

**UAE WOMEN
BOARD DIRECTORS**
CAREERS, BOARD EXPERIENCES AND
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CHANGE

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“Women proved themselves in many workplaces and today we want them to have a strong presence in decision-making positions in our institutions”

His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum
United Arab Emirates Vice President, Prime Minister and Ruler of Dubai
Tweeted on 9/12/2012

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FOREWORD

Her Highness Sheikha Manal Bint Mohammed Bin Rashid Al Maktoum
President of Dubai Women Establishment

Women are rightfully regarded as the pillars of their families and, by extension, of society. Yet, today women aspire towards playing a greater role in the progress of their Nation and their communities. I am proud to note that UAE women have received great support and encouragement to attain the highest academic degrees, and there are no limitations to their careers. Today, women have the desire to participate in the economic and social development of their country and occupy high positions and play a crucial role in the decision making process.

This study presents an important case for strengthening the role of women and giving them a strong presence in decision-making positions in our institutions, especially in the wake of the decision by His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice-President and Prime Minister of the UAE and Ruler of Dubai, to implement a representation of Emirati women on Boards of Directors of all government companies and authorities in the UAE. This decision, which provides an opportunity for Emirati women to actively participate in the overall development process in the UAE is a key step in utilising the full potential of the UAE society for the success of the nation.

The research report is the first phase of this initiative. Launched by the Hawkamah, the Institute of Corporate Governance supported by the Dubai Women Establishment, it will identify how the environment in the UAE restrict the participation of professional women into senior roles, recommend necessary changes

to overcome these obstacles, and then propose a comprehensive communication strategy to raise awareness of gender balance on boards of directors in companies and local and regional bodies.

Over the years women have proven their vital role in building society. Women's participation alongside men in the boardroom will breath new life to the work of public and private institutions. Among others, women can offer a broader perspective on issues previously gone unnoticed in our institutions and society; thereby ensuring the continued progress of our country towards playing a greater role in the international community.

As the President of Dubai Women Establishment, I would like to extend my heartfelt gratitude and appreciation to all those who have contributed to the preparation of this study; which also marks another significant contribution by the Establishment in their continuous work for the empowerment and development of all UAE women.

A MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIRMAN

His Excellency Hamad Buamim

Chairman of the Board, Hawkamah, The Institute for Corporate Governance

There is no doubt that women are under-represented in boardrooms across the world.

Company boards benefit greatly from the contribution women members bring. Businesses led by diverse boards that reflect the whole breadth of their stakeholders and their business environment will be more successful businesses. They are more in touch with their customers' demands, their investors' expectations, their staff's concerns, and they have a forum in the board room where these different perspectives come together and successful business strategies can be devised.

An argument against actively seeking to achieve gender balance on the board is a fear that too much diversity and independence of thought can be damaging to the cohesion of the board. Yet, for healthy boards with capable chairs, the very opposite is true. The modern board requires that there be room for open and constructive discussion, with respect and regard for the people around the table. The result is a more capable and better functioning board that can withstand the challenges of an ever-shifting landscape in which the organisation it serves operates.

Board cohesion is vital, and everyone needs to be moving in the same direction, but in order to come to the most robust conclusion about how the organisation should respond to the challenges it faces, there needs to be rigorous consideration of a whole range of stakeholder perspectives fuelled by as much diversity of thought and experience as possible. In other words, in order for boards

to be effective, and to encourage healthy discussion, debate, and action, there needs to be independence and diversity in thought and deed.

We are advocating the need to address socioeconomic fundamentals and address cultural barriers. What we are calling for is a shift to a women's market oriented education, a greater integration within the labour force and the building of women's board level capacity. More important is to increase female labour force participation in the Arab world, which is half of what it is in other countries at similar income and wealth levels.

As the Chairman of the Board at Hawkamah, the Institute for Corporate Governance, I would like to thank the Dubai Women Establishment for supporting this initiative under the patronage of Her Highness Sheikha Manal bint Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum and I would like to thank Cranfield for the support they have made available to Hawkamah in developing this research report.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

UAE WOMEN DIRECTORS' CAREERS, BOARD EXPERIENCES AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CHANGE, 2012

The aim of this qualitative research project was to identify challenges faced by women directors in the UAE, support mechanisms in their careers up to director level, and their board experiences and integration into the boardroom. The key objective was to ascertain senior women's views on possible solutions for wider discussion. Through face to face interviews with 16 highly educated executive board level women, career facilitators were revealed, including family support, role models, informal mentors and overseas study. Boardroom experiences were challenging, often due to being the first woman, the only woman and sometimes the youngest board member. Nonetheless the women were very positive about their roles, and determined to add value to their boards. They took steps to learn about corporate governance to prepare for their roles as directors, including on family business boards. Participants all commented warmly on UAE government support for women's progress.

Participants said that UAE boards need women, because they bring a transformational leadership style, better team-working and a reduction in aggressive culture. They are less prone to take risky and unethical ventures, going for steady growth and improvements. Women bring diversity of views and experiences; hence decision quality is improved as issues are well explored, and impacts on employees or society are more likely to be considered. Furthermore, adding more well educated women brings up-to-date knowledge, especially on corporate governance, to decisionmaking levels. The

women said that the UAE should nurture women's potential and get a good return on investments made in women's education and development in recent years.

These successful executive board women made four sets of recommendations.

FOR GOVERNMENT TO CONSIDER

Introduce a quota for gender diversity; start with public sector boards, influence the private sector of need to change. Of the 13 women who discussed this, four supported a quota, six would possibly support some intervention, but three women were against it.

Limit the number of board directorships that one person can hold, and time-limit seats.

Allow foreigners to be NEDs of Emirati businesses to take advantage of diversity.

Require all new directors to take a corporate governance programme.

Mandate transparency of board membership. Set up mechanisms to build and develop a pipeline of potential women directors.

