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## Holistic Sustainability as Key to Emiratization: Links Between Job Satisfaction in the Private Sector and Young Emirati Adult Unemployment

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# Holistic Sustainability as Key to Emiratization: Links Between Job Satisfaction in the Private Sector and Young Emirati Adult Unemployment

## **Abstract**

This study examines factors leading to unemployment among young Emirati adults and new entrants to the workforce despite the abundant employment opportunities available in the UAE private sector. The study points out that new entrants to the workforce, including a growing number of college graduates, find few opportunities in the preferred but saturated public sector so they are faced with a three-part employment decision: considering employment in the private sector for a long-term career, entering the private sector temporarily, or remaining unemployed until an opportunity emerges in the public sector. The study sheds light on the obvious question, “Why would Emirati youth prefer to remain unemployed when so many private sector jobs are available?”, by examining and identifying factors for Emirati job satisfaction. More than 1,000 Emirati participants employed in both public and private sectors responded to a quantitative survey rating aspects of job satisfaction. Quantitative data, supported by open ended responses, indicated that culturally friendly work environments and flexibility to manage family responsibilities were the most important factors for job satisfaction and employment decisions most Emiratis and especially for Emirati women. The study concludes that the most important factor for young Emiratis, especially women, is a workplace aligned with the culture in which they operate embodying the concept of holistic sustainability.

## **Keywords**

Emiratization, Sustainability, Job Satisfaction, UAE

# **HOLISTIC SUSTAINABILITY AS KEY TO EMIRATIZATION: LINKS BETWEEN JOB SATISFACTION IN THE PRIVATE SECTOR AND YOUNG EMIRATI ADULT UNEMPLOYMENT**

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## **Introduction**

Unemployment among young Emirati adults continues to increase in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), despite the existence of a vibrant private sector that is capable of absorbing tens of thousands of new employees each year (Al Ali, 2013). Even though the indigenous population in the UAE comprises less than 20% of the total population and only about 10% of the working age population, unemployment among young Emirati adults has been as high as 12% (Sherif, 2013; World Bank, 2014).

Experts agree that Emirati employee perceptions, private sector employer perceptions, and the availability of low-cost foreign labor are primarily responsible for Emirati unemployment (Elamin, 2011; Shallal, 2011). Several studies (Al Ali, 2013; Forstenlechner, Madi, Selim, & Rutledge, 2012; Sherif, 2013; Toledo, 2006; Toledo, 2013) agree that, although saturated, many Emiratis prefer to work in the public sector because they perceive their salaries, benefits packages, and working conditions to be more favorable. Therefore, some Emiratis prefer to remain unemployed rather than accept less attractively perceived private sector employment. Other studies conducted by the Federal Authority for Government Human Resources (FAGHR) (UAE Government, 2011) and researchers (Elamin, 2011; Shallal, 2011) found Emirati women vastly preferred working in the public sector because the shorter working hours allowed for more of a home–work life balance because Emirati women, even those with full-time jobs, shoulder most of the domestic responsibilities in Emirati social structure. Private sector vacancies are quickly filled by qualified and experienced foreign laborers who are willing to work longer hours for less compensation than their Emirati counterparts (Behery, 2009).

Daleure and Al Shareef (2015) found that Emirati dissatisfaction with the private sector is not likely to improve if the sector remains in its current state, since employers have little incentive to make workplaces more attractive to Emiratis or to make retaining Emiratis a corporate priority. The situation is especially pressing for Emirati women, as noted by Elamin (2011) and Shallal (2011), because the Western-based business practices most commonly used

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in private sector companies are often at odds with Emirati cultural practices and sensitivities. Nelson (2004) concurs, noting that many private sector employers prefer employing expatriates who are accustomed to Western business practices and willing to work within Western-style working conditions. Therefore, despite concerted efforts by the UAE government to incorporate Emiratis into the private sector—a practice known as Emiratization—the number of Emiratis employed in the private sector remains low, reaching roughly 4% in 2012 (World Bank, 2014). At the same time, Emirati unemployment, particularly among young adult Emiratis, was estimated to be 12% in 2013 (Al Ali, 2013; Quandl, 2014; Sherif, 2013). Salaries in the private sector remain lower than salaries in the public sector, where Emiratis occupy a majority of the positions and public and semi-government entities receive subsidies to guarantee Emirati employees' salaries.

Toledo (2013) implies that if Emiratis were willing to accept lower pay and less amenable working conditions, the issue of unemployment would be resolved. However, this rationale is much too simplistic, because it does not acknowledge the social, cultural, economic, and political realities of the region. In other words, it is not promoting holistic economic sustainability (Sharma & Ruud, 2003; Warburton, 2003). To be holistically sustainable, practices must be broader than the economic principles of supply and demand. True economic sustainability must include cultural, environmental, and social sustainability. All must be integrated into the corporate environment and be promoted at all levels of the education system for sustainable development to take place. Toledo's (2013) rationale only addresses the concept of commercial profit by multinational companies that benefit from the UAE's tax-free commercial environment and favorable labor laws (Sherif, 2013).

The purpose of this study is to investigate the complex issues related to Emirati young adult unemployment and under-employment through the lens of holistic sustainability. The study uses a quantitative survey to isolate specific job satisfaction criteria that contribute to dissatisfaction and disillusionment among Emiratis working in the private sector by comparing ratings in specific job satisfaction criteria in all sectors. In addition, job satisfaction criteria ratings are examined in subgroups by multiple factors including age, gender, education level, length of time in job, benefits package, and salary to understand the relationships between each factor and specific job satisfaction criteria. Survey items were designed to indicate:

- high and low ratings on job satisfaction criteria in each employment sector to better understand which criteria lead to greater Emirati job satisfaction across the sectors;
- whether young Emiratis are increasingly more willing to work in the private sector; and
- trends showing the extent to which UAE nationals have been hired and retained in the private sector.

The findings of the study can be used by:

- policymakers to develop more effective employment policies aimed at making Emiratis more attractive to private sector employers;
- post-secondary institutions to create programs that raise awareness of the benefits of working in the private sector;
- Emirati job seekers to make informed decisions about employment; and
- private sector employers to attract and retain Emirati employees.

