

# EFFECTIVENESS OF HRD IN PRIVATE SECTOR: A CASE FROM THE KINGDOM OF BAHRAIN

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**Abstract** - The Gulf Corporation Countries (GCC) still face the challenge of creating the private sector as a vehicle towards building a diversified economy less dependent on the oil sector through forming the private sector as an employer of choice to nationals. It has long been criticized that GCC nationals do not prefer the private sector viewing it as a less attractive sector. Despite, governmental efforts to form the private sector as an attractive sector, the dependency on foreign labor stays at 70%. The research explores strategies that have been developed in the GCC for forming the private sector as an employer of choice which reveal the presence of "Human Resource Development" strategies as a solution to attract nationals towards private sector employment. The paper presents a review of governmental strategies in the GCC states but focuses its exploration towards the Kingdom of Bahrain. Despite the presence of HRD strategies and its importance in retaining employees within organizations, the study reveals that nationals in Bahrain prefer the government sector despite the presence of extensive HRD strategies. Hence, this raises a deserved area of exploration towards the investments of HRD strategies for private sector versus the retention of nationals within private sector in other GCC states as well. The research data collection has focused on the Kingdom of Bahrain by collecting data from four private sector organizations to assess the presence of HRD and nationals view towards government sector employment. The study reveals findings towards the importance of forming policies that form the private sector an employer of choice through extrinsic means by restructuring the remuneration structure.

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**Keywords** - Capacity Building, Human Resource Development, national labor participation

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## I. INTRODUCTION

One of the main challenges of the labour market in the Gulf Corporation Countries (GCC) is to form the private sector as an attractive employer of choice for nationals. The strategies to support national labour within the GCC economy are evident through the creation of government entities and authorities. The government entities formed strategies which embed the Human Resource Development concept aiming to build capacities of local labour within the private sector. Despite the evident market reform initiatives through government strategies, the average number of non-nationals in GCC states is close to 70 per cent (Fasano 2003, Kapiszewski 2004).

Government authorities have embedded Human Resource Development strategies to address unemployment and labour force participation among nationals, but the low returns yielded merit a close study. The rates were recorded in Bahrain with 50 per cent, Saudi Arabia 65 per cent, Kuwait 82 per cent, Qatar almost 90 per cent, and 90 per cent in UAE (Gulf Cooperation Council 2002; Human Rights Watch 2004; Fasano and Goyal 2004; Girgis 2002). The researcher focused in the paper presented on one GCC state which is the Kingdom of Bahrain owing to the dearth in publications about Bahrain national labor participation in publications. In addition, the researcher aims cooperation with other researchers from other GCC states to explore the efficiency of HRD based on the conceptual model analyzed by the researcher. The paper presents an analysis of GCC entities and authorities that have developed strategies

to increase national labor participation. It is evident that Bahrain and other GCC states share common strategies aimed to form the private sector as employer of choice. The data collection focused on the private sector in Bahrain by exploring four private sector organization nationalization strategies. It examined the effect of the HRD presence to create the private sector as an employer of choice to nationals. The findings indicate that despite the presence of HRD, nationals still prefer the government sector. This raises the crucial need to move investments of HRD towards compensatory benefits that will form the private sector as an attractive choice for nationals. The research findings need to be further investigated in other GCC states to examine whether compensation can create the private sector as an employer of choice for nationals.

Though GCC Governments' approaches to labour market reforms embed HRD but it relies to a large extent on setting quotas. Measures to curb the growth of foreign workers included mandated targets for "nationalization" in different employment sectors, permit requirements and levy fees for foreign workers, and attractive incentives and preferential treatment for companies adhering to nationalization policies (Maloney 1998; Ruppert 1998; Mashood and Veroheaven 2009). The policy of Emiratisation has been described as not being realized "in its full scope" by means of its current form of implementation, which reflects the inability to achieve 'balance' in the labour market owing to the threat of not being able to meet labour market needs (Al Shaiba 2008; Robert 2009). Godwin (2006) views

