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Is it All About the Money? Motivations and Preferences for Work Across Emirati and Non-Emirati Youth in the UAE

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Executive Summary

This policy paper examines the values and preferences of United Arab Emirates' (UAE) youth regarding work and the workplace. Drawing on interviews with non-Emirati and Emirati youth, the study reveals key factors influencing their employment decisions. Flexibility in the workplace, opportunities for growth, and a supportive environment emerge as critical considerations. Additionally, the desire for meaningful, purposeful work transcends financial compensation. Emirati and non-Emirati youth exhibit nuanced differences in their priorities for work and the work environment. While both value supportive environments, the study finds that Emirati youth are more likely to prefer work closer to home and work environments where there is lenience and flexibility in terms of management style compared to their non-Emirati counterparts. It also finds that non-Emirati youth value supportive environments for goals of career advancement and financial stability as opposed to Emirati youth who value nurturing environments for reasons of personal development and purposeful work. Understanding these distinct motivators is essential for organizations seeking to attract, engage, and retain young talent in the UAE's rapidly growing economy.

Introduction

The fast-growing economy of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) requires a cadre of talented, skilled workers to sustain its economic development and diversification efforts. As such, the UAE has been actively enacting labor market policies and schemes to attract and engage national and non-national youth in various economic activities, especially in the private sector (Ewers et al., 2022). For example, the UAE introduced the Nafis program in September 2021 with a mission to ensure that 10 percent of all job positions in the private sector are filled by Emirati nationals (Nafis, n.d.). Furthermore, it launched a pilot job training program in secondary and post-secondary schools in September 2023 to help expand career prospects for young nationals, familiarize them with the fundamentals of work, and highlight the important role of the private sector. Additionally, the UAE's Golden Visa scheme that grants long-term residency to, for example, high-performing expatriate students, has been a way for the UAE to retain talent in the country, thereby contributing to the UAE's economy and development (The Official Portal of the UAE Government, n.d.-b).

Despite these new policies and initiatives to attract youth to the labor market, organizations and employers need to understand how to retain and motivate youthful employees and their generation's unique characteristics (Aggarwal et al., 2022; Schroth, 2019). This is especially important in the UAE, where one of the main challenges companies in the UAE face is employee engagement and retention (Maceda, 2017; Gallup, 2022). Thus, it becomes even more critical to understand the values and preferences influencing the employment choices of the new generation entering the labor market.

Compared to previous generations, Gen Z is considered to be more accepting and open-minded and to be a

generation who not only values meaningful work but also whose overall happiness is determined by good relationships with family and friends, recreational activities, and having enough financial resources to make life smooth and comfortable (Ozkan & Solmaz, 2015; Morgan, 2014). Furthermore, studies have shown that Gen Z employees are more willing to leave their organization in search of a company aligned with their work values (Aggarwal et al., 2022; Pendell & Helm, 2022). This has potentially important implications for attracting and retaining youth to the workforce. To this end, it is imperative to understand the motivators, preferences, and expectations of UAE's youth for work and the working environment.

In what follows, we first provide an overview of efforts by the UAE government to recruit and retain talent as part of its national development. Then, we examine the motivations and preferences of non-Emirati and Emirati youth in the UAE to illuminate insights into what motivates youth in life and work that could help organizations attract, engage, and retain young talent vital to the UAE's growth and future development. We also consider practical implications for recruiting and retaining young talent in the UAE.

Talent Retention and Workforce Nationalization as a Growth Stimulant in the UAE

Over the past decade, the UAE government has significantly expanded its attempts to train and attract young local talent to various sectors and industries, especially the private sector. One of the UAE's key efforts has been the Nafis program, which facilitates the employability of nationals in the private sector. The program includes other initiatives such as the Talent Program, Apprentice Program, On-the-job Training Program, and career counseling services, all of which are aimed at streamlining the employment process for young citizens (Nafis, n.d.). More recently, the Professional and Practical Training Program was launched in September 2023 to strengthen the career prospects of young Emirati youth and facilitate their employment in the private sector (Al Shouk, 2023). This program complements other programs that aim to prepare Emirati youth with skills and education for the Fourth Industrial Revolution, such as the 12-month-long Future Skills program, the UAE AI Internship program, and the EmiratesSkills program (The Official Portal of the UAE Government, n.d.-a; WAM, 2022). In addition to these supply-side interventions, the UAE has initiated quotas for companies, for example, a new quota that requires small businesses with 20 to 49 employees to hire at least two UAE citizens and a previous quota that requires companies with 50 or more employees to reach specific Emiratization targets to further channel its citizens beyond the public sector (The National, 2023).

