



Educating Ms. Fatima

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Introduction

The United Arab Emirates is a smallish Arabic/Islamic country about the size of Maine located at the tip of the Arabian Peninsula. Though currently oil dependent, the country is moving rapidly from a petrocarbon to a people-based economy. As that economy modernizes and diversifies, the country's underlying social ecology is being buffeted. The most significant of the winds of change that are blowing include a compulsory, free K-12 education system; an economy shifting from extractive to knowledge-based resources; and movement from the almost mythic Bedouin-inspired lifestyle to that of a sedentary highly urbanized society. Led by resource-rich Abu Dhabi and Dubai, the federal government has invested heavily in tourism, aviation, re-export commerce, free trade zones, and telecommunications. The Emirate of Dubai, in particular, also has invested billions of dirhams in high technology. The great dream is that educated and trained Emiratis will replace the thousands of foreign professionals now running the newly emerging technology and knowledge-driven economy.¹

To help fulfill this dream, Zayed University was founded in

1998 as a non-residential institution of higher education for Emirati women only. With dual campuses in Abu Dhabi and Dubai, the University has an enrollment of about 2500 drawn from most of the nation's seven Emirates. Students arrive with a varied educational background. The quality of (and opportunity for) education varies widely from student to student and Emirate to Emirate, depending in some measure upon the value an individual family places on educating its women, familial economic resources, religiosity, and socio-familial environment in which they grew up. Many attended private schools, an option that parents who can afford it are increasingly taking.

When these surveys were administered in 2003, a typical student in the College of Communication and Media Sciences was about 21.5 years old and usually lived among family members. That meant either being married and living with a spouse or living with parents. Only a very few from ultra-progressive families (about 2 percent) resided on their own. As a general rule, access to higher education has helped raise the age of marriage (and consequently first birth) for female nationals who are stu-

dents from the late teens to their early twenties. Only a mere handful of the College's students had children of their own. In their parent's families, College of Communication students tended to be middle children from what Westerners would consider very large families – a typical single family unit consisting of about eight children and two parents.

These students have grown up in well-off families who have had little experience of higher education. About three quarters of the fathers and mothers had completed high school or less. Fewer than a quarter came from families in which both parents had a high school education or more. Only 4 percent came from families in which both parents had college degrees. Fathers were mostly retired or worked in government jobs; only a little more than one quarter worked in private industry jobs.

About four in ten classified their family as middle class; another four in ten classified their family as upper middle class. One in ten thought their family was wealthy. Almost none of the mothers worked outside the home (Walters and Swan, 2004). Very few of the students had ever had work experience before they came to the university. A little less than half had had work experience by the time they participated in their internship, a mandatory part of their program of work at Zayed University.²

The public sector consists of government ministries, service monopolies, some education institutions as well as some health-care institutions, public safety, law enforcement and some quasi-private companies such as mass media. The private sector includes retailing, hotels, advertising and public relations agencies, construction, insurance, food and food services, and service among others. All companies doing business in the UAE – except those located in specially designated enterprise zones – must have a national sponsor. By law, he is often the 51 percent stockholder in that local enterprise. In general, public sector jobs pay better, have shorter working hours, observe prayer times, enjoy more holidays and carry more fringe benefits than private sector jobs.

Method

These data were gathered during the period from April to June 2003 on the Dubai campus of Zayed University and were designed to determine how students felt about the workplace and how being at work affected those feelings. Two surveys were administered to a group of students from the College of Communication and Media Sciences. The survey administered in April measured demographic characteristics and the attitudes and opinions of students before they went to on-the-job internships; the second administered in June measured the attitudes and opinions of students after they returned from

these internships. Students were asked how they felt about the workplace, what qualities they thought were important in supervisors and co-workers, and what they felt about work. Lastly, this study included debriefing comments gathered from student presentations given in a public forum after the conclusion of their internships. The number of pre-internship surveys was 49 and the number of post-internship surveys was 99. Questions about workplace values and qualities asked in the surveys were gathered from focus groups of seniors in the fall of 2002. In these groups, students talked about what they expected from the workplace, from their supervisors, and from their co-workers.