Promote a list of qualified candidates to those appointing directors.

Privatise more public sector organisations to improve governance, which would thereby create more director seats.

Continue to improve UAE education to best international standards.

| Encourage more Emiratis to go into private sector careers.

| Improve official maternity leave, give women a right to return to their posts within 12 months, and rights to flexible working for mothers of young children.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EMPLOYERS

| Set up talent management structures for women and men.

| Increase training opportunities for women; set up formal mentoring schemes.

| Train middle managers to stop stereotyping roles and genders, to remove blockage.

| Provide confidential career counselling.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MEN

| At work, stop stereotyping women and job roles, understand the lack of fairness in current systems, and stop excluding women in the workgroup.

| As fathers, bring up daughters and sons equally, send both overseas for postgraduate education.

| In family businesses, let daughters as well as sons get experience in the firm, without special treatment, so that they would be fully knowledgeable about the business.

| As husbands, provide more support at home; have a better understanding of women's need to travel and work long hours, and women's needs for career fulfilment.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR WOMEN

| Throughout career, understand themselves and their goals; choose a career that they have passion for; work very hard ("don't be average!"); balance their career and their culture, and treat others with respect.

| For young women: choose studies that lead to a good career, continue with lifelong learning, have strong self-belief and don't take no for an answer.

| For mid-career women: build up expertise and profile, taking care about the first impressions that they make. They should develop good teams, develop political skills, find a good mentor, continue networking, and keep an eye on the strategic perspective of their careers.

| For women at the top: sit on a smaller board to gain experience; leave a legacy of their leadership, and help other women.

| For women as mothers: bring up daughters and sons equally, and protect their family time when they are working.

Some of these recommendations may be already under consideration by Government. Many of these points come from the hearts of these women, based on their experiences. It is hoped that their views will be considered and some changes made to facilitate the careers and integration of more women into UAE boards.

We thank the women interviewees for their generous participation.

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INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

This study forms part of the first phase of a three phase initiative from Hawkamah Institute for Corporate Governance supported by Dubai Women Establishment. Under the patronage of Her Highness Sheikha Manal bint Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, President of Dubai Women Establishment. The aim of the initiative is to identify policy barriers restricting participation of women at senior executive levels and advocate changes to overcome these. It seeks to develop a communication strategy aimed at increasing awareness on gender diversity in local and regional boardrooms and to encourage existing and potential women investors, directors, managers and other stakeholders to strengthen and enhance the foundations of good corporate governance.

The objectives of the initiative will be carried out in three phases. The first phase, '*Research and Defining the Business Case*' for more women's participation in the boardroom will include qualitative interviews on current board practices, identification of current and future policy and practical challenges and publication of results through white papers in conjunction with various women's business groups. The second phase, '*Capacity-building and Empowerment*' will include workshops for women leaders and delivery of the globally accredited Director Development Programme and the Board Referral Service. This will provide a pool of women leaders ready for regional board appointments. The final phase '*Research Advocacy and Networking*' will include mentoring, policy recommendations, business cases and the promotion of media coverage to highlight challenges and successes.

Hawkamah's research shows that of more than 6000 board seats of GCC listed companies, only 1.5% are occupied by women. Yet there are many experienced and well-qualified women business leaders who could take up board seats and contribute diverse well-founded perspectives in GCC boardrooms. The aim of this Phase 1 qualitative research study is to identify challenges to women's integration into UAE boards, and facilitate discussions on solutions. The objectives are:

| To understand how those women experience their roles and contribute in the boardroom;

| To ascertain the views of those women regarding potential policy measures to facilitate the entry of more women to UAE boards.

Dr. Val Singh and Saeed Bin Shabib carried out the research.

Dr. Singh, from the UK's Cranfield International Centre for Women Leaders, is cofounder of the UK's Female FTSE Index, which annually monitors the top 350 companies for progress in the proportion of women directors and top executives.

Saeed Bin Shabib is a Corporate Governance Analyst at Hawkamah, with experience as a board member on multiple boards.

Dr. Singh and Saeed Bin Shabib interviewed sixteen outstanding women executive board members, including public sector directors, women running family businesses, charities and NFP organizations, and top female professionals.

UAE ACHIEVEMENTS IN WOMEN'S ADVANCEMENT

UAE ACHIEVEMENTS IN WOMEN'S ADVANCEMENT

Women in the UAE have education, legal rights, freedoms, careers and opportunities that are leading the Arab world. Over the last four decades, the UAE governments and local authorities of the various Emirates have significantly improved the status and role of women. Equal rights including equal pay for men and women are now enshrined in the law. The UAE was ranked 43 in a listing of 177 countries in the UN Gender Development Index, and 29/177 in the Gender Empowerment Measure in 2009. Education is free for Emiratis. More than 70% of graduates are women, and more than 80% of the Emirati university graduates pursue professional careers. Grants are available for postgraduates, including overseas studies. There are a number of government-funded women's organizations to help women realise their professional ambitions.

There are four women in the Cabinet of the UAE in 2012. Her Excellency Sheikha Lubna Bint Khalid Al Qasimi, the first female minister, is now the Minister of Foreign Trade. Her Excellency Maryam Mohammed Khalfan Al Roumi is the Minister of Social Affairs. The other two are Ministers of State, Her Excellency Dr Maitha Salem Al Shamsi and Her Excellency Reem Ibraheem Al Hashemi. Seven of the 40 Federal National Council members are female, forming 17.5% of that body in 2012. There are three female ambassadors and one consul-general: Her Excellency Ambassador Dr Hissa al Otaiba, Spain & Vatican City; Her Excellency Ambassador Hafsa Abdulla Mohamed Sharif Al Ulama, Montenegro; Her Excellency

Ambassador Najla Alqassimi, Sweden, and Consul-General Noora Mohammad Abdul Hamid Juma, Shanghai, China. Women are now judges and top police officials. Over 100,000 Emirati women are now in the UAE workforce, making up 28% of nationals in employment. In the banking sector, 38% of employees are national women. Women hold two thirds of public sector jobs, with nearly a third of those jobs in leadership and decision-making positions (Yearbook of the UAE, 2010).