The findings and recommendations are aimed to assist policymakers with developing policies that enhance Emirati participation in the private sector, decrease unemployment among young Emiratis, and establish the Emirati employee as an employee of choice for both public and private sector employers in the UAE.

## Literature Review

The UAE, one of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, represents a model of “stability, security, welfare, and prosperity” (Al Ali, 2013, p. 8). In the *United Arab Emirates Vision 2021 (Vision 2021)* report, the leadership of the UAE outlines its philosophy of peaceful development and economic sustainability, which cannot be achieved in isolation of cultural, environmental, and social sustainability, corresponding to the models of holistic sustainable development (Sharma & Ruud, 2003; UAE Government, 2010; Warburton, 2003). According to the *Vision 2021*, all dimensions must be integrated into the corporate environment of all economic sectors and be promoted at each level of the educational system for holistically sustainable development to occur. This section is divided into two interrelated areas of interest for this study: rapid economic development leading to the emergence of a three-sector labor market and a review of existing studies on job satisfaction in the UAE.

### *Rapid Development and the Three-Sector Labor Market in the UAE*

For more than 3,000 years, the Arabian Gulf region has been an important trading post for ships. Artifacts found in dig sites around the county originate from ancient civilizations including from India, Greece, Rome, Persia, Africa, and China (Goulding & McEwin, 2008; Jasim, 2012; Mansour, 2013). In these trading communities, indigenous Arabs formed the ruling and noble classes who “limited their economic activities to honorable occupations” such as operating pearling, fishing, or trading enterprises, usually with the assistance of imported labor (Alsayegh, 2001, p. 88).

Over the last 2,000 years, lifestyle and social order remained fairly constant in the region, with Bedouin traders traversing the interior to trade with the small communities that dotted the coasts. The trading communities served as mini trading hubs in a flourishing regional trade web with pearl trading as its main commodity, until the mid-1400s when the Portuguese, then British, became interested in the region (Alsayegh, 2001). After 1865 a large number of British Indian subjects specializing in money lending and retail trade migrated to the region, which was known as the Trucial States under the British Protectorate.

Life in the region in the early years of the 20th century was characterized by relative abundance and progress towards modernization. The income from trade and pearling allowed for the purchase of items that were not producible in the harsh desert environment (Alabed, Vine, Hellyer, & Vine, 2008; Alsayegh, 2012). Wealthy merchants in the commercial centers of Dubai and Sharjah began to “initiate educational development aimed at improving social awareness” (Alsayegh, 1998, p. 91). For example, in 1903 pearl merchants founded the Taimiyyah traditional school, admitting students at no cost to their families. A few years later, the more modern, small fee charging Al-Ahmadiyyah school was opened, featuring proper writing desks and foreign teachers (Ahmad, Al-Rostamani, & Matthew, 2011).

The natural pearl industry collapsed in 1929 when a process was developed in Japan for creating far less expensive cultured pearls (Alsayegh, 2001). Following that, the economy plummeted even further in the after-effects of the First World War, the Great Depression, and the Second World War. As pearl merchants went out of business, many men lost their livelihoods, causing them to leave the country in search of work in other counties in which oil had already been exploited and “stories of women forced to dive in exchange for their dead [or absent] husbands’ debts were reported” (Alsayegh, 2001, p. 21). Poverty, illness, and illiteracy spread as the economy declined. Having found oil in the neighboring countries of Saudi Arabia and Bahrain in 1932 and 1933 respectively, foreign oil companies paid fees to start searching for oil in the Gulf region. Additionally, in the 1930s local leaders began to receive revenues for air concessions, or rights to land for refueling and rest, and the first air station opened in Sharjah in 1932 (Al Qasimi, 2012). The meager income generated from these two sources “enabled the rulers to carry out some badly needed social services,” but was not enough to begin building a

modern social and physical infrastructure (Alsayegh, 2001, p. 23). During the Second World War, even this income dried up.

After the Second World War, the search for oil began again and the concessions resumed. Then, in 1968, the British announced their intention to turn over the protectorate to its inhabitants and to the rulers of the individual Trucial States. The rulers of the two largest and most populated emirates, Shaikh Zayed Al-Nahyan, Ruler of Abu Dhabi, and Shaikh Rashid Al-Maktoum, Ruler of Dubai, led the unification of the seven emirates, forming a federation in 1971. From the outset, the leadership of the country envisioned establishing a modern country that was uniquely Arab and Islamic, yet at the same time modern and integrated into the fabric of the global society (Alsayegh, 1998).

Pictorial and textual accounts bear witness to the early stages of development (Ahmad et al., 2011; Ahmad, Matthew, & Al-Rostamani, 2010; Bhatia, 1995; Codrai, 2001; Thesiger, 1959). These accounts give evidence of the leadership initiating developments to establish every aspect of a modern social and physical infrastructure, such as providing the municipal services of electricity, water, sewage, and waste collection in individual homes. At the same time, they created transportation systems for the use of commercial vehicles and passenger cars, and communications systems to connect residents to each other and the outside world with basic telephone and television services. Public schools were built, and education was made compulsory and free of charge to all national boys and girls up to grade 10, continuing the practice instituted by the pearl merchants in the early 1900s. A public health care system was put into place, providing basic health care services free of charge to nationals. Other benefits provided to UAE nationals included land granted to qualifying male nationals who entered the workforce and assistance to help cover the cost of marriage between two UAE nationals.

Public sector jobs were plentiful and offered generous salaries and benefits, requiring short working hours (7:30 am to 2:00 pm) and less than a high school education (Alabed et al., 2008; Toledo, 2013). The high rate of economic growth at this stage enabled the public sector economy to absorb all Emiratis who wished to enter the workforce (Al Ali, 2013). By the late 1990s, most UAE citizens had transitioned into a sedentary lifestyle so as to take advantage of the generous subsidies and benefits of citizenship (Alsayegh, 2001). By the 2000s, basic infrastructure was in place, and virtually all Emiratis had electricity, running water, air conditioning, a landline phone, access to acceptable transportation, and access to basic healthcare and education. By the mid- to late-2000s, technology had been integrated in the everyday lives of most Emiratis, as most had high-speed internet access at home, at least one smart phone, at least one computer or iPad per family, and at least one car per family (Alabed et al., 2008).