Before Internship Results (N=49)

By the time they were seniors, about 47 percent had some work experience outside the home, about double the percentage of students who had had such experience before they came to Zayed University. This increase partially reflected the effect of the university's World of Work program that gives students the opportunity to have the experience of work during the summer vacation. About two thirds of college students escape the stifling Dubai summer heat to vacation in the Levant or in Europe, so the number of students who participate in the World of Work is relatively small. Before taking their internships, students believed that the perfect job would be close to home, begin at 8:30 am, have about an hour lunch break, end at 2:30 pm, and require about 6.5 hours of work per day. Of those who expressed a preference about 63 percent wanted to work in a public (governmental) sector job, and about 10 percent in the private sector. The remainder expressed no preference. Before they began their internships, they believed that a fair mean beginning monthly salary should be about 8,400 dirhams.⁴

Although about a third wanted to work in a women-only workplace, about half said they would prefer a male supervisor, and about 40 percent expressed no preference for the gender of their prospective supervisor. Regardless of gender, they expected that their supervisor would have certain key qualities. (See Table 1.)

The key qualities that they identified seemed related to tender loving care (patience, fairness, support, and understanding) and management style (managing people well, being objective, and working hard).

Students also had expectations about what their co-workers would be like. (See Table 2.) To some extent what had happened on the Zayed University campus affected these expectations. Before going to off-campus work sites, attitudes and opinions no doubt were related to campus activities in which teamwork skills were active-



Table 1

Rank order of qualities important in a supervisor

Quality	Percent who ranked quality first (N=49)
Patient	71.4
Respects me	59.2
Fair	57.1
Problem solver	53.1
Cooperative	42.9
Creative	44.9
Understanding	36.7
Open minded	32.7
Supportive	32.7
Works hard	32.7
Active	30.6
Honest	30.6
Respects my ideas	28.6
Knowledgeable	22.4
Responsible	22.4
Listens	20.4
Manages people well	18.4
Understandable	16.3
Wise	16.3
Objective	14.3
Respects my culture	14.3

ly taught and in which group projects have become a standard part of project-based learning (PBL) experiences. Looking at the list of things expected from co-workers in Table 2 shows that a good work ethic (hard worker and working together); sharing (shares ideas and shares information); workplace etiquette (helpful, fair, and punctual); and interpersonal-type skills (respectful and listens to me) were important.

Before actually going to the workplace, students had both positive and negative feelings, reflecting two major reasons: normal apprehension about going to a new situation in which they would be held strictly accountable for their actions and output as well as their lack of practical experience. About 53 percent either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement "I am unsure about what to expect". Ninety-six percent expected to be held responsible for the things that they were assigned to do, and about 94 percent thought that they could manage time well in completing those tasks. Despite the fact that most thought they could manage time well, about 96 percent hoped that their internship site was flexible about that time.

One big issue among Zayed University students was that of transportation. Even though about half of College of Communication and Media Sciences students had driver's licenses and about a quarter even possessed cars, fathers, brothers, husbands, or male drivers transported many to work. Students worried, therefore, about the availability and timing of transportation and the distance to work. Dubai's notorious traffic with its horn-tooting, tail-gating, zigzagging drivers and the lack of street addresses and good maps added to the anxiety over transportation.

Only about 16 percent thought that they could not do the work, and all expected that work would be different than academics and that they would learn new things on their internship. About 90 percent thought that their academic experience had prepared them for the workplace. About a third expected the work to be difficult, but, despite that, about 98 percent expected that they would like working.

Internship students were concerned about workplace relationships. A little more than 90 percent thought that they would get along okay with male co-workers, rough-

Table 2

Key qualities of co-workers

Quality	Percent who ranked quality first (N=49)
Hard workers	81.6
Cooperative	79.6
Work together	63.3
Responsible	59.2
Respectful	53.1
Creative	51.0
Helpful	51.0
Share ideas	46.9
Share information	40.8
Listen to me	32.7
Encouraging	30.6
Divide work fairly	28.6
Effective	24.5
Punctual	24.5
Kind	20.4
Motivate each other	20.4
Patient	20.4
Prepared	18.4
Work under pressure	12.2
Faithful	6.1
Forgiving	6.1
Independent	6.1

ly 96 percent thought it would make a big difference if people on the job were cooperative, and 90 percent thought that it would make a big difference if the people were friendly. Despite considerable experience working in teams, about 60 percent hoped that most of their work was individual.