A report by Halawi & Davidson (2008) found that there were three women (0.6%) on Abu Dhabi listed company boards and three women (1.2%) on Dubai listed boards, in contrast to Kuwait (2.7%) and Oman (2.3%) and Saudi (0.1%).

LITERATURE OVERVIEW

LITERATURE OVERVIEW

The UAE has a multi-cultural workforce, with expatriates holding around 90% of jobs (Omair, 2010), so Emirati businesswomen are exposed to a variety of business cultures, especially western leadership cultures. This is often in sharp contrast to the conservative and patriarchal culture in the private sphere, where women are deferential to male relatives, who have a duty to protect them. Hence women in senior positions have multiple identities as good Muslims, mothers and extended family members, and possibly conflicting identities as well-educated modern individuals, and as business leaders where they may have superior positions over many male employees (Omair, 2009). Attitudes of younger people, especially females, towards women managers in the UAE are more relaxed compared to those over 45 years old, but only around 20% of older people viewed themselves as having open minds on such matters (Mostafa, 2005). Even a handshake between a man and woman at work is still often controversial in the UAE (Neal et al, 2005).

The career “locks and keys to the boardroom” of UK women and men directors have been studied to identify barriers and facilitators to progress (Vinnicombe & Singh, 2011). Challenges, mentors and profile-building were the keys to success. UAE women face more career barriers than men, because of strong gender roles in society and gender stereotyping, particularly of leaders and managers. Noting that life in the UAE is based on tribal and familial structures, Omair (2010) described four main classes of Emiratis: the ruling sheikh families, large business families, the middle class and the lower-income group. Upper and business class

families are more likely to be supportive of women’s advanced education and careers. In a study of 15 Emirati women, Omair investigated career patterns, identifying four types (progressive, moderate, facilitated and idealistic) of women’s careers. The ‘progressive career’ relates to those without powerful family connections who advance by taking charge of their own careers, building up skills and profile, moving to employers with good career development opportunities, and managing by sheer hard work. The ‘moderate career’ group of women, mainly middle class, felt they had worked hard for promotion but believed that preference for males stopped them from getting any further. They tended to stay within one organization, and accepted that top positions were reserved for men. So for them, the glass ceiling was firmly in place, as much by their own beliefs as in reality. The ‘facilitated career’ women worked in their family-owned businesses, progressing directly from university into management positions because of the power and support of their male relatives. The final career pattern was the ‘idealistic career’, where women of the highest status and most powerful families dedicated their lives to serving their countries through their careers, including philanthropic businesses on the side of their main job. These powerful women also moved from graduation into senior positions, often across fields and sectors, with their high social status facilitating their progression. They had both physical and psychological mobility. However, these women felt that they were very visible and had a huge pressure and responsibility to do well, because of their family reputation, and their position as role models for the young women of the nation.

Female leaders in the UAE are seen as having more transformational and democratic leadership styles than their male peers, who prefer transactional and laissez-faire leadership, according to Yaseen (2010). Educated Arab women including 108 from the UAE were asked about their conceptions of effective leadership (Neal et al, 2005). Whilst the UAE women had a preference for charismatic authority together with strong support for interactive and rational-legal authority, they also had support for traditional authority, and were more likely than other Arab/GCC countries to accept that an effective leader is from a rich and powerful family.

Few national women in the UAE work in the private sector, holding less than 7% of such positions (Al Marzouqi & Forster, 2011). Young female Emiratis, like their male peers, are not keen on working there, due to lower salaries and less favourable working conditions, especially working hours, security of employment and holidays (Al-Ali, 2008). Major barriers to Emiratis entering and being successful in the private sector were lack of relevant experience and skills, low motivation to enter the sector and insufficient standards of English. A study of 60 Emiratis by Al-Waqfi & Forstenlechner (2012) showed that a major barrier to private sector Emiratization is the high salary expected by young people, who also did not want to report to a low ranking person or a foreigner because of their lower influence in Emirati society. In a study of Emiratization policy, Randeree (2009) said that this offered job opportunities for UAE women, but societal attitudes still needed to change towards women's promotion in the workplace, so that women did not always have to prove they are as intelligent or capable as men. Randeree noted that nationals should not expect senior positions within a couple of years, but work

up through the organization to gain a better understanding of how it functions. Randeree added that it was a waste of female talent that so few of the women entering the labour market actually make it to the boardroom, or even to the upper echelons of leadership.

Al Marzouqi & Forster (2011) interviewed 20 Emirati women in the predominantly private IT sector to find out why women were so underrepresented. Again, barriers were structural: long hours, shorter holidays, lower pay. Other issues were the mixed gender environment, the attitudes of husbands who do not like their wives to work, or be more successful than them, and the reluctance of families to let girls go overseas for education or work, or to live independently. The IT sector was not attractive to girls or their families, who influence their career choices. Kirk & Napier (2009) found that whilst women in the UAE are attending university in ever greater numbers, they often reported that they did not want to follow the course being studied, but they had been directed by their fathers to take that particular degree. The women also complained that their teachers were not good. Kirk & Napier commented that the inability to make one's own educational choices reveals the gendered nature of the traditional society, where girls are under control of their fathers and then of their husbands. Despite legislation to ensure women's rights, cultural attitudes take a long time to change.

This Report concerns the advancement of women to UAE boards of directors, where they aspire to take their place in the governance of their organizations, whether public, private, voluntary or not-for-profit and family boards. The research literature on access of women to corporate boards and impact on boards is reviewed by Terjesen, Sealy and Singh (2009), highlighting women's contribution.

