



Engaging Thoughts report
Key drivers when managing a workforce in MEA



Contents

Introduction	1
What are the challenges regarding promoting gender representation in the workplace?	2
What challenges are faced when promoting a corporate culture and dealing with cultural movements such as #MeToo or TimesUp#?	4
What challenges are faced when applying HR practices to the business?	6
Changing Work Patterns	8
Rewards and Recognition	10
Panellists	12

Introduction

The MEA Employment Group recently held a client event focused on sharing ideas and views on the issues faced by employers over the past eighteen months; many of which form the basis of strategic business decisions on how an organisation should be run with implications for business growth and profitability.

To kick off discussions, our three panellists; **Elizabeth Williamson** (Senior Legal Counsel, Labour & Employment, Accenture); **Mohamed El Roubi** (General Counsel and Head of Compliance & Assurance, Risk, Insurance & Welfare, and HR GardaWorld); and **Patricia Exposito** (Vice President and Senior Legal Counsel Marriott International Inc) reflected on the following topics:

- Challenges regarding promoting gender representation in the workplace
- Challenges when promoting a corporate culture and dealing with cultural movements such as #MeToo or #TimesUp
- Challenges when applying HR practices to the business
- Changing work patterns
- Rewards and recognition

The Engaging Thoughts report highlights the key themes and concerns raised during the lively discussion.

What are the challenges regarding promoting gender representation in the workplace?

The collective view was that there was an underrepresentation of women in senior positions with all businesses looking to actively increase advancement and career opportunities for women in the workplace.

Accenture in particular has bold goals to accelerate gender equality – publicly committing to achieving gender balance by 2025 and growing its percentage of women managing directors to 25 percent globally by 2020. As part of this process, the business is empowering managers to take bold action to enable flexibility and launching initiatives that provide women with in-demand skills. For GardaWorld, underrepresentation of women in the military and police, from which it draws talent, represents a challenge to increasing the number of women in the workforce. This challenge is not unlike that faced by companies in the STEM space and reinforces the need to improve gender diversity in traditionally male dominated areas of study and work. For Marriott, this can be a challenge due to the hospitality industry's shift work and round the clock service industry.

For Clyde & Co, 2019 saw the launch of its 'Balance for Better' global program which requires the essential support of all male partners and fee earners but which essentially undertakes to promote female lawyers and managers by ensuring that our representatives in any forum (client events, conferences, press interviews and internal sessions) are gender balanced and where appropriate positively promoting of our female talent. We also review our job descriptions to ensure that the wording used is balanced and shortlisting includes a diversity of candidates, with interviewers also being drawn from diverse backgrounds and practice areas to encourage diversity of assessment and thought.

On a wider UAE and regional level many governments have taken steps to promote gender equality, with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia targeting forty-four percent female participation in the workforce in its Vision 2030 (up from the current twenty-two percent). The UAE also put in place the UAE Gender Balance Council which is initially government focused but which has published guidance for the private sector to promote opportunities for women. In recent months, the UAE has introduced at a federal level, resolutions to provide for equal pay packages (covering not only basic salary but benefits and allowances) between men and women and the Dubai government has required its government owned entities to have at least one female Board member since 2016.

Someone wise once said,
a job worth doing is worth
doing together.

Lynn Isabella



What challenges are faced when promoting a corporate culture and dealing with cultural movements such as #MeToo or #TimesUp?

Mohamed highlighted that this year has been declared by the UAE Government as the Year of Tolerance in the UAE so this is something businesses have to factor in and take into account when drawing up policies to promote workplace culture and a way of doing things.

For example, there may be different views among employees on certain practices, such as what is acceptable hospitality or gift giving. When overlaid with different approaches to such matters based on specifics of one industry or another, this can present challenges in trying to implement standardized global policies. These points have to be especially considered in the UAE.

Liz Williamson explained that globally Accenture adopts an extensive programme of initiatives to promote inclusion and diversity and create a sense of belonging for everyone – and these are implemented in each of Accenture's offices in the region. For example, employees at all levels receive training on unconscious bias and inclusive leadership and are expected to build and grow diverse teams – which are a core part of Accenture's Leadership DNA. Employees are also encouraged to speak up and are provided with many avenues for doing so. To embrace and celebrate differences; religious, cultural and national events and holidays are promoted and shared online and in local offices.

Patti stated that Marriott applied global policies which it sought to integrate into local operations in a meaningful way but this did require a big piece on employee and manager education.