To support this period of economic growth, labor was imported to the UAE to fuel the expansion at all levels, ranging from general laborers to highly qualified and experienced professionals such as doctors, lawyers, engineers, architects, and teachers (Al Ali, 2013, Sherif, 2013; Toledo, 2013). The expatriate population grew until the indigenous population comprised less than 20% of the population by around 2000 (World Bank, 2014). Due to the large number of non-nationals working in the country most private sector business transactions were conducted in English, and by the late 1980s, English became the medium of instruction in federally funded higher education institutions (Al Ali, 2013).

Up until the early 2000s, UAE nationals who desired work, even those with limited education and experience, were readily absorbed into the rapidly expanding public sector with generous compensation packages (Sherif, 2013). Advantages of working in the public sector included an Arabic-speaking work place, an office based away from the outdoor heat, and jobs of a service or administrative nature rather than jobs requiring technical expertise or physical exertion (Al Ali, 2013).

However, by the mid-2000s the public sector had reached its capacity to absorb Emiratis, with nearly 80% of all working Emiratis employed in the public sector (Sherif, 2013). The public sector had become saturated and “experienced poor productivity, exacerbated by employment for life for underqualified workers, *wasta* (nepotism), and a managerial willingness to buy in expertise to tackle problems” (Al Ali, 2013, p. 73). Young Emirati adults expecting to enter the workplace in their preferred public sector were increasingly disappointed because they were unable to secure a job.

### *Social Transitions Resulting from Development*

Despite the challenges of modernization, the forward-thinking and inclusive nature of the leadership enabled the UAE to survive the challenges of rapid development and to thrive. Herb (1999) identifies the tribal aspects of consensus, negotiation, inclusion, and spreading wealth to include all citizens as agents of cohesion that enabled the leaders of the UAE to catalyze economic development, enable peaceful transitions of leadership, and maintain the loyalty of their people. With high unemployment (especially among young adults) perceived to be a factor that has led to social discord in other countries of the region, the leadership is keen to find solutions to avoid a similar outcome. This subsection lists other key transitions that continue to challenge the nation’s leadership when considering policies to decrease young adult Emirati unemployment.

Growing numbers of young adult Emiratis graduating from tertiary institutions seeking jobs create pressure on the existing Emirati workforce that may be less technologically savvy or possess lower levels of education. According to Tabutin and Schoumaker (2005), multiple factors led to the rapidly increasing proportion of youth in Arab countries graduating from higher education programs, including in the UAE. First, health care improvements reduced infant, child, and maternal mortality. Average family sizes increased as more children lived through infancy into young adulthood. Figures from the 2005 national census indicated that the youth population (age 15 and younger) made up more than half (51%) of the population in the UAE (CIA World Fact Book, 2014). Secondly, the average marriage age for female Emiratis increased as women entered college and the workforce in growing numbers (Tabutin & Shoumaker, 2005).

According to Hassane and Abdullah (2011), demographic shifts contributed to deep-felt social changes. The increased use of English in education and business prompted the leadership to officially designate Arabic as the national language and sparked debate about adopting more stringent guidelines regarding the level of Arabic that was to be taught in public educational institutions. In addition, the use of technology, which made many aspects of life easier and many processes faster, isolated and confused members of the elder generation who witnessed tremendous changes throughout their lifetime. Concerns have been expressed among social service entities that younger Emiratis are drifting away from the core values that have made the country strong—the values that contribute to the notion of holistic sustainability and have supported rapid development (Choudri, Marelli, & Signorelli, 2012).

Recent studies have compared the lives of UAE nationals in four different generational categories according to experience level and age (Daleure, Albon & Hinkston, 2014; Daleure, Albon, Hinkston, Ajaif, & McKeown, 2013). The studies found that elder generations’ influence on younger family members’ crucial life decisions, such as deciding to continue with post-secondary education, program choices, and career moves, may be well-meaning but misleading. This is particularly because elders may advise according to the life circumstances in their own days, that is, in the days of plentiful public sector jobs that could be had with a high school diploma or less.

Business practices used by multinational companies in the GCC region originated in the home country of the company and vary from the Khatib, Al-Habib, & Lanoue, 2001).

practices to which UAE nationals are accustomed, making some of the available jobs unattractive to nationals (Robertson, Al-Robertson et al. (2001) describe two outcomes in such cases: *divergence views* in which “individuals will preserve their culturally unique values despite power of outside influences” and *convergence views* in which the values of two distinct groups are blended into a “new set of values, expectations, and behavior based on the dual influences of the trading cultures” (p. 226). Supporting Robertson et al. (2001), Al Ali (2013) and Pech (2009) found that Emiratis entering private sector employment are often unfamiliar with practices and procedures based on Western values and beliefs. Many Emiratis who enter the private sector experience feelings of bewilderment and isolation, leading to disillusionment and termination of employment when not properly addressed.

Obeidat, Shannak, Masa’deh, & Al-Jarrah (2012) investigated workplaces in the Arab region using Hofstede’s model for national culture. The study found that Emirati national culture, as a subset of Arab culture, included the following characteristics:

- large power distance “where inequalities were accepted” and there is emphasis “on a dependency relationship between managers and subordinates” (Bader et al., 2012, p. 514);
- low uncertainty avoidance based on Islamic religious concepts;
- high collectivism in which the “loyalty of employees will be more to their managers than to the organizational goals” (Bader et al., 2012, p. 515);
- close to the feminine side of the masculine–feminine continuum, preferring to establish friendly relationships in the workplace and exemplified in the phrase “work to life” rather than “live to work” (Bader et al., 2012, p. 515); and
- long-term orientation, preferring “stable progression towards long-term goals” (Bader et al., 2012, p. 516).

Ultimately, the study found that although Arabs, including Emiratis, “have imported modern laws, rules [*sic*] and structures from others, old [i.e. traditional] practices and customs are still dominant,” especially in organizational management styles (Bader et al., 2012, p. 519).