The OECD definition states that “Corporate governance is the system by which business corporations are directed and controlled. The CG structure specifies the distribution of rights and responsibilities among different participants in the corporation, such as the board, managers, shareholders and other stakeholders, and spells out the rules and procedures for making decisions on corporate affairs. By doing this, it also provides the structure through which the company objectives are set and the means of attaining those objectives and monitoring performance.” It is also about holding the balance between economic and social goals, and the stewardship of resources. There are now international codes of governance, as well as national codes, and the UAE has made considerable progress in this area recently. Principles of good corporate governance include disclosure and transparency, previously uncommon in the UAE business world. The UAE has many very large family-owned business groups. However, a note by Clyde & Co (2012) reports that almost half of family businesses have no succession plan in place, and given the family structures and business culture in the UAE, this is increasingly an important issue. Women could help UAE boards address this concern.

Several European countries led by Norway and followed by Spain, France, Belgium, Italy and the Netherlands, have introduced legislation for quotas for balanced gender diversity on listed corporate boards. Norway elected for a quota of at least 40% of either sex representation, whilst other countries have chosen lower proportions. Denmark, Finland, Greece, Austria and Slovenia have adopted similar rules for state-owned companies. In 2011, the UK Government set up the Davies Commission to consider a quota but decided to first see whether government influence

could achieve the same results (Sealy, Doldor, Singh & Vinnicombe, 2011). In September 2012 the EU is drafting legislation to introduce a quota system for member states, with a minimum 40%: 60% balance for either gender by 2020 for firms with more than 250 employees. Quotas bring fast change but often resentment from the directors in situ, and new women appointees face scrutiny as to their qualifications for the directorship. The UAE has to decide if it wants to follow that strategy.

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METHODOLOGY

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This is a qualitative research study designed to uncover experiences and views. The sample was identified by Hawkamah and Mudara IOD and included top women from UAE government departments, government-owned businesses, family businesses, private businesses, universities, charities and not for profit organizations. Only women with executive board experience were included. Sixteen women kindly agreed to take part within the timeframe. Twelve women were Emiratis, three were Lebanese, and one was Australian. Semi-structured face-to-face interviews were held in the women's offices, at the Dubai International Financial Centre and in a hotel. One was conducted by telephone. They typically lasted 60-80 minutes, and were digitally recorded so that transcripts could be obtained and analysed. All interviews were confidential and quote identifiers are not provided in sensitive sections of the report.

The combination of the interview team of a British female academic in the field of board diversity, corporate governance and women's careers and an Emirati male board member who is also a specialist in corporate governance worked very well in building a level of trust and understanding that resulted in openness and a comfort factor for the interviewees. Explanations regarding questions and prompts were occasionally given in Arabic by the male interviewer. Where rarely there were sensitive moments, the male interviewer exited briefly from the interview. Whilst it is unusual for such a combination of interviewers, and concerns could be raised over potential gender bias, overall we felt that we gained more openness and trust from our interviewees than could have been achieved by a sole researcher.

Women were asked about their personal lives (See Table 1 for demographics), career history, the challenges they had faced, and support mechanisms that facilitated their progress. They were asked about board experiences, and their views of what could be done by government, by employers, by men and by women to improve access of women to director positions. Interview transcripts were analysed and coded using NVivo software in a grounded approach to identify themes and concepts.

We acknowledge some limitations. The qualitative research design means that issues are explored with 16 top women in depth, rather than providing statistical support to hypotheses. There is bias from the different nationalities, and from participants who may overstate or understate their roles. There may be cultural limitations due to the UK researcher, but she has worked in the women directors field since 1996, and is very familiar with the UAE, having had a home here for several years. There is bias from the reporting, as the writers decide what to include and omit. Nonetheless, this study gives a rich, honest account of these women's reports of board experiences and advice for government, for employers, for men and women to improve accession of women to UAE boards.

CAREER SUPPORT

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1. EARLY CAREER GOALS

All the women talked about early career goals, and their enthusiasm and passion to be successful, to improve things and be change agents. Understanding their goals and themselves was important, so that they had a path to reach those goals. One lawyer said that she knew at five years old that she would be a lawyer. Another woman said that her goal was to become a doctor from the time that she sat with her headmistress discussing university abroad. One participant knew from an early age that she wanted to do something involving art, and this is still her passion. For those in family-owned firms, there was an added responsibility that they knew at some stage they would have to shoulder.

"I think it was always in the back of my mind that one day I'll add value to this business. I was always interested in its sustainability, longevity. Somehow I always felt responsible for the fact that this company would remain for the next generation, so passing on like the baton." (B)

One interviewee took her early career goals very seriously, writing down her strengths and her areas for improvement, reviewing these every year. When deciding whether to move from her first job, she again wrote down all the capabilities and merits of each career path before deciding to move.

Some early goals proved to be the wrong ones, as their educational choices showed. One woman started her training as a nurse, but left with a firm intention to become a lawyer. Another wanted to be a paediatrician, but after volunteering in a children's ward, realised that she would

become too depressed. One woman said that as her father would not agree for her to study medicine overseas (due to her young age), she decided to study architecture which would be useful for a later career in the family construction business. She is now so enthusiastic about architecture and urban planning as a great career for talented women. One woman wanted a media career, taking a very proactive approach, entering short story competitions, calling up radio stations and sending in articles that she had written. One participant dreamed of being an ambassador, applying to do political science, but did economics instead, which has been very useful in her business career. These women were brought up with a desire to make the most of their lives. They had been very successful at school and loved studying. They all knew they wanted a career rather than just a job, and many were quite flexible in making decisions to choose or change. Self-fulfilment often came only later.

"Maybe I was very hard on myself because I wanted to satisfy my family's needs first, and then wanted to prove myself to them. But I also desired to have achievements that I could take pride in. That was the most difficult part, because I always wanted everybody else to be happy. Now as I'm growing older, sorry, younger [Laughter] the fruits of my labour are evident and I am enjoying these achievements. I am in a way reaping benefits of all the hard work that I have put in." (G)

It is clear from the women participants that it does not matter so much as to what the goal is, but rather that there is a goal, to have a pathway and a sense of purpose in life.