After Internship Survey Results (N=99)

After the internship experience, about 74.5 percent reported enjoying their experience to some degree or to a great degree, and about 70 percent reported that they would like to work fulltime after graduation at their internship site. (All the following percentages were the result of adding "to some degree" with "to a great degree.") About 87 percent said that work hours were flexible. Mean time that students left home for work was at about 8:00 am; mean leaving time was 3:00 pm; mode time for returning home was 2:30 pm. The mean lunch break was about 45 minutes. About 78 percent thought that the working hours were about right; about 19 percent felt that the working hours were too long. About 42 percent had their own offices. About 91 percent said that men worked at the workplace. About 73 percent report-

ed that their internship experience made them more likely to get a job after graduation.

After their internships, the students increased the figure that they thought represented a fair starting salary by ten percent to a mean monthly salary of about 9020 dirhams. The minimum mean startling salary that they thought would be fair was 5000, the maximum 12,000. The standard deviation was 1246. (The total salary and benefits package that students thought was fair would have totaled about \$50,000).

Although about 86 percent felt that work was different from academic life, the overwhelming majority believed that Zayed University had prepared them for that workplace. The overwhelming majority (80 percent) said that they believed that Zayed University had prepared them for the work they were expected to do, but an even larger majority (86 percent) found work to be very different from academic life. There was "a big difference between the university and the outside world," said Alya. "Initially I was terrified," said Noora; "I felt panic at first," added Maryam.

Among the things that students learned were patience, not having high expectations, and how to better organize and manage time. Almost every intern enjoyed discovering work. "It was a good experience for me," said Wafa. "I liked the work," concluded another, and "I did not like the work environment," stated another.

Nine out of ten students found most co-workers friendly, cooperative, and helpful. Even so, the students occasionally had trouble relating to their new staff colleagues. About a quarter of students felt that co-workers were either in a bad mood or grumpy, about a quarter felt that problems existed between employees or that some employers bothered them. More than 60 percent believed that unprofessional people made life difficult. About 12 percent also believed that people treated them badly because they were interns.

Learning how to deal with people-related workplace issues was consequential for the students because they needed both to feel a "connectedness" and to have a support system. They may have felt that way because a support system has been part of their entire lives at home and at school, many of whom enrolled at Zayed University with a group of about 3.3 friends.

In addition, the University assumes a much greater in loco parentis role than is typical of the Western universities upon which it is modeled. Attendance is strictly monitored, students are not allowed to come and go from campus as they please, cell telephones are prohib-

Table 3

Post Internship to what extent did your supervisor exhibit these qualities?

Quality	Extent as percent (Great + Some)
Respected my culture	96.9
Respected me	94.9
Honest	94.2
Supportive	94.0
Knowledgeable	93.9
Respected my ideas	93.9
Problem solver	93.0
Responsible	92.8
Understanding	92.3
Objective	92.0
Listens	90.9
Understandable	90.7
Patient	89.8
Open minded	89.8
Works hard	88.9
Wise	88.5
Active	88.0
Cooperative	87.5
Fair	84.9
Manages people well	79.8
Creative	71.6



ited, the school day is from 8:00 am to 5:00 pm. These rules have been imposed in part to stimulate the creation of a work environment in the hopes of instilling the beginnings of a work ethic in students who have more likely never held a paying job. "Because all the staff (were) nationals, ...they (were) helpful," said Jeehan. "They were excellent. They treated us as employees," said Fatima. "I found only professional conduct. I was motivated by the environment. They respected my culture," said Noora of her multinational workplace.

While about 95 percent believed that work was enjoyable, it also proved stressful. About 9 in 10 agreed with the statement that "work put a lot of strain on me" and by day's end 46 percent felt as if they could not do anything more. About 62 percent believed that there was too much work to do and about 45 percent believed that her supervisor treated her as if she didn't know anything. By the end of the internship about 86 percent reported "dreading" getting up and going to work.