Many attendees confirmed that huge effort had been put into eliminating harassment and discrimination and encouraging employees to raise concerns; with managers in particular being required to attend mandatory training not only in terms of their own management styles but also in terms of identifying issues within their own teams and dealing with them promptly and effectively.

However, many acknowledged that there were significant issues in creating a transparent culture in some segments of the workforce where employees for cultural reasons can be reluctant to speak up, some may fear losing their jobs and can wish to avoid confrontation.

From a Clyde & Co perspective, our work with a variety of employers across sectors gives us empirical evidence that building a corporate culture is difficult in MEA. The diversity of employee backgrounds means it can require extensive educational programs to embed a corporate culture as well as compliance with specific codes of conduct and corporate compliance programs. We have also seen a marked increase in employees' willingness to bring complaints of bullying and harassment, meaning that this region has by no means been immune to cultural movements such as #MeToo or #TimesUp. Of course, the use of social media has also posed employees relations issues with potential penalties under the cyber crimes laws being criminal, for example misuse of WhatsApp and so on. Defamation can also carry criminal sanctions under the UAE Penal Code.

Shaping your culture is more than half done when you hire your team.

Jessica Herrin, founder Stella & Dot

Growing a culture requires a good storyteller. Changing a culture requires a persuasive editor.

Ryan Lilly, Entrepreneurship and economic development consultant

Culture eats strategy for breakfast.

Peter Drucker

What Challenges are faced when applying HR practices to the business?

Patti struck a chord when she discussed the challenges faced in managing millennials in the workplace.

Sixty-six percent of the Marriott workforce in the Middle East and Africa is made up of millennials and, they have different expectations regarding working practices. It can be difficult to incentivise them to read and follow up on traditional hard copy policies or traditional training session formats. Employers therefore need to think about modernising to incentivise this demographic within the workforce. Liz similarly highlighted specific challenges with managing five generations within the workforce and the changing nature of work and the employment relationship. For many, the 'job for life' culture has shifted to a more transactional approach – Liz commented that millennials in particular are often looking for shorter contracts and greater flexibility. HR and employers need to redesign the workforce model – giving the employee the experience they are seeking, whilst balancing the fluctuating needs and demands of clients.

Liz also commented on the changes in the way in which employees interact with HR and their managers. The uptake of new technologies in employees' personal lives means that they expect the same speed of response from HR and same ease of access to information and senior leadership. This is driving greater adoption of automation, digital content/communication and self-service tools by the HR and executive teams.

Other discussions during the evening picked up on these themes and provided further insight into some key trends in the region.

Clients do not come first.
Employees come first. If you
take care of your employees,
they will take care of the clients.

Richard Branson, CEO & Founder of Virgin Group

Changing Work Patterns

Whilst the legal framework in MEA has not by and large sought to compel employers to provide or to empower employees to request different work patterns such as flexible working, working from home or job sharing, many of our attendees spoke about introducing these policies as a necessity both from a people perspective as well as from a business viability angle.

It helped retain employees and in some instances attracted employees into the business from competitors who moved for these benefits and not an increase in salary.

Such measures reduce office space at a time when all business in the region are looking at regionalisation, off shoring and cutting base line costs. While the UAE, and more particularly, Dubai remains the preferred regional corporate hub whose remit has grown over the past five years (Middle East and Africa now often has Central Asia, India and Russia tagged alongside it); many businesses are looking at moving a middle tier of management or specific business units for example sales, into lower cost centres such as Egypt, Lebanon or South Africa to name a few alternatives.

From a people perspective changing work patterns potentially empowers employees by giving them autonomy to manage their own working day (some attendees commented that people will often work harder and longer) and it forms part of a culture of reward and recognition that moves away from extrinsic factors to intrinsic ones which are more individually aligned.

The challenge with these measures is ensuring an acceptable measure of productivity, for example a commitment of doing at least eight hours a day regardless of when during the day these are completed. Being able to withdraw the benefit was also a key consideration if productivity dropped off.

Beyond changing work patterns is the reality of the changing nature of the work relationship, and specifically the prevalence of expatriate contractor-like relationships in project environments in the Middle East, versus the protected and frequently unionized employment relationships in Africa. This can present particular challenges for lean corporate HR and legal teams trying to manage labour and employment relations across diverse jurisdictions lumped together as a region. The consequences of mistakes can be severe, with potential employment, tax and other risks of blurring the contractor-employee distinction, and constitutional or even criminal risks for mismanaging industrial relations.