TABLE 1: DEMOGRAPHICS OF PARTICIPANTS

NATIONALITY	12 UAE citizens, 3 Lebanese, 1 Australian
AGE	2 in 50s, 6 in 60s, 8 in 30s
EDUCATION	4 PhDs, 8 Masters, 4 Bachelors
TRAINED AS	Academic (1); Accountant (1); Architect (1); Businesswoman (5); Engineer (1); Government Career (1); Lawyer (5); Medicine (1)
MARRIED	13 were married (one had been married, two have never married)
CHILDREN	From 13 married women, 2.86 children average, range 0 to 5
JOB TITLES	1 Chair, 4 CEOs, 1 Dep CEO, 1 COO, 1 Secretary General; 1 Head Engineering; 1 Chief Legal Officer, 1 Head Compliance, 1 Head Investor Relations. 1 Head Asset Mgt; 1 Head Business Development; 1 Head HR, 1 Family Board Member
BOARD EXPERIENCES	On Family Boards (5) On Government Boards (11) On Government-owned Company Boards (6) On NFP/Voluntary/Charity Boards (10) On Private Sector Boards (8) Chairperson experience (9)
OVERSEAS EXPERIENCES	Studied overseas (13); Worked overseas (13)

2. INFLUENCE OF FAMILY

Parents had brought up their girls to have strong values and a work ethic that lasted throughout their working lives. Thirteen women had mothers who had not worked after marriage, as was common some decades ago. Only one mother had a career. Four mothers had educated themselves to become Arabic scholars and English speakers later. Mothers dedicated themselves to family, education of their children, as well as to their community.

“My mother, definitely, education. She always said, ‘it’s a passport to life. And no-one can ever take it from you’.” (L)

“My mother was really a very simple person, whose life reflected the era we lived in. She taught me honesty and pride, as well as how to look after myself in this society. Most importantly she emphasized the significance of truth, and taught me to never indulge in falsehood. Being a woman, she was my mentor in life and I am grateful for my upbringing. May God rest her soul in peace.

My father was my mentor at work and I have benefited from his counsel as an astute businessman.” (G)

Whilst only two women named mothers as mentors, nine saw their mothers as role models for raising families so well. However, for one woman it was seeing her mother studying after having children whilst working, then going to the UK to get her masters and PhD, followed by a successful career in a demanding job. The learning from her mother was to be persistent in achieving your goals. There is always a solution, *“you just have to go and look for it and make it happen”*.

Several Emirati women mentioned the traditional work of their ancestors and how that had affected the gender roles culture that was passed down to the next generation. Eight referred to the strong influence of their grandparents, often citing the traditional Emirati role of the older family members, respected by their families for their wisdom and dedication to the future of the family.

“Men used to go away to sustain a living, they would go for pearl-diving for months, they would go to source some commodities like spices or cotton, or silks, or food. They would go away for a long time, so a woman in this family was brought up given liberty, freedom, education and wealth. So that’s how I was brought up in my family.” (M)

Fathers were often instrumental in ensuring that daughters gained high quality education, but for some, there was a challenge from other family and friends about the value of education for daughters, as the general expectation was that *“they are just going to get married and you should find them a husband, not find them a university degree.”* When one father sent his daughters overseas to the best universities, as he had done for

his very successful son (for which he had been praised), he was heavily criticized, but said: *“Even if they want to hang their degree in the kitchen, they should get their degree”*. His daughter said that this courage and determination to educate his daughters as well as his sons made a lasting impression on her. For older women in the sample, it was very uncommon for girls to go abroad to university, and even to go to Egypt or Kuwait was a big hurdle, often mitigated by the close family ties across the Gulf.

3. EDUCATION AND LEARNING

As Table 1 shows, this is a highly educated sample. Six women started on degree courses that turned out to be the wrong choice for them, or were not able to get onto the courses that they wanted. But these women did not stick in unattractive careers; they took steps to move on. There were other hurdles. One participant said that having a baby whilst studying overseas far from one’s community was very challenging. However, she also said that going off to university in Cairo was really exciting, as it was the first time she had travelled alone abroad. When one woman returned from studies abroad and started work in her family contracting company, she did not feel that her passion for her field could be fulfilled there. So she started her masters and PhD in Cairo, working as a consultant on projects for malls and tourist villages, and teaching at the university, before returning to Dubai.

Ten women reported that they were taking a life-long learning approach in their careers. One had done a leadership course run by her professional body, where they took a person from every member country. Another had attended the IMD leadership programme in Lausanne, where she met women from all over Europe, and found that women in those countries are also struggling to reach

the top of their careers, without the kind of support that is now being given by the UAE to its promising women. One woman had just graduated from the UAE's Executive Leader Programme, which improved her communication skills and increased her network across the public sector entities, whilst the international trip provided different perspectives on leadership.

One already well-qualified woman reflects the history and diversity of the UAE in her choice of professional development. Not only has she done an MBA, but also studied for qualifications in fine arts and gemmology, as well as advertising. These help in her career and role in her family business.

"I've been exposed to business and trading ever since I was young. I've worked in Antwerp in the diamond industry; I worked in art management. Business administration, and marketing and advertising was something I specialised in when I was at university. After that I studied at the Higher Institute of Gemmology in Antwerp in the summers to get the diplomas. I've also done that at the Open College of Arts in London through a correspondence course in fine arts. I have the advertising diploma from the IAA in New York and currently I'm doing my Executive MBA."

Six women had taken corporate governance programmes in Dubai, also increasing their networks across the GCC.