Work proved challenging on several other fronts as well.

One obstacle was getting to work. Even those who were not dependent upon a male relative or hired driver had problems. "My first challenge was to drive from home to work. I was lost four or five times during my first week," said Budor. Simple inexperience or naïveté with the working environment was another. "I liked the work, but I did not like the work environment," said Budor, who objected to music playing from computers, a television set that was constantly on, and people (including women) smoking. Most of all she felt lost because she "wanted to work with people, I (knew), at least with a friend." "I felt panic at first," said Maryam. "I was shy," added Latifa. "In the beginning it was hard to get used to the work environment because they were so busy," added Yasim. Sometimes just working in a multicultural workplace posed a problem. "I was the only Arab there. I felt lonely," said Alia. "They do not like to work with locals," added Fatma. Budor added, "It's hard to communicate with people from different backgrounds. It's hard to respect them."

Some were unable to adapt and merely tolerated the experience. Others were more successful. "We learned not to let problems stop us," concluded Marwah. "I learned that a smile is like a medicine for people," added Sadiyah.

Looking to the future, students had suggestions for improving the workplace experience. One was that the university should provide more practicum as part of their training. "We need workshops more than classes so we can have activities to learn about the work environment," said Sadiyah. Another way to improve placement success would be to educate parents and male spouses about the opportunities their daughters and wives would be afforded. "They wanted me to do voiceovers for advertisements. I had to get my dad's permission. He finally said yes but only because it was part of my course," said Haifa. "I had lots of work offers," added Mira, who turned them down because she was having a baby and moving from Dubai to Al Ain to be closer to her husband's family. "My husband was happy for me to do an internship because it was part of my schooling," said Nada, "but he definitely does not want me to get a job."

The relationship between the place at which students had their internship to where and whether they wanted to work after graduation was statistically significant at $p < .001$. After their internship experience, those students who worked in a private company were less likely to take a job at that job site than those who had worked in a public company. Students who worked in a private company also were less likely to say that they wanted to work at any job following graduation.

Table 4

Post Internship to what extent did your co-workers exhibit these qualities?

Quality	Percent Extent (Great + Some)
Cooperative	93.7
Effective	93.7
Hard workers	93.6
Responsible	93.6
Respectful	92.7
Shared information	92.7
Divided work fairly	92.7
Independent	92.6
Creative	92.5
Encouraging	92.5
Helpful	92.5
Listened to me	91.5
Kind	91.4
Punctual	91.4
Worked together	90.6
Faithful	90.5
Shared ideas	90.4
Forgiving	89.5
Motivated each other	87.1
Worked under pressure	87.1
Patient	85.3
Prepared	84.7

Some difference was directly due to student experience at the internship site. Students who worked in private companies believed that their supervisors were more knowledgeable, open minded, punctual, smarter, visionary and planned better than did those who worked in public companies. Students who worked in public companies believed that the supervisors were more honest, patient, and likely to listen to them. Students who worked in private companies believed that co-workers were more creative and more organized than those who worked in public companies. On almost all other qualities, they favored public company co-workers. Among other things, that meant interns believed that public company co-workers were more cooperative, encouraging, helpful, worked harder, were patient, likely to share ideas and information, and divided work fairly and could work well together under pressure.

Respondents also reported on whether they would like to work at their internship site after graduation. Those who thought their supervisor was more willing to accept criticism, active, cooperative, creative, knowledgeable, listening, made things better, and patient were more likely to want to work at their internship site than those who did not. Those who thought that their co-workers were more cooperative, creative, faithful, helpful, organized, patient, punctual, shared information were more likely to work at their internship site than those who did not. Those who felt less stressed, more knowledgeable, part of the workplace team, enjoyed the work, felt that the workplace offered a friendly environment, and felt more accepted by their female co-workers were more likely to want to work at their internship site after graduation than those who did not.