According to Al Ali (2013), in the private sector, where there are the most jobs available, “expatriates are preferred by employers, and nationals, despite government actions[, and] are not in a position to compete with expatriate labor and professionals” (p. 5). Sherif (2013) explains that “national workers cannot find jobs that match their skills at the reservation wage, which is determined largely by the opportunity wage rate in the government sector” (p. 160). Highly qualified and experienced expatriates are willing to work for significantly less compensation than national employees and “tend to accept changes and variations in working conditions” that are not acceptable to national workers, while semi-skilled and low-skilled expatriate workers are employed in jobs that nationals would not accept at any salary (Toledo, 2013, p. 44). Although Toledo (2013) criticizes Emiratis for this tendency, most developed countries that import migrant labor do so to fill positions that nationals either cannot fill or do not wish to fill at the wage offered (Weiner, 1982).

Some experts claim that generous social benefits contribute to young adult unemployment. UAE nationals expect to receive education and health care subsidies, land and interest-free loans to build houses, and wedding cost assistance, which some experts believe “discourage[s] UAE citizens from working” at a wage less than they expect (Toledo, 2013, p. 40). Other experts state that caring for extended family members is an essential aspect of tribal culture that is entrenched deeply in the UAE’s modern society. There is no age at which young people become financially independent from parents and families. Most Emirati families perceive that young people, both males and females, “have the right to be supported financially by their families” regardless of subsidies received (Al Ali, 2013, p. 49). As young people mature, families then expect males—and, increasingly, females—to work when suitable



employment is found and to contribute to the support of unmarried women, elderly parents, or other members of their extended families (Daleure et al., 2014; Ridge, 2010).

To understand the issue of increasing unemployment of UAE nationals, the relationship between the characteristics of individuals, their jobs, and their organizations must be better understood and better aligned, because they are “related to both productivity and commitment” (Behery, 2009, p. 179). Behery (2009) describes the person–organization fit and the person–job fit that can be obstacles in hiring practices in private sector companies because “many organizations are yet to discover the link between investing in people and work outcomes such as customer satisfaction, high work performance, and profit” (p. 180). Organizations, especially in the private sector, “should continue to look at their socialization tactics to enhance the organizational commitment among their employees,” whether Emirati or expatriate (Behery, 2009, p. 191).

According to World Bank (2014) figures, the Emirati population grew steadily from 2000 to 2010 with increases averaging around 10% each year. Steady population growth means even more competition for the most preferred jobs. Shifting demographics and steady increases in the cost of living have put pressure on collectivist notion in the UAE.

### **Methodology**

Data were collected for this study using a quantitative survey distributed by social media to employed Emiratis in both public and private organizations. The goal was to get an evenly balanced sample of approximately 500 Emiratis working in the public sector and 500 Emiratis working in the private sector, for comparison. Semi-government entities were considered a third category, neither public nor private, because their distinguishing factors were often blurred, making differentiation difficult even for participants in the study. The survey was open from June 30, 2014 to August 1, 2014.

Relationships are important for sharing information, especially among female members of society, and public information gathering systems are insufficient to locate the contact details of working Emiratis, let along the very small number of Emiratis working in the private sector. Therefore, snowball sampling was used to locate working Emiratis with a request to forward on the survey, especially to Emiratis working in the private sector. The sampling method proved highly effective because sharing personal information in the Emirati context, even under anonymous or confidential conditions, is not common. In effect, each referral from a trusted person inspired the recipient to forward on the request for participation to others, and thus, an acceptable total number of participants were obtained. It is acknowledged that the sample cannot be used for referential statistics, so the study uses only descriptive statistics and correlation of demographic information to satisfaction items in the analysis, for the purposes of comparison.

### *Instrument*

The survey instrument consisted of four sections: general information items, satisfaction ratings, benefits inventory, and open-ended items. Survey items were benchmarked against recent studies investigating job satisfaction in the UAE workplace (Allen, 2012; Bayt & YouGov, 2013; United Arab Emirates Government, 2011). The survey items were written in both English and Arabic and were distributed via social media platforms Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Whatsapp. The first survey requests were sent out through members of a student research team to known Emiratis working in the public and private sectors with a request to forward on the link to others. On two occasions, an inquiry was received by the lead researcher for more information on the purpose of the survey and to whom the surveys were to be forwarded. After each inquiry, a wave of responses was received, indicating that the survey was reaching members satisfied with its purpose and willing to share their information.

The first section of the survey consisted of a series of demographic questions including type of job, length of employment, number of jobs, salary level, and benefits. The second section contained 18 statements corresponding to key job satisfaction criteria identified in the literature with 4-point Likert ratings of 4-strongly agree, 3-agree, 2-disagree, and 1-strongly disagree. The third section listed benefits identified by the UAE Ministry of Labor as available in the UAE and asked participants to indicate which of the benefits they receive. The last question was open-ended, asking participants to give more information or explain responses to survey items.

#### *Description of Analytical Framework*

The data were examined using multiple descriptive statistics and non-referential techniques so that interpretations could accommodate multiple perspectives. Frequency tables were used to display demographic data. Job satisfaction criteria were examined using a set of rating tables, starting with overall satisfaction ratings and then broken down by each rating criteria and demographic variable using a method described in the Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD)'s *Handbook on constructing composite indicators: Methodology and user guide* (2008). The composite tables were used to examine variances in job satisfaction related to specific respondent characteristics. Another set of composite tables was constructed using the same method examining private and public sector ratings side by side in each category to isolate criteria which varied between public and private sector respondents. Relationships between ratings and variables were examined and noted when and where they existed. A few of the open-ended responses were written in Arabic, so they were translated into English; then all responses were categorized by theme and used to support interpretations of the numerical data.

#### **Presentation and Discussion of Results**

Results are presented and discussed below in three sections: general results summarizing the descriptive statistics, job satisfaction ratings and ratings controlling for demographic variables, and correlational analysis results showing relationships between variables and ratings. Results of the benefits inventory and open-ended items are used to support interpretations of the numerical data.