"I used to follow some of these issues but when I attended this course, I think it was interesting and really enlightening – the group was attending came from all over the GCC and it was really interesting to go through these discussions and understand. And actually it added to my knowledge of how to act as a board member." (A)

One woman said that whilst she was well up on the strategic duties of board directors, the course helped her to improve her understanding of the audit function and gave her credibility, through its accreditation with the World Bank. Another said that taking a director development programme was very interesting, as it was values based, and she liked to put the learning into her organization. She realised that despite her years of experience, she needed to be more aware of the international economic situation. She said, *"Nobody told me before that this is important and you should know it at an earlier stage."* All the women who had attended such courses said they were very useful.

4. PARTICIPANTS AND THEIR CHILDREN

The average number of children is three per married participant, including the four non-national women. This is very different from successful career women in the West, where many never marry, many get divorced, and few have more than one child, often due to lack of (and expensive) childcare. These women had considerable parental responsibilities. Seven had children under five, and eight had school-age children. Only one woman's children had all reached adulthood. Women in their 50s had on average four children, those in their 40s had three, and the 30s age group had just under two.

Family support was very important in managing childcare. One interviewee said that her mother and mother-in-law, as well as her sister and sister-in-law, supported her when she couldn't leave work on time, and they looked after her daughter. She didn't want to leave study time to be supervised just by the nanny, echoing views of several participants. The women interviewees all had paid help.

"I have a driver and two maids, but in the morning I sit with my babies like one hour before I go to work. I take my son to the kindergarten. I bring back my son from the kindergarten. I go home and after this, after 4:35, I spend it with my kids and during the weekend with my kids. And after my kids sleep, I spend the time with my husband." (F)

These remarkable women acknowledged tremendous support from their families, and from the government. They ensured that they brought up their children very well, a most important task.

5. PARTICIPANTS AND THEIR HUSBANDS

Husbands play an important part in most women's lives. One woman was studying overseas when she fell in love with a non-national, and it took two years to gain her parents' approval. Another who married young was shocked when her much older husband did not approve of having a working wife. She decided to go along with this for a while, but she said that *"inside my heart, I felt I'm not that kind of girl, I like to work"*. Later he changed his mind, and her career blossomed.

Husbands' jobs ranged from engineers to executives, public sector heads to medics, bankers to businessmen, with most at the peak of their careers. There were some major challenges for these husbands. One husband moved several times around the world following his wife's career, whilst managing his own successful corporate career. Another couple with three young children had managed parallel careers, but already gone through one international relocation due to promotion and knew it would be a challenge to face this again. An Emirati woman had to relocate when she got a new job, and unusually her husband and family moved with her, a great opportunity for

her but challenging for her husband, against cultural expectations that his career would have priority.

"So I had to move my family, move my husband. Yes, it's usually the other way around. But no, he had to follow me with the kids to X. But that was the right decision. You have like even bigger environments you'll be able to affect, communicate with foreign [partners], with other traders. The sky is the limit, so I love being there."

Travelling is still a big issue for some Emirati women. One woman said that her husband was very supportive and let her travel to the UK to study. He was very proud when others started saying to him that she was really smart. But as the women became more senior, they often needed to travel overseas for work. They talked of 'being allowed' by their husbands to travel for work, a discourse that reveals the careful path they have to tread to maintain cultural traditions and loyalties.

"If it was only my father, maybe I would have done so many other things in my life; easy to travel, easy to do things. But my husband is a bit conservative, so I try to take it step-by-step. He allowed me to travel for my work. I travelled alone to Japan. I travelled to New York, to London many times, but sometimes we have some colleagues joining us."

"I'm travelling next week to Riyadh. It's a work team and I'm the head of it. He doesn't like this much travelling, but he knows that I'm doing something good, hopefully for the UAE or my work, my organization, so he's very supportive, but he doesn't like me travelling for pleasure by myself, which I do as well, I need some breaks sometimes."

These examples of some of the challenges faced by dual career couples and by Emirati

couples show how carefully the successful women have to balance their work and family lives. Many women reported that their husbands helped with their children. Some did this just when work pressures were overwhelming, but others gave daily support. One woman said her husband was “*wonderful with the children*”. Another said that when she was really busy and needed to work at weekends, her husband would step in. One husband was supportive as long as his wife was happy and enjoying her work, but he did not like her working late or at weekends. One mother was facing an absence of seven months by her husband, but when asked how she would manage, she said, “*Like everybody else does. You just cope. It’s like a well-oiled machine.*” In contrast, two women said that they had to organise their lives very carefully, calling it “*organised chaos*” and “*an organised mess*”. Most mothers had constant concerns that they did not give sufficient time to husbands, children and work.

“It’s tough and you never feel like you’re giving anything enough time, so you never spend enough time with your children, you never spend enough time with your husband, you never spend enough time with your work.”

“It’s quality time, and I try to adopt it in my family life. My children always say you are a super mum, you are perfect, you are this, but inside myself I don’t feel I’m having enough time for their education. As much as I’m giving them quality time, or giving them good advice and being with them, giving them some nice time together as a family.”

These women appreciated the support that they gained from their husbands, but put themselves under great pressure to fulfil their family and work roles to the highest standards.