Chi square between "did you enjoy your internship" and "would you like to work there after graduation" was $p = .038$. Chi square between would "you like to work there after graduation?" and the following qualities of supervisors was statistically significant at $p < .05$ for: cre-

ates a common goal, creative, cunning, manages time well, respects my culture, self confident, and supportive. Chi square for ideas was .08, understanding was .079, and being patient was .057.

Certain qualities of the workplace were important too. Chi square between "would you like to work there after graduation?" and co-workers listened to me, co-workers were cooperative, co-workers helped me, I knew most things, I enjoyed discovering work, I dreaded going to work, and stressed were $p < .05$.

Factor analysis for data reduction and scaling using Cronbach's Analysis to examine the resulting potential scales suggested that questions in this preliminary study could be related to four categories. These were: 1) qualities of the supervisor, 2) qualities of co-workers, 3) workplace expectations, and 4) stress. Varimax rotated component matrices with accompanying Cronbach's Alphas were the following.

Chi square between "would you like to work there after graduation?" was significant at $p < .05$ for all the workplace atmosphere responses. This result suggests that students require a friendly workplace atmosphere and network as well as a supervisor who treats them well. While factor analysis using Varimax rotation successfully divided workplace atmosphere into three factors, Cronbach's Alpha was very low for each factor. When combined into one factor that might be labeled workplace atmosphere, Cronbach's Alpha was .607. This suggested that more needs to be done to develop better scales for workplace atmosphere.

Chi square for "would like to work there after graduation?", "work put too much stress on me", "I dreaded going to work", "men were in the office", and "worked in a multi-national workplace" were significant at $p < .05$. This meant that the more likely these were present at their internship site the less likely students were to

1. Qualities of Supervisor

People management skills	Loading	Interpersonal skills	Loading	Forward looking	Loading
Listens to me	.711	Responsible	.772	Wise	.808
Fair	.689	Active	.765	Visionary	.661
Self confident	.674	Caring	.684	Works hard	.592
Handles pressure well	.655	Smart	.678	Supportive	.537
Helpful	.647	Understanding	.671		
Manages people well	.646	Ideas	.626		
Open minded	.644	Understandable	.626		
Patient	.640	Manages time well	.625		
Cronbach's Alpha	.922	Cronbach's Alpha	.930	Cronbach's Alpha	.805



2. Qualities of Co-Workers When Working Together as a Team

Sharing	Loading	Work habits	Loading	Interpersonal	Loading
Team shares information	.782	Patient	.800	Cooperative	.825
Team shares ideas	.752	Punctual	.701	Encouraging	.797
Independent	.715	Prepared	.664	Faithful	.724
Responsible	.662	Forgiving	.638	Helpful	.649
Respectful	.564	Hard working	.634	Effective	.618
Cronbach's Alpha	.919	Cronbach's Alpha	.864	Cronbach's Alpha	.916

3. Workplace Atmosphere (Co-Workers)

Friendly	Loading	Social network	Loading	People at work	Loading
Co-workers were helpful	.784	Females did not accept me	.730	People were cooperative	.793
Co-workers were cooperative	.756	Treated me badly because I was an intern	.573	People were friendly	.750
Co-workers were friendly	.729				
Problems between employees	-.728				
Co-workers listened to me	.702				
Some bothered me	-.640				

want to work there after graduation. If these were to be used as stress and workplace scales around identifiable and meaningful factors, new measures should be developed to more precisely determine what was stressful about the workplace. On one level it is perhaps enough to say many found work stressful; on another, knowing more about what interns found stressful would be useful in developing on-campus training programs.

Discussion

Educating Ms. Fatima examines the attitudes and opinions of Zayed University College of Communication and Media Sciences students about the workplace before going to their required internship and after returning from that experience. The data clearly demonstrated that inexperience with the workplace and workplace environment helped create and magnify difficulties. Having trouble commuting to work, managing relationships, being uncomfortable in the workplace atmosphere – all manifestations of student naïveté – added stress to an inherently stressful situation: being the new kid on the block. Students were uncomfortable with such basics as men in

the workplace, the distractions of multiculturalism, and the hurly-burly, high-energy directness of private companies. Also painful were the expectations accompanying what were perceived as long work hours, the stress of the workplace, and perhaps, above all, being managed and supervised. Many come from privileged homes and wield considerable *wasta*, a special influence generated by the power of tribal names. Many of these “middle class” students have grown up with servants – maids, nannies, gardeners, drivers, cooks – and have been accustomed to giving orders rather than taking them. Being on the receiving end proved painful for some. Even in the University setting, students – though generally respectful of the knowledge and rank of faculty – view almost everything as negotiable. A previous survey of attitudes and opinions also showed that, when faced with stress, students were more likely to pray, eat, or sleep, rather than direct their energy towards work.

