithms faced this issue



which led to the company to abandon them eventually. The evaluation is made on the basis of the candidate's subjective criteria, which can result in her true potential being overlooked. This can be rectified by the regular audit or modification of such algorithms and through the use of multiple algorithms.

Harvard Business Review published a study in 2018 on how machine learning could be used in selecting board directors and how the selected directors differ from those selected by

“One of the most noted drawback of algorithm-driven decision making in recruitment is that when the algorithms are done incorrectly, it can reinforce discrimination in hiring process.”

the management. The algorithm was able to identify directors that are unpopular with the shareholders. The study also identified that firms predominantly tend to bias the selection process based on gender, network reach of the candidate, experience and whether or not they have a finance background.

In the case of algorithm-based recruitment, the hiring decision is taken through prediction, which anticipates the potential of the candidate selected to succeed in the future in a given position. Therefore, the experts' responsibility is to supply quality and valid data to the learning machine that would ensure that the predictions are in sync with expectations.

The use of algorithm-driven recruiting enables recruiters to become more strategic. It will make the recruiter's job easier. However, identification of the right candidate is only the first part of the hiring process. Developing relationships with the potential candidates and familiarizing them about the company's culture are integral components of the process which can result in the perfect hire.

When algorithms are used in recruitment, it can develop appropriate job descriptions, encourage better candidate fits, promote fairer screening process and enhance the efficiency of the entire process. ■

# CULTURAL FIT

## HOW CAN COMPANIES ASSESS CANDIDATES' FIT IN THEIR INTERNAL SURROUNDINGS

**T**o define an organizational culture is quite a challenging task as it is often undocumented as it is reflected as an acceptable set of behaviors within an organization. The principles, beliefs, values, and ideologies are the core elements that constitute culture which are the critical differentiators between organizations. Other factors such as management behavior, employees, environment and geography also play a vital role in ascertaining the culture of the organization.

Often a candidate is evaluated for relevant experience, technical skills, specific competencies, along with soft skills like communication and creativity. However, to ensure a strategic fit, it is equally important to seek candidates who can align with the company's culture and values.

However, before evaluating a candidate, it is crucial for organizations to explicitly define culture which is reflective of its vision, values, and desirable work environment. This objective could be achieved by working with an external consultant or could be done internally by creating focus groups. The organization can formalize the results by defining the culture that governs the way the organization conducts itself. It is important that hiring managers and interviewers can identify critical characteristics that relate well to that culture. For example, if for an organization 'entrepreneurism' is one of the cultural hallmarks, then ensuring that the potential candidate has a track record of thriving in the entrepreneurial environment will be imperative to ensure the cultural fit of the candidate.

**"To ensure a strategic fit, it is equally important to seek candidates who can align with the company's culture and values."**

Similar to defining organizational culture, expected set of behaviors from candidates also needs to be objectively determined, which should help nurture and sustain organizational culture. Post identification of desired behavioral traits, the recruitment process should emphasis on adopting a robust and consistent assessment methodology to identify potential candidates. According to the Society for Human Resource Management, it could cost about 50-60% of the individual's annual salary, if a company hires an employee who does not fit the company's culture. The recruitment and hiring process involves considerable resources, including time and investment, which can be maximized by hiring an employee who is culturally aligned to the organizational values. On the other hand, cultural misalignment could take a toll on productivity as it would require additional efforts to attune the new hire to the organization's culture.

Corporates have deployed different approaches to assess the cultural fit of prospective candidates. Organizations are no more reluctant to invest in interview processes; efforts are made to ensure that the process is robust, comprehensive and involves





interactions with employees across multiple hierarchies. Increasingly, organizations are also including scientifically designed personality tests as part of their assessments to evaluate candidates better.

Despite the advancements and introduction of the various method of candidate assessments, face-to-face interviews serve as the most critical tool for an organization to determine whether a candidate fits culturally. The key challenge is in understanding the intangible elements of the candidate's profile such as his personality and values. Asking the right set of questions, which aligns with the qualities that are valued most by the organization is the key here. Interviews not only provide candidates with an opportunity to demonstrate their competencies and values, but is also a medium for the HR to convey the organization's vision and culture, primarily, by emphasizing on things like, how the organization recognizes achievements, values its customers, work timings (overtime or not) and the likes. Furthermore, for assessing cultural fit while engineering an interview process, one needs to think beyond traditional approaches. For example, to learn more about a candidate as a person, interviews can be conducted in an informal setting such as in a coffee shop or even over lunch. Roping in key team members in the process would be a good idea, as the candidate gets to interact with the prospective team members. With the proliferation of Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and LinkedIn, certain firms have started to screen and assess candidates based on their activities in social media. In general, employers tend to avoid those candidates who indulge in political rants, those with poor grammar in the

social posts; while those who highlight volunteering acts with non-profit organizations, mentoring activities and presence of mutual connections with existing employees are viewed favorably.