While many of the initiatives listed above prioritize the talent development of nationals, other policies, and strategies attempt to attract and retain international talent while further harnessing the potential of prospective talent. The Golden Visa scheme, for example, offers residency to excellent high school and university students for a period of 5 to 10 years, enabling them to reside in the UAE and work or study without requiring a sponsor (The Official Portal of the UAE Government, n.d.-b). This measure serves as an attempt to retain expatriate talent who find the UAE to be their home and help them contribute to the growth and development of the UAE's economy.

Implementing policies and programs to incentivize young people to pursue careers in various sectors and encourage companies to hire them may help facilitate the latter's entry into the labor market. Furthermore, skills-building programs for youth may help reduce the skills gap and allow them, especially nationals, to be more competitive, employable, and attractive to employers. However, the basis for effective talent development and human resource management goes beyond ensuring that employees have the right skills to perform their jobs. Effective selection of motivational factors to meet the needs of employees, such as working conditions and incentives, can bring about the desired positive behavior of employees, thereby contributing to the success of the organization (Bińczyzycki et al., 2023). In fact, this is especially important for the UAE, as companies have been struggling to attract and retain local talent in the private sector given the strong preferences for public-sector employment (Daleure & Al Shareef, 2015; Gallup, 2022).

A Gallup study conducted in the West, showed that Gen Z and younger millennials born after 1989 prefer to work with companies that give them an accurate picture of the work profile, and are willing to quit if their expectations for workplace norms are not met. The same study found that they are not as engaged at work and are ambivalent about their workplace as compared to their older counterparts. They also value work-life balance, personal well-being, and career growth when considering a new job (Pendell & Helm, 2022). Furthermore, recent patterns of Gen Z in the labor market suggest that money, though important, may not be the primary motivating force. Other factors such as job security, work atmosphere, content of tasks performed, competence of colleagues, and leadership style may also be important (Aghayeva & Ślusarczyk, 2019).

Growing studies of Gen Z employees have shed insights for the workplace; however, less is known about Gen Z values and preferences in non-Western contexts such as the UAE. For example, the different realities faced by Emiratis and non-Emiratis when it comes to security, cultural values, labor market policies, and social networks may lead youth to be differently motivated and have varied sets of priorities and preferences when it comes to the workplace. Moreover, culturally friendly working conditions and flexibility to study and/or take care of family responsibilities may be important factors that influence the kind of jobs and work environment young people look for in entering the labor market (Al-Hendawi et al., 2022; Daleure & Al Shareef, 2015). Likewise, there may be differences in workplace preferences across genders (Beblo & Gorges, 2018). Thus, understanding and considering the features and characteristics of UAE youth who are entering the labor force to inform organizational policies and practices to recruit and retain young talent is critical. In what follows, we present our findings of the motivations and preferences for work and the work environment of youth in the UAE who are currently or will soon be entering the labor market.

Data

The study draws upon semi-structured interviews with 61 residents between the ages of 18–35 in the UAE (see Table 1).[1] The interviews asked about the interviewee's major motivations for their university experiences, career aspirations, understanding of navigating the job market, expectations, preferences, and deal-breakers regarding work and the work environment. Interviewed youth were recruited from a pool of people who had responded to a call for interviews on social media networks and university platforms, as well as through snowball sampling. The interviews were conducted between May and August 2023.

Table 1: Demographic Distribution of Interviewees

	Female	Male	Total
Emirati	13	8	21
Non-Emirati Arab	5	4	9
West	4	2	6
Other (e.g. Asia, Africa)	11	14	25
Total	**33**	**28**	**61**

In this policy paper, we focus on factors that influence young people's decision-making in entering the labor market: workplace preferences and deal-breakers. We focus on these two aspects as they are key factors that may influence policies or practices to attract and retain Gen Z employees.

[1] We recognize that the experiences and perceptions of young people regarding work and the work environment vary across the ages between 18 and 35. However, we looked at this age range as this is the range that the UAE defines for youth.

Findings

Interviews revealed that while salary matters, other factors matter as much, if not more, in some cases. Namely, interviews illuminated that values of flexibility, opportunity, and desire for meaningful work play important deciding roles for youth in considering their employment choices, albeit with variation in meaning and degree of importance across these three aspects and across nationality and gender groups (see Table 2).