As a safeguard to validity, both nationality and employment time were asked with surveys being considered unusable if the respondent indicated "non-Emirati" or "not employed." A total of 1,157 useable surveys were obtained, however, not all surveys were complete. A comparison of the incomplete items revealed that most of the uncompleted surveys had the same blank items, suggesting that the item may be been sensitive in nature or that the participant may not have known how to answer. Surveys with more than five missing fields were rejected and those with more than two demographic items left blank were rejected. Each table gives the number of acceptably completed surveys that were included in the item analysis.

#### *General Results*

Most participants responded that they worked in the public sector (56%), followed by the semi-government (25%) and private (19%) sectors. However, several employment categories, including the "police," "military," and "oil industry," were classified by some respondents as public and others as semi-government. This overlap supports the research of Salem and Jarrar (2009), who have found that public sector entities are increasingly transitioning into semi-government entities to raise their efficiency and garner foreign investment. Therefore, for the purpose of analysis the semi-government and public sector are given as separate descriptors but the reader should be aware that even the participants seemed unclear about which descriptor applied to their employer.

Males and females were nearly equally represented, with slightly more females (55%) represented in the private sector and slightly more males (51%) represented in both the public and semi-government sectors. Most participants (70%) were between the ages of 21 and 35, as shown in Table 1.

**Table 1: Age of participants**

<i>Age of Participants</i>			
Age	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
16 to 20 Years	69	6.0	6.0
21 to 25 Years	373	32.2	38.2
26 to 30 Years	293	25.3	63.5
31 to 35 Years	156	13.5	77.0
36 to 40 Years	82	7.1	84.1
41 to 45 Years	80	6.9	91.0
46 to 50 Years	38	3.3	94.3
51 to 55 Years	37	3.2	97.5
56 to 60 Years	18	1.6	99.1
60 Years or Older	9	0.8	100
Total	1,155	100	

The skew toward younger respondents was expected from the choice of survey distribution through online social media. It was desirable since the focus of this study was young adult Emirati unemployment, specifically those between 18-25 years old. This targeted age group comprised well over one third (38%) of the participants. Data from all age groups was sought to provide comparative data for interpretations about job satisfaction.

A closer analysis of the data shows that about one forth (26%) of the public sector participants were older than 35 years old, followed by 18% of the private sector participants and 16% of the semi-government sector participants. Nearly half of the private (45%) and semi-government (44%) sector participants were 25 years old or younger, with only 34% of the public sector participants in the same age group. The results support the assertions in the literature of the public sector's labor saturation and its downsizing through attrition and the transition of Emiratis from public to semi-government employment (Al Ali, 2013; Al-Mazaini, 2013; Salem & Jarrar, 2009; Sherif, 2013; Toledo, 2013;).

Nearly all the respondents were either single (47%) or married (49%), with only 4% indicating divorced or widowed. Further analysis indicated that more participants in the public sector were married (53%), followed by 44% of the semi-government participants and 34% of the private sector participants. This could be because the public sector participants tended to be older or it could be because private sector employees perceived their employment as not substantial enough to support marriage and family responsibilities and had postponed marriage (Daleure et al., 2014; Obeidat et al., 2012).

Most participants (61%) had a bachelor's degree or at least some college education, as shown in Table 2. More than half of participants (55%) were either continuing their education (32%) or planning to continue their education (23%) at a later date. Closer examination of data showed a tendency for younger participants to be more educated and more interested in continuing their education than older participants. The data supports the assertion that the government providing access to Emiratis to public education at all levels, especially post-secondary education, has contributed to raising the education level of Emiratis entering the workforce and has contributed to developing Emiratis as lifelong learners.

The highest concentration of respondents lived in Sharjah (50%), followed by Ajman (11%), Dubai (10%), Umm Al Quwain (9%), Abu Dhabi (6%), and other mostly low population density areas combined (14%). Table A (Appendix A) shows a tendency for Emiratis to work in emirates other than those of their residence. For example, only 6% reported living in Abu Dhabi while 18% reported working in Abu Dhabi, and only 10% reported living in Dubai while 22% report working in Dubai. Closer examination of the data showed a tendency for participants, especially those from low population density or outlying areas, to work in larger urban centers. For example, participants from Umm Al Quwain tended to work in Ajman or Sharjah while participants from Ajman tended to work in Sharjah, and participants from Sharjah tended to work in Dubai or Abu Dhabi. Nearly all participants who worked in an emirate other than their resident emirate worked in the semi-government or public sectors, suggesting that Emiratis were willing to accept the inconvenience of commuting to gain acceptable salaries, benefits, and/or working conditions (Al Ali, 2013; Behery, 2009; Elamin, 2011; Obeidat et al., 2012; Pech, 2009; Robertson et al., 2001; Shallal, 2011).

**Table 2: Education level**

<i>Education Level</i>			
	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
Less than primary	6	0.5	0.5
Primary	22	1.9	2.4
Secondary	359	31.1	33.5
Some college	316	27.4	60.9
Bachelor's degree	381	33.0	93.9
Master's degree	62	5.4	99.3
Doctorate or M.D.	8	0.7	100
Total	1,154	100	

Table 3 shows that about one fifth (21%) of the participants had held their current positions for more than 10 years, while another fifth (19%) had held their current positions for six to 10 years.

**Table 3: Years employed**

<i>Total Years Employed</i>				
Years Employed	<u>Years in Current Job</u>		<u>Total Years Employed</u>	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Less than 1 Year	170	15.1	150	13.6
1 to 5 Years	510	45.2	437	39.6
6 to 10 Years	211	18.7	223	20.2
11 to 15 Years	93	8.2	108	9.8
16 to 20 Years	49	4.3	66	6.0
21 to 25 Years	49	4.3	49	4.4
26 to 30 Years	28	2.5	32	2.9
More than 30 Years	19	1.7	39	3.5
Total	1,129	100.0	1,104	100.0

Closer examination of the data shows that most participants reported having held only one job in their lifetime (59%), with only 7% indicating having held more than 2 jobs in their

lifetime. Further analysis of the data show that 74% of the private sector employees have been in their current job for 5 years or less, followed by 68% of the semi-government employees and 53% of the public sector employees. The results indicate that private sector participants change jobs more frequently than semi-government or public sector employees. This private sector transience could be interpreted two ways. The first interpretation could be that private sector has more opportunities for growth and promotion, so Emiratis could have been promoted, resulting in a job change. This interpretation would support the literature on the lack upward mobility in the saturated public sector (Al Ali, 2013, Toledo, 2013). However, a second interpretation could be that finding the workplace unsuitable, Emiratis employed in the private sector experience little organizational loyalty and quit one job when another job, perceived to be better, becomes available (Behery, 2009; Robertson et al., 2001). Table 4 shows salary ranges for participants.