It is also essential to invest in internal training programs to ensure interviews are conducted consistently and effectively. Training on interviewing skills, including behavioral interviewing, active listening and providing objective assessments of candidates is vital for employees.

Organizations can also adhere to psychometric assessment to have a detailed synopsis of the innate behavior that the candidate possesses. Some tools also provide details on the interplay of those behaviors and what job role would suit the candidate the most. However, recruiters do not often use such tools for elimination.

Improper procedures for assessing culture fit can lead to bias, discrimination and lack of diversity. Hiring for cultural fit does not necessarily mean hiring candidates who are all the same as existing employees. A richly diversified workforce should carry the values and attributes that make up an organizational culture.

Employees are united by their organizations' common mission, but diversity, and different backgrounds aid the teams to contribute towards it effectively. It also enables new approaches to tackle issues, facilitates thought process and ultimately imbibes in the culture. Employees who culturally fit well with their organization, colleagues, and managers have higher job satisfaction. Such employees demonstrate superior performance and stay longer with the organization. ■

# GROWING WINGS

## HOW TO MANAGE AN INTERNATIONALLY DIVERSE WORKFORCE IN THE WORKPLACE IN THE GCC

**C**hanges in the organizational structure in recent years have altered the way people perceive their workplace and interact within them. No longer does an organization merely represent a place of work; rather they are looked at as a group of mini societies, having their own distinct set of patterns and cultures. Globalization has presented curious proximity.

For example, an Indian employee could work for a company in Kuwait and interact with an Egyptian colleague to serve an American client. In today's organizations, employees are not only required to be efficient with their work, but also know how to communicate across languages and cultures. Various scholars studying organizations have subsequently turned their attention more closely toward definitions and application of the concepts of culture and diversity. Results of Aon Hewitt's flagship study, Top Companies for Leaders, shows that 84% of the organizations identified as being Top Companies for Leaders, globally, formally work towards increasing the diversity in their leadership group as part of their leadership strategy. These organizations make a conscious effort to build an inclusive workplace by promoting cultural agility, global mindsets and diverse backgrounds.

Intercultural communication has become a necessity in most workplaces and there may be no other place where this necessity is more clearly evident than in the GCC region. When talking about workforce diversity, for many Middle Eastern HR professionals, this is viewed as an almost effortless achievement, with limited requirements for targeted initiatives, due to the diverse pool of talent which already



exists in the marketplace. The UAE for example has one of the world's largest net immigration rates, and the number of workers from India, China, Philippines, Indonesia, Australia, the USA, among other countries have grown significantly over the years. According to the UN 2015 report on immigrant population, expatriates constitute 83.7% of the total population making UAE home to one of the world's highest percentage of immigrants. Qatar (73.8%), Kuwait (70%), Bahrain (54.7%), KSA (31.4%) and Oman (30.6%) too have a significant percentage of immigrants as part of their population.

Despite the positive effects of policies and regulations in recent years that aim to increase diversity (like female participation in the workforce by promoting work-life balance, and also reducing gender restrictions in the workplace<sup>4</sup>), countries in the GCC continue to be rated the lowest in terms of tolerance to diversity. For example, according to the SHRM's quantitative survey Global Diversity Readiness Index, Scandinavia, North America and Western Europe demonstrate the best regional performance for Diversity and Inclusion whereas, Asia, Eastern Europe, South America, Africa, the Middle East and South Asia (listed in order of best to worst) score below the world average. This shows that even if

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governments and organizations agree to start prioritizing diversity, this still isn't enough in ensuring that diversity gets utilized in a way that is actually beneficial for the profitability of a business.

Traditional diversity trainings aim at influencing opinions and attitudes of employees towards expatriates. These initiatives that the organizations implement typically includes a pre-defined list of do's and don'ts with the ultimate aim of being tolerant and sensitive towards their culturally diverse counterpart in the workplace. However, in order to build systemic change within an organization, it is important to build basic, underlying skills of cross-cultural competencies. This can be achieved by recognizing and taking into account one's own and others' world views, to be able to solve problems, make decisions, and resolve conflicts in ways that optimize cultural differences for better, longer-lasting, and more creative solutions.

Although diversity has been shown to have a

number of benefits, including enhanced employee creativity and greater organizational productivity, this recognition is seen to be rare when it comes to actual implementation. Moreover, if not exercised with caution, diversity can also lead to miscommunication, dysfunctional adaptation behaviors and the creation of barriers that reduce the benefits diversity can bring to the organization. In the GCC, organizations can no longer take diversity for granted. Even if a diverse work-force continues to exist, organizations need to realize that they need to do much more to ensure that they are contributing to an authentic environment of inclusion, through equipping the organization's employees, processes, and structures to take into account the deepest implications of a diverse workforce. By developing cross-cultural competencies, organizations in the GCC would be able to create more powerful and inclusive practices, in order to make the most out of the unique potential that the region offers.■

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