TABLE 2: ROLE MODELS & INFORMAL MENTORS
- FAMILY, FRIENDS & TEACHERS -

PERSONS	ROLE MODELS & QUALITIES ADMIRRED <i>LEARNING FROM INFORMAL MENTORS (NUMBER OF WOMEN REPORTING)</i>
MOTHERS	<p>As Role Models (9), admirable qualities are: * Bringing up family as widow. * Community leadership skills. * High commitment. * Determination, persistence and courage. * Studying and building career after children</p> <p>As Informal Mentors (2), learning about: * Responsibility to family. * Self-development. * Education is key.</p>
FATHERS	<p>As Role Models (5): * Good leader. * Respectable. * Caring. * Good decision-maker. * Has presence.</p> <p>As Informal Mentors (3): (Two chairmen of family businesses) * High quality experience and roles passed on. * Issues that seemed like mountains were brought down to size and were easy to deal with. * Guiding towards his legal profession.</p>
GRAND-MOTHERS	<p>As Role Models (3): * Passion and excellence. * Charitable work whilst raising family. * Leadership role in family. * Passing on wisdom to next generation. * Honesty. * Hardworking.</p>
UNCLES	<p>As Role Models (2): * Visionary and successful. * Growing new business with no support.</p>
HUSBANDS	<p>As Informal Mentors (3): * Gives advice from his strong consulting and MBA experience, especially project and academic perspective. * Talks through issues. * Advises on tasks.</p>
FRIENDS	<p>As Role Model (1): * Canadian friend doing Masters whilst raising family. * Friend with conservative husband transforming her life by education and new job.</p> <p>As Informal Mentor (1): * Male friend with PhD and relevant experience giving guidance from his doctoral and international experience.</p>

TABLE 2 CONTINUED

PERSONS	ROLE MODELS & QUALITIES ADMIRIED <i>LEARNING FROM INFORMAL MENTORS (NUMBER OF WOMEN REPORTING)</i>
TEACHERS & PROFESSORS	<p>As Role Models (1): * My professors were very encouraging and inspiring.</p> <p>As Informal Mentors (3): * Advice to be practical in choice of education, it must lead to a good career. * Helped me to think logically. Helped me to get over emotional upsets to see things in clear view. * Having positivity really helps in all aspects of life. * I had the chance to be research assistant to a Nobel Prize-winning professor, getting exposure to their thinking and networks.</p>
HH SHEIKH MOHAMMED BIN RASHID AL MAKTOUM	<p>As Role Model (5):* Wisdom. * Vision and strategic path to reach goals.</p> <p>* Shows that he cares for people, mixes with people.</p>
CURRENT BOSSES & CHAIRMEN	<p>As Role Models (3): Three chairmen and two senior men. * Inspiring.</p> <p>As Informal Mentors (7): * Good leaders, good to have such support. * Being able to work closely with such senior people, improves the quality of your work very fast. * Challenging dialogue. * Sponsorship for overseas task, the affirmation boosts self-confidence. * Boss gives very honest feedback, not always positive but always helpful, need to take criticism to improve. * Charismatic.* Internationally respected, low profile manner, yet impressive in international meetings. *Learnt a lot from working with such people.* I want to know what he knows.</p>
FORMER BOSSES & CHAIRMEN	<p>As Role Models (2): Two investment bank leaders. One former boss. * Inspiring.</p> <p>As Informal Mentors (9): *Keep learning from them, gradually move on as life changes. * Trust, feelings of support. * Self-confidence gained from affirmation that he spotted me. * Former boss still advises me. * Wonderful former female bosses guided, groomed and challenged me. * Former bosses at Ministry of Education, still in touch. *Former boss always gave his time despite busy senior job. * Another former boss at DFS, nothing shocked him.* Encouragement and direction, affinity. * Former bosses were supportive. *One asked her to take on challenging role, had confidence in her.</p>

TABLE 2 CONTINUED

PERSONS	ROLE MODELS & QUALITIES ADMIRER <i>LEARNING FROM INFORMAL MENTORS (NUMBER OF WOMEN REPORTING)</i>
<p>HE SHEIKHA LUBNA AL QASIMI <i>MINISTER OF FOREIGN TRADE</i></p>	<p>As Role Model (8): * Intelligent, hard-working, ambitious, down to earth style.* Amazing woman. * Convincing. * Great way of talking to people. * Charismatic. * Proving herself very strongly. * A bastion for women. * Great leader. * Speaking up without being aggressive.</p>
<p>OTHER FEMALE GOVERNMENT MINISTERS</p>	<p>As Role Models (2): (a) HE Maryam Al Roumy, Minister of Social Affairs:* Inspiring, a leading lady (b) HE Reem Ibraheem Al Hashemi, Minister of State: * Inspiring (c) Dr Maitha Al Shamsi, Minister of State: * Such a good speaker.* Really communicates well.</p>
<p>HE MOHAMMED AL GERGAWI <i>MINISTER OF CABINET AFFAIRS</i></p>	<p>As Role Model (1): Inspiring, like his style.</p>
<p>NATIONAL ASSEMBLY WOMEN</p>	<p>As Role Models (1): Inspiring, " I want to join them one day."</p>
<p>LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE MEMBERS</p>	<p>As Role Models (1): Inspiring for lawyers.</p>
<p>WOMEN FROM THE ROYAL FAMILY</p>	<p>As Role Models (2) and Mentor (1): (a) HH Sheikha Fatima bint Mubarak, wife of late HH Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan: * Definitely a great leader. (b) HH Sheikha Alia bint Khalifa bint Saeed Al Maktoum, Wife of late HH Sheikh Maktoum bin Rashid Al Maktoum: * Has advised her since childhood & supported her career (c) HH Sheikha Hessa bint Al Murr, Wife of HH Sheikh Saeed bin Maktoum Al Maktoum:* Supported UAE women</p>
<p>TOP BUSINESS WOMEN</p>	<p>As Role Models (1): (a) Marissa Mayer, CEO of Yahoo: * admire her business acumen (b) Farah Foustok, CEO Ing Investment Middle East: * like the way she deals with being CEO (c) Roberta Julfar, Head of Legal, DIFC: * Really good lawyer to look up to.</p>