Emiratization as an affirmative action quota-driven employment policy that ensures UAE nationals are given employment opportunities in the private sector through quotas set within selected industries considered suitable for national men and women to work in (Morris 2005). In 1995, Saudi Arabia passed legislation requiring every employer of twenty or more workers to employ a minimum 5 per cent of Saudi nationals which was increased to 25 per cent in 2000, 30 per cent in 2002 and 75 per cent in 2005 (Al-Kibsi et al. 2007). In Oman, a circular enforced that Omanis should hold at least 75 per cent of senior and middle management positions (Winckler 2009b). A further trend in all GCC countries recently has been to totally ban immigrant workers in specific occupations, with Kuwait as the last country to embrace this policy approach (Shah 2008). Certain jobs, such as HR managers, secretaries and public relations officers were limited to Emiratis only (Forstenlechner 2008). Similarly in Oman, different Omanization percentages are set for local companies, including support services, engineers and draughtsman in the oil and gas sector (Directorate General of Employment 2008). The Saudi Government has set percentages for different positions and industries. A general requirement to increase Saudi manpower by five per cent annually, reducing the number of expatriate workers to 20 per cent of the total population in a decade, has accelerated Saudization of the banking sector (Looney 2004). Another restriction aimed at discouraging expatriates was that non-nationals were barred from entering into a commercial venture without a national partner in order to involve nationals in the new projects that were being undertaken in various economic fields; however, this has instead led to the appearance of 'silent partners' who merely sign contracts and complete formalities while receiving 51 per cent of the revenues (Winckler 2006). Looking at the nationalization programmes in the GCC, it becomes clear that they all focus on reducing the reliance on expatriates by replacing them with local workers and are all seen as 'positive discrimination' on behalf of local nationals (Mashood and Veroheaven 2009; Suter 2005). Even though GCC labour nationalization policies focus on encouraging nationals to view the private sector as a viable career option (Forstenlechner 2011), the nationalization policies of GCC countries are considered an interventionist approach taken by governments (Harry 2007) with the aim of reducing the countries' reliance on expatriate labour and increasing the participation of nationals in the labour market (Wilkins 2001). The various government labour nationalization policies are yet to achieve their goals as unemployment rates remain in double figures in all GCC states (Forstenlechner 2008). The measures and restrictions imposed, such as the sponsorship system and the rotational system of expatriate labour to limit the duration of foreigners' stay, have not brought the

expected results (Kapiszewski 2006). Stricter regulation seems to be an unlikely option; rather, the government needs to move towards adopting a softer approach more focused on education and less on quotas (TANMIA 2006; AMEInfo 2007a, 2007b). Fasano et. al. (2003) believe that GCC governments are aware of the drawbacks of a quick localization of the labour force and have now moved towards focusing on long-term structural solutions for retraining and educational reforms to meet medium- and long-term skill demands.

Mashood and Veroheaven (2009) explain how the approach to nationalization in the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia and Oman is one of intervention rather than using a normative approach which debates the success of the nationalization. GCC governments have been focused on a quick-fix of replacing expatriates, most of who have jobs that are undesirable to locals, and instead should focus on encouraging education and entrepreneurship to create jobs that local nationals will want to do (Harry 2007). Weir (2008) emphasizes that "It is imperative for the region's human resource departments to work differently. They need to think as marketers and to create a powerful and persuasive talent value proposition." Achieving a balanced workforce needs a rigorous approach focusing on multiple dimensions, not just those which are immediately obvious (Jasem Ahmad Al Ali of the Dubai Municipality, as reported by Ashfaq Ahmed, Gulf News 2008). Forstenlechner (2008) recommends the use of a combined measure that includes the average length of service of nationals on the payroll, the promotional track-record of nationals and the quantity and quality of on-the-job training and support provided to national employees. Quantitative measures alone cannot gauge localization success, qualitative methods are also required that show the attitudinal and motivational states of localization processes and how these relate to traditional change management (Rees 2007). Marchona and Toledo (2014) observe that there is considerable evidence in the economics literature that labor quotas appear to reduce productivity.

The above views criticize that GCC policies rely heavily on "quantitative" measures though reviewing the efforts of the authorities provide strong evidence of the presence of being "qualitative" through the HRD efforts. Hence, the researcher explores the effect of HRD which is considered a "qualitative" approach to attract nationals towards private sector.

## II. DATA COLLECTION

The data was collected by designing a questionnaire which focused on the HRD concepts derived from the HRD definitions reviewed. The questionnaire was distributed among Bahraini employees (below managerial level) in four private sector organizations. The organizations respective sectors were retail, tourism, hospitality and petrochemical). The data

received from 250 questionnaires were analyzed through SPSS.

### III. FINDINGS

The below tables indicate the data collection findings. The tables ( A, B,) are analyzed as per the HRD activities derived from the literature review with respective responses of employees collected from Bahraini employees in private sector Bahrain. Table C indicates the views of the employees with respective to government jobs.