Table 2: Workplace Preferences and Deal-breakers Across Nationalities and Gender

	Female	Male
Emirati	**Work Preferences:** • "Supportive" work environment; professional colleagues • "Flexibility" preference for hybrid or remote work • "Flexibility" preference for lenient management style • Opportunities for growth • Desire for "meaningful" or "impactful" work • Preference for a job closer to home • Willingness to "wait" for the "right" job **Deal-breakers:** • Misalignment in workplace culture and values • Pressured/micromanaged • No opportunities for growth • Job too far away from home • Lack of work-life balance • Inflexible leave policies (e.g., maternity, childcare, health-related) • "Low" salary	**Work Preferences:** • "Supportive" work environment; professional colleagues • "Flexibility" preference for hybrid or remote work • "Flexibility" preference for lenient management style • Opportunities for growth • Desire for "meaningful" or "impactful" work • Preference for a job closer to home • Preference for governmental jobs • A "suitable" workplace • Higher pay to build a financial safety net **Deal-breakers:** • Misalignment in workplace culture and values • Pressured/micromanaged
Non-Emiratl	**Work Preferences:** • Workplace culture with "friendly colleagues" and teambuilding • "Flexibility" preference for hybrid or remote work • Opportunities for growth • Desire for "meaningful" or "impactful" work • Higher pay to build a financial safety net • More likely to put up with low salary • Any job is acceptable (finding work as fresh graduate is difficult) • More likely to stick out work even if they don't advance in their careers **Deal-breakers:** • Misalignment in workplace culture and values • Inflexible annual leave or sick-childcare leave • "Low" salary • Discriminatory or racist workplace culture	**Work Preferences:** • "Supportive" work environment; professional colleagues • "Flexibility" preference for hybrid or remote work • Opportunities for growth • Desire for "meaningful" or "impactful" work • Higher pay to build a financial safety net • More likely to put up with low salary • Any job is acceptable (finding work as fresh graduate is difficult) **Deal-breakers:** • Misalignment in workplace culture and values • No opportunities for growth • Lack of work-life balance • Discriminatory or racist workplace culture

1. Flexibility in the Workplace

Interviews revealed that flexibility in the workplace is highly preferred and important for youth in choosing where they would like to work. The phrase "flexibility" or "flexible work environment" broadly encompassed meanings such as work location, working hours, management style, and ability to take leave for oneself or for child-rearing purposes. However, the aspects of "flexibility" that the interviewed youth looked for and valued in their prospective (or current) places of employment varied by nationality and gender.

Generally, youth did express a preference for the availability of hybrid or remote work options. However, some of the expressions for why flexible working arrangements are important were gendered. In discussing their preferences, women more frequently mentioned location as an important factor in choosing their place of work. This was often explained in terms of the inability or preference not to relocate due to cultural or familial reasons and often doubled as a reason for why some women refused job offers received in other emirates or far-away locations. For example, according to one woman,

> I have [received]...offers but not in Ras Al Khaimah...[instead, they are] in Dubai and in Abu Dhabi. I want to work in Ras Al Khaimah because [the rest are]...far.

Another woman stated,

> When I applied [for jobs], I [had graduated from] international business...[and] I couldn't choose between two companies: Julphar and [company B]... and I choose Julphar [because] it's near.

Male-dominated environments or excessively remote locations were also noted as undesirable workplaces, with one Emirati female stating,

> When I did graduate and I started looking at these jobs...it [the workplace] was like in the middle of nowhere. It was like a whole factory. First of all, I wouldn't feel comfortable going there as a woman.

Furthermore, women, especially Emirati women, were more likely to mention flexibility in relation to other family commitments or child-rearing responsibilities, especially if her children were sick and she needed to care for them. An early career youth who is also a young mother mentioned,

> From the perspective of a parent, if the company is not very parent-friendly, as in...if a child has a sick day, [and] they don't allow the employee to leave early or... work from home for a specific period of time, if they're not flexible... yeah...that would be the main thing [deal-breaker].

Although not unique to the UAE, these expressed preferences and values of young women suggest that availing flexible arrangements in the workplace at the policy level may help reduce the 'childcare gap' that discourages women from pursuing full-time employment (Arpino & Luppi, 2020; Wagner & Zapf, 2022). In fact, flexibility in working time arrangements may help attract national women to the private sector and view it as a feasible option in comparison to work in the public sector, which generally is characterized by fewer working hours compared to the private sector in the UAE.