**Table 4: Salary ranges (monthly)**

<i>Salary Ranges</i>			
<b>Salary Ranges</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>Cumulative Percentage</b>
Less than AED 5,000 (USD 1,362)	304	26.8	26.8
AED 5,000 to 9,999 (USD 1,362 to 2,725)	533	47.0	73.8
AED 10,000 to 14,999 (USD 2,726 to 4,047)	144	12.7	86.5
AED 15,000 to 19,999 (USD 4,048 to 5,449)	45	4.0	90.5
AED 20,000 to 24,999 (USD 5,450 to 6,812)	63	5.6	96.1
AED 25,000 or More (USD 6,813)	46	4.1	100
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,135</b>	<b>100</b>	

Note: 1 USD = AED 3.67

One fourth of the participants earned AED 5,000 (USD 1,360) or less per month (approximately) while nearly three fourths (74%) earned AED 9,999 (USD 2,726) per month or less (74%). Most (47%) participants earned between AED 5,000–9,999 (USD 1,362–2,726). Only about 10% of the participants earned AED 15,000 (USD 4,048) per month or more. The most common benefits were annual leave (81%), training courses (61%), health insurance (59%), and on-the-job training (50%). Less than half of the participants reported receiving maternity/paternity leave, retirement benefits, bonuses, paid holidays, housing, mentors, flexible timings, self-education, transport, children’s education, life insurance, or commission. Contrary to the expectation, most participants did not report earning the generous salaries and benefits described by the literature (Al Ali, 2013; Toledo, 2013; Sherif, 2013), however, public sector participants did report slightly higher mean salaries than private sector participants did.

Monthly incomes in excess of AED 40,000 (USD 10,899) in 2008 as reported in newspaper accounts (Namatalla, 2009) seem to contradict these figures. However, factors mentioned earlier may explain the discrepancy. First of all, the figures most frequently quoted are prior to the wage dip caused by the financial crisis in 2008 and the highest estimates (i.e., AED 40,000 or USD 10,899 or more) are quoted for Abu Dhabi, where the highest overall salaries are found. The most important factor, however, is one previously mentioned by Daleure et al. (2013) which is the nature of Emirati family structure, in which all male—and, increasingly, female—members of the family contribute to the overall family income. If two spouses are working, with each spouse earning the average salary in the study of AED 15,000, then the total household income would be AED 30,000.

Similarly, if a family has even two adult males—perhaps even married, yet living with their parents—the AED 40,000 household income would easily be reached with salary figures given by the participants in the study. Finally, the average salary figure quoted for Abu Dhabi of 40,000 AED is just that: an average. Perhaps the highest salaries are so high in Abu Dhabi that they more than compensate for the low range of salaries earned by entry level employees.

### *Job Satisfaction Ratings Criteria and Demographic Variables*

This section presents the results for high and low job satisfaction ratings averages. The high and low ratings are grouped by demographic variable to illustrate relationships that are described in this section.

*Salary.* Respondents with the lowest salary levels—salaries of less than AED 5,000, and salaries from AED 6,000 to 10,000—had the lowest satisfaction ratings in the job satisfaction criteria shown in Table B, Appendix B. The highest salary level, a salary of AED 25,000 or more, had the most high satisfaction ratings for 11 criteria. Overall results suggest a strong positive relationship between positions with high salary and job satisfaction, which was expected, since most of the participants (81%) indicated working in the public or semi-government sectors. Participants working in the public and semi-government sectors were also older and had been in their current jobs longer.

*Marital Status.* Respondents who indicated that their marital status was divorced or widowed had high ratings for seven criteria and low ratings for five criteria. All of the high ratings were related to workplace conditions including feeling comfortable, being praised, feeling valued, having challenging work, and enjoying work, while the low ratings were related to salary, benefits, awareness of labor laws, advancement potential, and job security. Results suggest that widowed and divorced participants experienced an overall positive work experience but had concerns about adequacy of salaries, benefits, advancement, and job security.

*Continuing Education.* Respondents who indicated that they were continuing their education had high ratings in four criteria and low ratings in one criterion. The high satisfaction ratings applied to criteria related to workplace conditions and advancement. The low criterion was related to harassment in the workplace. Evidence suggests that respondents who were continuing their education were satisfied with their work environment and advancement opportunities but perceived some harassment. Perhaps these respondents, as students, requested and/or received incentives to study including a flexible schedule, days off to prepare for exams, shorter working hours, or other accommodations that may have led to resentment among other employees.

*Age.* Respondents 20 years old or younger had high ratings in four criteria and low ratings in six criteria. High ratings were related to growth potential, motivation, and benefits, while low ratings were related to fair treatment, challenging work, harassment, enjoyment of work, providing assistance, and being on time. Employees from 21 to 25 years old and 26 to 30 years old had high ratings in advancement potential and no low ratings. Employees from 36 to 40 years old and 41 years of age or older had high ratings in job stability and security but low scores in satisfaction for benefits. Results indicated that, as employees pass through age ranges, their satisfaction indicators shift from focusing on personal growth potential to having advancement potential to having job security.

*Total Time Employed and Time in Current Position.* Respondents who were employed in their current positions for 11 years or more and respondents who had worked 11 years or more in their lifetimes had low ratings in three criteria, which related to growth potential, advancement, and benefits. Respondents who had worked from six to 10 years in their lifetimes had high ratings in three criteria and no low ratings. Their high ratings were related to receiving praise, feeling valued, and advancement potential. Respondents who were employed 11 years

or more in their lifetimes had no high ratings. Evidence suggests that employees who have worked longer than 11 years have not advanced in their careers and experience lower job satisfaction in other areas.