Besides such obvious workplace issues, students and the government harbor sometimes unrealistic expectations about where newly minted graduates can, will, and

4. Stress and the Workplace

Stress producing elements	Loading	Multicultural	Loading
At day's end, I couldn't do more	.822	Men were in the office	.742
Work put too much stress on me	.728	Worked in a multi-national workplace	.665
I dreaded going to work	.519	Cronbach's Alpha	.651.699

should fit into the workplace. Viewed from a Western perspective, students expected too much money and too many benefits for too little work. Government policies and pronouncements on employment, marriage, and education often operate at cross-purposes, or, at the very least, create dissonance among these students and their peers. Talk is abundant about the need to Emiratisize the labor force, but incentives for Emiratis to actually go to work are few. Housing, education, health care – even the costs of weddings – are heavily subsidized. It is proving difficult to wean citizens from the current social system that provides cradle-to-grave support.

When surveyed, students are not always candid about whether they really want to work outside the home – even in those great paying, benefit-laden government jobs. Preliminary Zayed University statistics suggest that three years beyond graduation only 27 percent or so want to be working; the vast majority yearn for hearth and home and family. While most of these women feel an obligation to help their country grow and prosper, they want to do it at home rocking the cradle – not necessarily in any workplace, and mostly certainly not in a multicultural workplace. It is perhaps too much to ask that all members of this transitional generation rear large families, manage the household, and hold down a full-time job in the private economy. They are unprepared to become the superwomen that their leaders desire.

To move forward, these students have identified several areas that they believe would help. These include more college media opportunities with practical experience with equipment on campus, more trips to media, and more orientations from women. The latter is because they require female role models to show how to combine work with family and how to navigate the workplace (Hassan, 2003). After hearing a series of career women speak at a University-sponsored Women at Work Conference in Abu Dhabi, students reflected on the messages of several female speakers. "I would like to see how she works and how she can deal with work and family," Naeman said of one. "We know that it is difficult to balance between work and family. She is a successful person. She faced many problems at the beginning of her career but she tried to solve her problems alone, without asking for help from a man. She is a good example for me because she helped me to understand what it will take to keep moving up..."

On their part, internship employers believed that students need to learn how to succeed by going beyond expectations and making personal sacrifices such as occasionally working beyond normal hours to finish a job and to travel. They would also like these students to be unafraid to stand out in a crowd.

While all these shortcomings exist, the facts speak of the enormous progress that has been made since the founding of the country in 1971. In short order, a broad-based compulsory education system has been developed, literacy rates have climbed greatly, infrastructure has been upgraded, a new vibrant economy is developing, and Abu Dhabi and Dubai have become two of the most modern cities on earth. To continue down this pathway to progress means making nationals more workplace ready. In the stew of traditional and transitional cultures, a cooperative education model with more opportunities for experience both on and off campus might be a useful adaptation. Combining work and school more closely together, students would gain important practical experience and the university could develop more efficient programs.

END NOTES

1. See United Arab Emirates Yearbook 2002, for example.
2. See Walters and Swann, 2004; Walters, Quinn, Walters and Swann, 2003; Walters, 2002.
3. See for example, Kawach, 2004, p. 33.
4. Their estimated mean fair salary figure was without housing allowance, travel allowance, and furniture allowance, which is normally part of a compensation package for an Emirati. The pension match was 15 percent of total compensation package. Thus, the total salary and benefits package that students thought was fair would have been crudely computed at about \$45,000. At the time this research was gathered, mean per capita income in the United Arab Emirates was about \$22,000.

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