Additionally, interviews elucidated how the meaning of "flexibility" in the workplace goes beyond the typically associated workplace policies of remote work and working hour adjustments. Emirati youth expressed a preference for working with a flexible, understanding, or lenient manager compared to their non-Emirati counterparts. For example, one Emirati male expressed,

> It's not necessarily about the money, it's more about the comfort...Because my line manager doesn't like pressure me to [do] something. Like, at the beginning... he just gives me simple things and gradually give[s] me more responsibility, as I understand the company. And he's very lenient.

Another Emirati female stated,

> When I was working at [Company A], my salary was 3,800 dirhams and then when I went to [Company B], my salary was 6,800... but I actually regretted leaving [Company A] and resigning. Sure, I understood that my livelihood had improved, but I wasn't able to keep up with my responsibilities toward my house and my family... and I also didn't take good enough care of my health. So, I think a person shouldn't look to whether their salary is very high and instead should be more interested in having a more stable environment, a more cooperative work environment, one that's more flexible and easy to manage.

Mirroring how a number of Emirati youth pointed out how being overworked or put under too much pressure is a "deal-breaker," interviews revealed that young Emiratis value a flexible work environment where their employer understands various demands of life and values work-life balance. In other words, UAE youth find organizational culture important in deciding their place of employment. More specifically, Emirati females expressed hesitancy to work for employers who they considered to be too demanding. According to one interviewee,

> The nightshift duty is a huge deal-breaker and as soon as they said, like some people, from when I start working said that I might work night shift and I said fine, just told them I am going to work night if there is a big catastrophe going on. Like the world is about to get destroyed, that's when I am gonna work [a] night shift. So we are not going to work before. And what else... workload [is also a deal-breaker]. I was about to leave my job because of the workload, because it started affecting my health a lot.

2. Opportunities for Growth and a Supportive, Collegial Environment

Interviews revealed that the youth value a supportive work culture in seeking and choosing their place of employment. Particularly important is a supportive, professional environment where they can voice their opinions and feel respected. Interviewees emphasized their need to feel valued, describing their ideal workplace as a "safe space" where they can receive help and guidance from colleagues and managers. According to one Emirati female,

> In terms of my ideal working environment, it would be dealing with colleagues and managers who respect me as well as give me the opportunity to contribute, or listen to the solutions or ideas that I make... and vice versa as well.

Mirroring this, the most commonly cited deal-breaker across all groups pertained to there being a misalignment in the workplace culture and values. This was most commonly labeled as a "toxic environment," which was described as working in a non-supportive or discriminatory setting with unprofessional colleagues who engage in disrespectful behavior or gossip about others. In the words of one non-Emirati, male interviewee,

> I think the culture more than anything [is a deal-breaker], so any red flags on a toxic culture, whether that's a lack of meritocracy, whether that's a lack of respect, whether that's a lack of...work-life balance in an unhealthy way...a culture that prioritizes friendships or connectivity...those three-to-four factors are a no-go for me.

In addition to a collegial work environment, opportunities for growth, typically defined as the availability of mentorship and guidance, the potential for career advancement, and the development of one's skillset, were cited as critical factors affecting one's decision to begin or continue working in a particular organization. This factor was especially important for non-Emiratis, who often mentioned the possibility of receiving support for developing their educational backgrounds on the job or receiving a promotion. For example, one non-Emirati male noted that having opportunities for growth is particularly important for fresh graduates:

> When you enjoy what you're doing, you will advance further and you'll enjoy yourself more. You would love what you're doing, and you would also want to learn more. So, by learning more, you're directing yourself to getting a higher job than the one that is offering already a higher salary. So, growth is a very important factor in deciding if the job is right for you, especially in the beginning of your employment.

The absence of growth opportunities was also often mentioned as deal-breakers across all nationalities and genders. Interestingly, whereas non-Emiratis articulated the absence of opportunities to advance in one's *career* as a deal-breaker, Emiratis pointed to the absence of opportunities to gain knowledge or develop one's *skills* as a deal-breaker. As one non-Emirati male interviewee stated, "If I don't have prospects for...promotion, there is no reason for me to stay in the company." Other non-Emirati males also indicated that they would be willing to stay in a particular position for one year before considering moving on to other opportunities. Similarly, Emirati females emphasized the need for career growth or skills development opportunities, with one stating, "if there's no potential for growth, it's one of the deal-breakers... if something is not making you grow, I would not take [a job]."

What is interesting to note is that the Emiratis, as opposed to non-Emiratis, did not necessarily relate opportunities for growth and development to higher salaries or promotions. It is also worth noting that lack of opportunities for growth, though important, were not deal-breakers for Emiratis even though they were often deal-breakers for non-Emiratis. Instead, interviews suggest that the importance of growth opportunities at work is tied to notions of self-fulfillment and meaningful work for Emirati youth.