*Number of Jobs in Lifetime.* Less than 10% of the respondents indicated having three or more jobs over their lifetimes; however, those who did have multiple jobs gave high ratings for criteria related to growth potential, feeling valued, challenging work, and receiving praise. Respondents who indicated having two or more jobs over their lifetimes had high satisfaction ratings in two criteria: being motivated and advancement potential. Results indicated a relationship between having more than one job in one's lifetime and overall job satisfaction. One interpretation could be that changing jobs happened as a result of being promoted or leaving one job for a better job. In either case, higher job satisfaction seems to be the outcome.

*Gender.* Male respondents had one high rating criterion and no low criteria. The high rating was related to advancement opportunities. Results indicated that males may perceive having more advancement opportunities than females. Except for this single satisfaction criterion, gender was not related to job satisfaction.

*Employment Sector.* Satisfaction ratings among public, semi-government, and private sector employment are shown in Table B (see Appendix B). Similarly high ratings were observed in all three sectors for the following items: motivation to work hard, harassment-free workplace, provision of assistance, and confidence in not being fired. Respondents in semi-government sector jobs reported high satisfaction ratings for the training opportunities and enjoying their work. In the public sector, two additional criteria received high ratings: feeling welcome in the workplace and receiving praise. The criteria that received the lowest satisfaction ratings in all three sectors indicated that participants felt they should be paid more.

**Table 6: Salaries by sector.**

<b>Salary Ranges</b>	<b>Private</b>	<b>Public</b>	<b>Semi-Government</b>
Less than AED 5,000 (USD 1,362)	41.5%	20.8%	28.2%
AED 5,000 to 9,999 (USD 1,362 to 2,725)	38.2%	49.4%	45.1%
AED 10,000 to 14,999 (USD 2,726 to 4,047)	12.0%	12.9%	12.3%
AED 15,000 to 19,999 (USD 4,048 to 5,449)	3.2%	5.4%	5.6%
AED 20,000 to 24,999 (USD 5,450 to 6,812)	1.8%	7.2%	4.6%
AED 25,000 or more (USD 6,813)	3.2%	4.3%	4.2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

N=1,127 Note: 1 USD = AED 3.67

The number of respondents receiving relatively low salaries was similar among the three sectors, with 80% of private sector, 73% of semi-government sector, and 71% of public sector workers earning less than AED 10,000 (USD 2,726). Contrary to the literature (Toledo, 2013; Sherif, 2013), salaries for most public sector employees in the study, while slightly higher than private sector salaries, were relatively low. One explanation could be the relatively young participant sample. Perhaps the high average public sector salaries reported in the literature mask the relatively low salaries earned by employees such as the participants in this study.

*Correlational Analysis.* Correlational analysis revealed some expected relationships, such as how employment length was strongly correlated with age (0.7571,  $p < 0.01$ ). However, unexpectedly, a respondent's salary was less than moderately correlated with length of career (the time employed in a lifetime) (0.4751,  $p < 0.01$ ); age (0.4208,  $p < 0.01$ ); and education level (0.4248,  $p < 0.01$ ). Results suggest that salary was not strongly related to age, length of career,

or education level. Results of correlational analysis and other descriptive results suggest that since most participants, regardless of sector, reported having only one or two jobs in their lifetime, they did not advance in their careers. Perhaps participants were not motivated to advance, or more likely, according to the literature, advancement opportunities did not exist. This could also be due to the relatively short time that most of the participants had been in the workforce.

#### *Open-ended items*

This section summarizes the supplementary anecdotal responses from the open-ended items:

1. *What are your career plans for the next five years? (What position would you like to have after five years?)* The most common responses were related to moving up in the same company, followed by responses indicating that the respondent did not have a clear career path or a desire to establish one.

2. *How could your company improve your job satisfaction?* The most common responses were related to increasing salaries and benefits, followed by giving employees time off to study.

3. *Which part of your job or work environment do you dislike the most?* Few participants chose to answer this question, but the most frequent answer was related to working hours.

4. *What do you think Emirati employees add to an organization that non-national employees cannot?* All the responses were related to Emiratis' commitment to the country, understanding of the culture, and insight into decision-making process at top management levels. A few responses indicated there were no differences.

5. *Why did you choose to work or not work in the private sector?* There were two common responses from employees working in the public sector. The most common response related to beliefs that the public sector had much better salaries, benefits, and working conditions than the private sector. The most important working condition cited was shorter working hours, with many respondents adding comments similar to "shorter working hours help me take care of my family." The second most common response was related to a belief that working in the public sector helped contribute to the development of the country more than working in the private sector. Responses from employees working in the private sector included the following statements:

"[My private sector employers] allow me to have flexibility to continue my studies."

"I think that I can move up more in [the] private sector."

"After I get experience, I'll try for [a] public sector job."

"I only got a [job] offer from a private company."

#### **Summary of Findings**

Results indicate that the most significant criteria in terms of high satisfaction ratings were related to work environment, with most dissatisfaction expressed with regard to salaries and benefits. Respondents who were younger, had spent less time in their current positions, and had shorter careers expressed more satisfaction with their workplace conditions relative to other respondents, while respondents who were older and had spent more time in their current positions and careers expressed relatively more satisfaction with their job security. The greater the number of jobs that respondents had held over a lifetime, the more criteria they gave high



satisfaction ratings; the fewer the number of jobs respondents had held, the more criteria they gave low satisfaction ratings.