#### Training and Development

Assessing the percentages under the training and development theme, it is evident that there is a high level of agreement reflecting the process of training in organizations. The researcher structured the questions regarding training and development in terms of attendance, management, nomination, mutual agreement and job alignment. The percentages of agreement were high in all areas as

specified in the table below, and specifically the highest percentage related to managers' support in training and organizations, i.e. building the learning culture. According to the statistics, 46 per cent of Bahrainis have managers that encourage and support their training and 43 per cent strongly agreed to having organizations that promote a learning culture. Management encouragement for training had the highest mean of 4.06 while organizations promoting learning culture had a mean of 4.05 in the set of questions relating to the training and development theme. The question with the lowest mean of 2.82 was related to the employees' hesitance to request training from their organization. Thirty four per cent of the Bahrainis were neutral in terms of requesting training from their organizations. The questions with the highest disagreement percentages reflect the positive percentages in training activities in private sector organizations. Referring to the table, 18 per cent strongly disagreed to being hesitant to request training while 15 per cent disagreed with attending two training courses per year.

**Table A- Training and development for nationals in Bahrain private sector**

Question	FQY / PCT	SA	A	N	D	SD	Mean	STD DEV.
I am trained at a regular basis	Frequency	199	136	73	51	16	3.95	1.143
	Percent	41.8	28.6	15.3	10.7	3.4		
I attend at least 2 training courses per year	Frequency	188	122	59	72	33	3.76	1.304
	Percent	39.5	25.6	12.4	15.1	6.9		
Am given the opportunity to choose my training programs	Frequency	138	123	119	62	34	3.57	1.232
	Percent	29.0	25.8	25.0	13.0	7.1		
My manager only nominates me for a training program	Frequency	150	175	88	45	16	3.84	1.078
	Percent	31.5	36.8	18.5	9.5	3.4		
Training programs are mutually agreed by myself and manager	Frequency	141	160	118	36	21	3.76	1.091
	Percent	29.6	33.6	24.8	7.6	4.4		
Training programs are aligned with my job requirements	Frequency	184	155	82	38	14	3.97	1.073
	Percent	38.7	32.6	17.2	8.0	2.9		
Am hesitant to request training from my organization	Frequency	33	107	162	84	86	2.82	1.177
	Percent	6.9	22.5	34.0	17.6	18.1		
Training programs in my organization meet development needs for promotion at work	Frequency	115	198	93	49	21	3.71	1.078
	Percent	24.2	41.6	19.5	10.3	4.4		
Training is well managed in my organization	Frequency	189	134	102	35	13	3.95	1.076
	Percent	39.7	28.2	21.4	7.4	2.7		
My manager encourages and supports my training	Frequency	217	132	81	30	16	4.06	1.086
	Percent	45.6	27.7	17.0	6.3	3.4		
My organization promotes a learning culture	Frequency	203	135	97	22	13	4.05	1.037
	Percent	42.6	28.4	20.4	4.6	2.7		

**Career Development and Performance Management**  
 Analyzing career progression as an HRD activity through the questionnaire, there is significant agreement in several areas as explained in this section. A high percentage of Bahrainis responded affirmatively towards appraisal discussions and career promotion by development through management support and organizational culture. The factor of career path limitation had a high percentage in terms of being 'neutral'. In addition, response towards the question of whether career progression

retains employees in the organizations was significantly neutral.

The highest agreement percentage of around 50.8 related to the organizations engagement of a culture of promotion through development programmes. Looking at the highest mean in the table below, which is 3.78, this relates to development through promotion. As highlighted below, over 30 per cent of the Bahrainis strongly agree that managers develop and guide them to be promoted. Although 37 per cent of Bahrainis see career prospects in their private sector organizations, nevertheless there were higher

neutral responses in terms of viewing career prospects. As indicated below, 39 per cent of the Bahrainis were neutral towards career limitations in their department, 50 were are neutral towards career limitations in their organization, and 41 per cent had neutral views regarding career progression retaining them within their private sector organization. Around

44 per cent of the Bahrainis agree that career progression is discussed during their appraisals, 36 per cent agree that they had their careers discussed when they first joined the organization, while 47 per cent were neutral as to whether their career progression was discussed more than a year after they joined the private sector organization.