3. Desire for Meaningful, Purposeful Work

Across the different demographic categories, interviewees mentioned the desire to contribute to a workplace through what we have classified as "meaningful work." Often described by interviewees as the desire to create change, contribute to society, or personal self-actualization, interviewed youth expressed a preference for work that matters *beyond* the salary. While people often expressed a preference to have a job that pays well and is meaningful, many interviewees noted that they would prefer to do more impactful work that they are passionate about even at the early stages of their career. Interestingly, "creating impact" was defined by people in various ways, including by making people happy, drafting impactful content, being innovative, serving their country, or serving God. According to one non-Emirati female,

> Doing something that...you're passionate about and like impacting people is I think more important, and like I trust that God will take care of whatever I need. I think living life in a way that's...if I die today, have I... lived well? And have I... put my all into something? ... I think that's more important to me.

Likewise, an Emirati male, in describing his passion for his profession, stated,

> For me, my passion as a child ... similarly to how behind you I can see cars and buildings, I see things happening in the world. When I was thinking about the things that move the world and I kept thinking, when I was thinking about the main factor that moves the world, I saw that it was energy...The state wants to achieve 25% of its power coming from nuclear power. So, I want to help the country to achieve this goal, so this is what really drives me to work in this field.

Accordingly, doing work that one feels personally connected to or is passionate about influences how all youth define impactful or fulfilling work. Similarly, feeling overworked or not having a sufficient work-life balance can negatively affect how youth relate to their work, even if they believe and are passionate about the mission. According to one non-Emirati male,

> I think that [work-life balance] is a really big thing that, you know, even if the mission is something that I believe in a lot, and even if it's work that I really enjoy doing, having some sense of work-life balance, or at least recognizing that, you know, it's impossible to be like to be at your 100%...all the time. That's like a really big deal, because a lot of times employers just want, you know, like maximum output 24/7, that kind of stuff. But yeah, I think...being able to prioritize... what's important and what's just like, bureaucracy... I think that's like a really big deal for me.

Thus, interviews reveal that the youth in the UAE, especially nationals, seek to carve out a professional path where they can pursue their passions and interests to have meaning and purpose while having a sense of work-life balance. In many ways, this reflects a global trend observed in Gen Z employees who desire to have an impact and contribute to society but also value personal life, leisure, and freedom. However, findings suggest that Emiratis and non-Emiratis do have slightly different preferences and motivations even in their pursuit of meaningful work. Though important for both groups, interviews revealed that non-Emiratis are more likely to value job stability over job flexibility when forced to choose compared to their Emirati counterparts. Furthermore, Emiratis tend to value a healthy work-life balance more so than their non-Emirati counterparts while the non-Emiratis tend to be more career-driven and financially motivated. Financial stability was also an important value and motivator for men compared to women across both nationality groups.

Discussion and Implications for Policy and Practice

Interviews revealed that UAE youth values and preferences for work and the workplace are not much different from those of their generation. Reflective of a generation that craves a sense of purpose in their work (Fernandez et al., 2023), interviews revealed that it is important for youth to work in organizations that are aligned with their values. In fact, misalignment with work culture and values was one of the most frequently referenced deal-breakers in the interviews. Interestingly, interviews indicated that the country's rapid development and examples of the UAE's visionary leaders are role models for Emirati youth. In expressing a desire for impact and meaning through their work, many Emiratis also expressed a desire to contribute to the country's development. Thus, we offer the following recommendations:

1. Employers should provide training and development for their employees at various stages of their careers, providing growth and mentorship opportunities for young professionals and providing leadership and management skills development opportunities for more experienced employees.

Interviews revealed that opportunities for career growth and development are important for young people. In fact, the most frequently mentioned reasons why interviewed youth would leave employment were the lack of opportunities to engage in meaningful work and the lack of professional growth and development opportunities. An important aspect of providing a supportive environment with opportunities for growth is leadership and management (Abualoush et al., 2018; Eliyana et al., 2019). Leaders and managers are also critical for fostering a culture and environment where early career professionals can find meaning and purpose in their work.

Recent studies of the workplace have found that leaders and managers need to continuously develop their leadership and management methods to be relevant and responsive to effectively support the youngest cohorts in the workplace, who desire to cultivate coaching or mentorship relationships with their managers rather than hierarchical relationships (Fernandez et al., 2023). Providing relevant training and development opportunities for employees at various stages of their careers will be critical for recruiting, engaging, and retaining talent for the long term.