Results indicate that participants place the greatest emphasis on their satisfaction with salary, benefits, and job security, followed by workplace conditions. Correlational analysis results support this finding, showing only moderate correlations between salary and key variables including length of employment, age, and education. In other words, salary did not appear to be higher for participants who had been employed for longer, participants who were older, or participants with higher levels of education, indicating little advancement and few pay increases. Open-ended responses supported descriptive and correlational findings, adding that shorter working hours were important to participants and that many participants believed that working in the public sector supports the economy more than working in the private sector.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

It is recommended that this study be repeated with a larger sample size and greater demographic diversity, for example, age, salary, and length of career. Representation from the private sector should include as many types of businesses as possible. The survey instrument should be revised in the following ways:

- add working hours to demographic variables;
- remove items with low differentiation (all or nearly all the same response);
- remove all open-ended items except for one, giving the participants an opportunity to add any other information; and
- in the ratings section, include more focused items such as:
  - i. “To build the economy, more Emiratis should work in the private sector.”
  - ii. “It is not important for Emiratis to work in the private sector to build the economy.”
  - iii. “I chose my job based mostly on my skills and interests.”
  - iv. “It is important for me to work at a job that I like.”

Several recommendations are, therefore, based on the results of the study. First, promote awareness of the importance and benefits of increasing Emirati participation in private sector employment at the secondary and post-secondary level; Second, provide incentives for community-based work experience (in addition to work placement) in the private sector; Third, encourage alternate work arrangements in the private sector for Emiratis desiring part-time employment or employment with shorter working hours, for example, students, mothers with young children, retired Emiratis desiring to work at a second job, Emiratis with challenges or special needs, or Emiratis desiring experience in other fields; Fourth, increase awareness among private sector employers of the importance of supporting the local community by making the workplace more attractive to Emirati employees, in order to enhance sustainable development; and, finally, provide incentives for private sector companies to sponsor post-secondary students to ensure that they have experience and will begin their careers in the private sector.

The findings of the study revealed participants’ priorities in employment for an acceptable working environment over salary. The lower-than-expected salary figures given for public sector work implied that other factors attracted young adult Emiratis to the saturated public sector. Although the results may not be generalized to the entire Emirati workforce, the study provides primary data on the subject of young adult Emirati job satisfaction, which is sparse. For Emiratis, job satisfaction criteria related to work environment and job security were more important than salary, as shown by the lower-than-expected salary figures. Additionally,

other job satisfaction criteria, including growth potential and opportunities for advancement, were indicated as less important than the perceived security of the public sector.

The majority of respondents were willing to work in a single job with little possibility of advancement as long as the workplace conditions were suitable and the salary was acceptable. There was no relationship found between higher salaries and higher job satisfaction in younger Emiratis.

For the largest number of participants, the most important workplace condition was a desire for shorter working hours. According to the open-ended items, important reasons for seeking employment in the public sector were having shorter working hours in order to spend time with family and to manage personal affairs. In addition, based on the open-ended responses, there seems to be a perception that working for the public sector contributes to the country more than working in the private sector does.

The UAE appears to have gone through a rapid growth and development phase and more modest growth rates are expected in the future. Young adult Emiratis seeking employment in the future will face more competition from the next generations of young adult Emiratis, who will likely be more educated, more experienced, and have better English skills. Only time will tell how the labor market will adapt.

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## Appendix A: Descriptive tables

**Table A: Residence and work locations**

<i>Residence and Work Locations</i>				
Residence Location	Residence Location		Work Location	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Urban Centers:				
Sharjah	571	49	449	39
Ajman	130	11	67	6
Dubai	110	10	259	23
Umm Al Quwain	109	9	68	6
Abu Dhabi	79	7	200	17
Rural Areas:				
Ras Al Khaimah	61	5	32	3
Dhaid	28	2	16	1
Fujairah	13	1	7	1
Kalba	13	1	4	<1
Madam	12	1	4	<1
Al Ain	10	1	26	2
Dibba	9	1	5	<1
Malaiha	8	1	6	1
Outside UAE	1	<1	0	<1
Total	1,154	100	1,143	100



## Appendix B: Ratings tables

Table B: Ratings by sector (positive orientation)

	Private			-	Public			-	Semi-Government			-	Total			
	Mea n	N	Std. Dev.		Ratin g	Mea n	N		Std. Dev.	Ratin g	Mea n		N	Std. Dev.	Rati ng	Mea n
11 Sector	2.95	214	.780	.738	3.04	624	.782	.760	2.97	286	.776	.741	3.00	1124	.780	
19 Welcome/comfortable																0.751
21 Challenging/ interesting	2.88	215	.806	.720	2.94	623	.800	.734	2.91	282	.830	.727	2.92	1120	.809	0.73
23 Motivated to work hard	3.21	216	.754	.803	3.18	625	.778	.796	3.17	284	.784	.792	3.19	1125	.774	0.796
25 Confident not fired	3.03	217	.894	.758	3.22	617	.796	.804	3.15	280	.813	.788	3.16	1114	.822	0.791
28 Know labor laws	2.72	217	.832	.681	2.86	621	.859	.715	2.76	279	.874	.691	2.81	1117	.859	0.702
29 Free from harassment	3.19	216	.826	.796	3.31	627	.796	.828	3.31	283	.744	.827	3.29	1126	.790	0.822
31 Enjoy work	2.98	218	.806	.744	3.11	624	.768	.777	3.02	284	.730	.754	3.06	1126	.768	0.765
33 Provide assistance	3.06	217	.724	.764	3.15	624	.718	.788	3.16	286	.735	.789	3.14	1127	.724	0.784
35 Receive praise	2.92	217	.747	.729	3.00	626	.717	.749	2.87	285	.739	.717	2.95	1128	.730	0.737
37 Satisfied salary	2.47	217	.948	.618	2.71	627	.838	.677	2.58	286	.936	.644	2.63	1130	.890	0.658
39 Satisfied benefits	2.56	215	.794	.640	2.62	624	.820	.655	2.72	279	.806	.679	2.63	1118	.813	0.658
41 Can advance	2.73	196	.861	.682	2.87	548	.792	.717	2.90	254	.766	.725	2.85	998	.801	0.712
43 Training opportunities	2.92	213	.797	.731	2.99	623	.776	.747	3.04	284	.742	.759	2.99	1120	.772	0.747
45 Stay long time in job	2.52	215	.932	.629	2.83	629	.856	.708	2.70	284	.916	.675	2.74	1128	.894	0.685