One Oracle study found that 93 percent of US HR leaders and employees would be willing to take instruction from a robot or AI at work—although they also believe that organizations are not yet doing enough to prepare their employees for these changes.

The analyst firm Gartner has predicted that by 2020, AI will create more jobs than it eliminates... By 2022, it claims that one in five workers will use AI when carrying out non-routine tasks, such as running a status report or sorting their incoming messages.



Rewards and Recognition

Of course, many of these themes are linked to employee reward and recognition which is a challenge across the region, again because different demographics within the workforce have typically been found to have different motivators; historically employees from the region are seen to be extrinsically motivated whilst many expatriate employees are regarded as intrinsically motivated.

Setting policy can therefore be a challenge, not least in terms of recruitment and the growing global trend to view talent, recognition and reward through the prism of individual performance and overall business contribution. Ensuring consistency and fairness against this backdrop is a challenge many of our attendees said their businesses are grappling with. Restructuring salary packages was also a key discussion point in order to try to incentivise an employee going the extra mile; one attendee commented that 'employees view their salary package as their reward for simply turning up to work; they want something extra for actually doing a good job.'

Clyde & Co's experience over the past five years is that employers are seeking to build in flexibility in their remuneration structure and to make more components discretionary or subject to adjustment. Employers are also looking at introducing schemes which have become standard elsewhere to the region such as a 'basket' approach to benefits with employees choosing from a range of benefits up to a certain value. The key concern in implementing such measures is consistency and if a framework provides for a manager's subjective judgment or assessment, putting in place a sufficient framework around that exercise to be comfortable employees are being assessed fairly.

As an employer we are also looking at our appraisal system; how we assess performance, manage careers and, reward and recognise employees. Many multinationals including Cigna, Accenture and Mott McDonald have taken the step of doing away with yearly appraisals in favour of continuous feedback enabled through technology (such as an app or electronic platform for managers and employees to log into and comment on performance) and separating career development from performance assessment.

The issue of financing these experiences also arose. A concern was that by reporting directly to CFOs, HR departments are not able to provide as many experiences as they would have liked, due to the fact that at the end of the day it's all about the bottom number, and CFOs simply don't want to pay for such things.

People work for money but go the extra mile for recognition, praise and rewards.

Dale Carnegie, Leadership Training Guru

Panellists



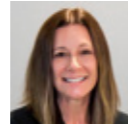
Mohamed El Roubi

General Counsel and Head of Compliance & Assurance, Risk, Insurance & Welfare, and HR
GardaWorld

Mohamed is General Counsel at GardaWorld International Protective Services, and leads the Legal, HR, Compliance and Assurance, and Risk, Insurance & Welfare functions. A specialist in business resilience, M&A and issues management, he has broad international legal, governance, risk and compliance experience across a range of industries.

As a senior executive at Orascom Telecom, General Electric, and Amec Foster Wheeler, and GardaWorld, Mohamed has contributed to business strategy over twenty years working throughout five continents, with a particular focus in Africa and the Middle East. Mohamed serves on the Board Risk and Compliance Committee of the International Company for Water and Power (ACWA Power), a leading Saudi Arabian developer, investor and operator of power generation and desalinated water plants.

A bi-lingual (English/Arabic) Northeastern University School of Law graduate, Mohamed is licensed as an attorney in Massachusetts and the District of Columbia, and is a thought leader and a regular conference speaker on corporate governance and business ethics.

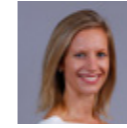


Patricia Exposito

Vice President and Senior Legal Counsel
Marriott International Inc

Patti is Vice President and Senior Counsel at Marriott International, Inc. She serves as the team lead for asset management, lodging operations and labor matters for Marriott's hotel operations in the Middle East and Africa. Prior to joining Marriott approximately 11 years ago, Patti was in private practice at two Washington, D.C. law firms, where she focused on employment litigation and counseling.

Patti is a founding member of the recently-formed Female Leadership Initiative for Marriott, Middle East & Africa.



Elizabeth Williamson

Senior Legal Counsel, Labour & Employment
Accenture

Liz is a UK qualified employment lawyer and Certified Information Privacy Professional based in the UAE. After 10 years in private practice in the UK, South Africa and the Middle East, Liz moved in-house and joined Accenture, where she is responsible for employment and immigration law strategy and compliance across the Middle East & Turkey; and is part of a global team focussed on strategic employment law initiatives. Liz is a passionate Inclusion & Diversity advocate and sits on Accenture's Inclusion & Diversity Committee; she also is excited by the potential of digital to drive societal change.



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