A. **Develop career prospects and provide mentoring opportunities to early career professionals.**
In addition to providing on-the-job training, it is important for companies to provide early career professionals with opportunities to network and develop their relationships with senior employees. This will enable them to establish useful contacts that can model and support their career development in the long run while further allowing them to learn how to adapt and grow professionally in their new work environment. Moreover, offering coaching and mentorship opportunities to young employees can help them discover their workstyle and preferences, not only contributing to their own personal and professional growth but also providing them with practical tools that can benefit their daily jobs and tasks for greater efficiency and success. This is particularly important for recruiting and retaining Emirati talent, as interviews revealed that Emirati youth desire a workplace where they can be supported and mentored to grow and develop professionally.

B. **Equip managers with the skills needed to support and train young employees.**
Employers should provide leadership training and development for managers to adopt behaviors such as: (1) Shifting to customized oversight with regular coach-style check-ins; (2) Delegating more decision-making closer to the front line; (3) Devising team-level agreements to accommodate for team and individual needs; (4) Modeling corporate values in their practice; and (5) Enhancing empathy, communication, and collaboration skills of managers. In addition, employers should further support managers in setting and managing expectations with young employees to understand their roles and responsibilities and how their work fits into the wider work of the team and the company from the beginning.

2. Government-sponsored training and development programs can expand options and opportunities for professionals across industries and sectors to grow and development.

Government entities can play an important role in supporting and expanding training and development opportunities for professionals across the career trajectory. The primary entities responsible for the training and development of employees should be their employers. However, the government can support and foster important leadership and management skills and growth of the workforce as a long-term investment through special programs. For example, the government could offer training and leadership development programs, including executive education programs, such as "Leadership and Management," "Power and Influence for Positive Impact," and other relevant practical courses and workshops about coaching and mentoring the next generation. These programs may not be open to all, but the responsible government entities can invite companies and organizations across private, semi-government, and public sectors to nominate middle and senior managers for participation. These programs will complement various programs and initiatives by the UAE government to upskill youth to bridge the gap between the education system and the labor market and prepare them for life and work in a fourth industrial revolution economy. Supporting the training and development of the workforce after they enter the labor market and investing in the leadership development of middle- and senior-level managers would help with the engagement and retention of talent, which are vital for the growth and development of the UAE's economy.

3. When possible, employers should offer flexible work arrangements, e.g., hybrid or remote work options, providing a variety of workspaces within the office, and accommodating flexible scheduling.

Related to work-life balance and job satisfaction for young people is flexibility in the workplace. As reflected in the interviews, Gen Z seek freedom to choose flexible hours that fit their individual preferences and lifestyles. Moreover, interviews revealed that desire and strong preferences for flexible work arrangements among youth in the UAE are colored by cultural and familial values, e.g., flexible hours so that women can fulfill their familial obligations such as caring for children. These values are not necessarily unique to the UAE. Nonetheless, the fact that Emirati women expressed these desires much more than their counterparts highlights the extent that a local culture, which emphasizes and values family matters, can have in influencing a woman's decision to pursue employment or wait for the "right job" to appear, i.e., a job that allows for more flexible arrangements or a workplace that is close to home. Thus, organizations should consider human resource policies that allow for flexible arrangements when possible to accommodate for various life needs of employees, provided that these arrangements do not become an impediment to performance of the employees or the organization.

Conclusion

This paper examined the motivations and preferences of non-Emirati and Emirati youth in the UAE to illuminate insights into what motivates youth in life and work that could help organizations attract, engage, and retain young talent. Consistent with global trends of Gen Z entering the workplace, we found that youth in the UAE value and prefer work environments that are flexible, supportive, and collegial, and ones that provide opportunities for growth and engagement in meaningful, purposeful work. At the same time, we find variation across nationalities and genders. We found that Emirati youth are more likely to prefer work closer to home and work environments where there is lenience and flexibility in terms of management style compared to their non-Emirati counterparts. We also found women have a greater preference for flexible work arrangements that accommodate family responsibilities compared to men. With regards to the desire for a supportive work environment with opportunities for growth, we found that non-Emirati youth value such an environment for goals of career advancement and financial stability as opposed to Emirati youth who place greater value on the same environment for reasons of personal development and purposeful work. Governments and companies, especially in the private sector, would benefit from taking these UAE youth values and preferences into account and develop and implement policies and organizational cultures that would attract and retain young talent.

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