**Table B- Career Development and Performance Management for nationals in Bahrain private sector**

Question	FQY / PCT	SA	A	N	D	SD	Mean	STD DEV.
My manager develops me to be promoted	Frequency	158	139	117	31	28	3.78	1.153
	Percent	33.2	29.2	24.6	6.5	5.9		
My manager communicates to me openly regarding my next career position in the organization	Frequency	57	197	131	52	38	3.39	1.085
	Percent	12.0	41.4	27.5	10.9	8.0		
My manager guides me towards achieving a higher position in the organization	Frequency	148	135	110	54	28	3.68	1.194
	Percent	31.1	28.4	23.1	11.3	5.9		
I see career prospects in my organization	Frequency	90	177	138	47	22	3.56	1.051
	Percent	18.9	37.2	29.0	9.9	4.6		
Career progression is discussed during yearly appraisal	Frequency	35	208	120	82	30	3.29	1.038
	Percent	7.4	43.7	25.2	17.2	6.3		
Career paths are limited in my department	Frequency	54	144	186	65	23	3.30	1.004
	Percent	11.3	30.3	39.1	13.7	4.8		
Career paths are limited in my organization	Frequency	40	100	240	73	23	3.13	0.937
	Percent	8.4	21.0	50.4	15.3	4.8		
Career progression retains me at my organization	Frequency	47	147	197	58	26	3.28	0.986
	Percent	9.9	30.9	41.4	12.2	5.5		
Career progression was discussed when I first joined the organization	Frequency	82	171	117	72	33	3.41	1.145
	Percent	17.2	35.9	24.6	15.1	6.9		
Career progression was discussed after more than a year of joining the organization	Frequency	24	89	225	100	37	2.92	0.953
	Percent	5.0	18.7	47.3	21.0	7.8		
Besides, high performance my organization engages in a culture of promotion through development programs	Frequency	38	242	134	41	20	3.50	0.915
	Percent	8.0	50.8	28.2	8.6	4.2		

**Government versus private sector preference among Bahrainis**

The literature review identified reports that nationals in the Middle East have a tendency to seek work in the government as opposed to the private sector. It is evident that similarly to their neighbouring GCC nationals, Bahrainis also prefer the government sector. Fifty per cent of the respondents strongly agree that they prefer working in the government sector; 49 per cent strongly agree that the government

sector has better compensation and benefits while only 13 per cent strongly agree that the government sector has more career opportunities. Forty eight percent of the respondents strongly agreed that they would leave their job in the private sector for a government job. In addition, 53 per cent of them strongly agree that they joined the private sector because they did not find an opportunity in the government sector.

**Table C - Government versus private sector preference among Bahrainis**

Question	FQY / PCT	SA	A	N	D	SD	Mean	STD DEV.
I prefer working in the government sector	Frequency	239	70	85	45	28	3.96	1.273
	Percent	50.2	14.7	17.9	9.5	5.9		
In general, the government sector has better compensation and benefits than the private sector	Frequency	232	90	61	63	19	3.97	1.242
	Percent	48.7	18.9	12.8	13.2	4.0		
Government sector has more opportunities for career progression	Frequency	60	81	102	118	104	2.73	1.331
	Percent	12.6	17.0	21.4	24.8	21.8		
I would leave my current job for a job in the government sector	Frequency	229	79	75	55	26	3.93	1.277
	Percent	48.1	16.6	15.8	11.6	5.5		
I joined the private sector because I did not find an opportunity in the government sector	Frequency	251	77	52	47	41	3.96	1.356
	Percent	52.7	16.2	10.9	9.9	8.6		

#### IV. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The above tables indicate the presence of HRD activities such as training, development, career development and performance management are strongly evident with high satisfaction rates by Bahrainis. Despite, the high response agreement towards HRD activities, yet Forty eight percent of the respondents strongly agreed that they would leave their job in the private sector for a government job. Reviewing the practices of HRD, it reveals that compensation and benefits are the factors that attract Bahrainis towards employment. The data shows that 49 per cent strongly agree that the government sector has better compensation and benefits. Data indicates that only 13 per cent strongly agree that the government sector has more career opportunities with 21 percent had neutral views towards government sector career progression. Hence, the study reveals that compensation and benefits is the way to attract Bahrainis towards employment.

#### CONCLUSIONS

The policy of enforcing national labour participation in Bahrain needs to be strengthened through extrinsic means of compensation and benefits rather than having investments on HRD practices as it is viewed by Bahrainis as an attractive means towards being retained in private sector. The findings require further study by applying towards every GCC state to assess whether other nationals share the same views as Bahrainis. If extrinsic means is a vehicle towards forming attraction to private sector this shall raise crucial strategic planning of policies that focus on compensation and benefits. This reveals a deserved area of study whether to focus on HRD solely, compensation and benefits solely or to take the “multidimensional” view of combining both. But combination of both extrinsic and intrinsic values shall cause further pressure on investments. Hence, every GCC state needs to explore views of its nationals to meet their needs that will form private sector an attractive employer of choice.

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