TABLE 2 CONTINUED

PERSONS	ROLE MODELS & QUALITIES ADMIRRED <i>LEARNING FROM INFORMAL MENTORS (NUMBER OF WOMEN REPORTING)</i>
MAJOR BUSINESS LEADERS	<p>Mentioned as Role Models and/or Informal Mentors (11):</p> <p>HE Sami Gergash <i>CEO of Mohammed bin Rashid Housing Est.</i></p> <p>HE Sami Qemzi <i>Director General at Dept. of Economic Development</i></p> <p>HE Sultan bin Saeed Al Masoori <i>Minister of Economy</i></p> <p>HE Essa Kazim <i>Chairman & CEO of the Dubai Financial Market</i></p> <p>Fadel Abdulbaqi Al Ali <i>Chair of Operations at Dubai Holdings</i></p> <p>Mohammed Al Ansari <i>Chairman & Managing Director - Al Ansari Exchange</i></p> <p>Abdulqader Obaid Ali <i>Head of Group Internal Audit - Dubai World</i></p> <p>DIFC Chairman & Board Members Former Governor of DIFC Former head of DFSA</p>
MEDIA PERSONALITIES	<p>As Role Models (1):</p> <p>(a) Oprah Winfrey: * Use of power and influence, plus self-presentation.</p> <p>(b) Angelina Jolie: * Style in her charity work</p>

6. ROLE MODELS & MENTORS

The women were asked if they had any particular role models that inspired them in their careers. Role models may be close and known personally to the individual, or they may be more remote and never come into direct contact, unlike mentors with whom there is an inter-personal developmental relationship. For the pioneer women, there were very few females in the business world as they looked upwards. Table 2 reveals role models and mentors from family, friends, government and business world. The roles of family members have already been reported above. Interviewees acknowledge the tremendous support given to women coming

through H.H. Sheikh Mohammed Bin Rashid Al Maktoum and the modern approach that he has led in the Dubai and UAE Governments to facilitate the development and contribution of women in society.

“I think the government does a fantastic job. Our ruler is a visionary in what he does. We have maybe the youngest female minister ever- I don’t think in the world there is a precedent to that, so His Highness has done everything to promote women. Access to the Federal National Council, ministerial positions, all levels. There is great support.”
(B)

Interviewees also found H.H. the Ruler of Dubai inspiring because of his personal characteristics, his vision and identification of a path to achieve it.

"I really admire the way he actually puts his vision in his mind, and he wants to really achieve that goal. And also, if you notice, he is the caring and the feeling of the organization he gives to people. Like he will just pass by a place, he will sit in the coffee shop just randomly. He just cares about the people around him... This is very good." (A)

"His vision is really my aim. I read his book many times. Every time I find there is something new. I can learn more. The way he works, being present everywhere, it really gives one the appetite to know how this unique man works. And I feel like following those paths. Of course, I am nobody, but one can try it out in one's own small way." (G)

Several women said that they had been sponsored by the Ruler of Dubai. Their leader roles in public institutions are formally decreed by the Government, which gives them great pride in their work. One interviewee went to the Ruler with plans for a new, now well established charity and gained his support so that she became part of the team to set it up, and has just won an award for that work.

H.E. Sheikha Lubna Al Qasimi, Minister of Foreign Trade was identified as a role model in eight interviews. She clearly is an inspiration to women at all levels, and has been joined by three other ministers, the Minister of Social Affairs, H.E. Maryam Al Roumy, and the two female Ministers of State, H.E. Dr Maitha Al Shamsi and H.E. Reem Ibraheem Al Hashemi, as inspiring role models.

Mentors are also reported in Table 2. Mentor was the name of the original ancient Greek advisor. Unlike role models, mentors are always personally known to their mentees, although in recent times this may also be via the telephone or internet. Traditionally, mentoring relationships have been informally set up either by the mentor identifying someone they would like to mentor, or by the mentee approaching an admired counselor. Informal relationships usually depend on interpersonal liking and respect for their success in transferring wisdom. Vinnicombe & Singh (2011) highlighted the importance of mentors in UK directors' careers. Where mentor relationships are organized by employers or professional bodies, they are described as formal mentoring.

One woman told of being noticed by a senior director of her multinational company, based in Egypt. She felt honoured that he had recognised her talent. Her mentor made her reflect on what she really wanted to do, whether to stay in the company or join her family business. Another talked of her respect for her former CEO, who always had time to sit and explain. Nothing was too much bother.

Only two women reported having female mentors. One woman said that she had "*wonderful female bosses*" in her career, and told of the support that she had received from her female boss, who moved to a new company and took her with her, after grooming her for a higher position. One participant spoke warmly of her mentor at a UK university, who has stayed in touch. She helps her to think through issues logically rather than getting too emotional about them.

“She really opened my eyes. Sometimes when you’re at work and you feel there’s like some kind of injustice towards you, she will just give sense to it. She will just try to give you a logic thinking which I really appreciate, and also I myself started to think logically. That can be hard for a woman in certain circumstances, because we get overwhelmed with emotions. So now I feel I’m just more relaxed and I try to see logic into things.” (K)

She also helps her to think more positively, rather than getting upset at small things. This is very useful, as often a small incident or issue can fester inside till it is blown up out of proportion, and if it is dealt with quickly by discussion with a mentor, so that they can get another perspective based on experience and wisdom, then the person can move on. Another benefit is the affirmation from the mentor that the mentee is doing well. They become motivated to do even better, to prove themselves to the mentor. One said that this is very important for women, because sometimes their boss does not provide enough encouragement and motivation to push them to excel.

One of the advantages of having a strong-minded mentor is that there will be honest feedback, sometimes saying that you are not delivering. One woman told of her informal mentor; she knew that when she got praise from him, it was genuinely deserved. She added that in the Emirati culture, it is not so common for people to criticise others, but you have to accept it, learn and do better.

One woman reported how her chairman sent her overseas to represent the organization. She was very proud to have his support and trust, which gave her enormous confidence. Another interviewee told of how the head of her organization and her line manager had sponsored her for assignments and for her

promotion; *“they have really affected my career and pushed me forward to move and improve.”* The support that these women received from informal mentors has led some of them to mentor too. One said: *“My role is to help the younger generation to be in the same position”*.

Only three women had experienced formal mentoring. One was allocated a formal mentor when she joined a global bank as a trainee. It did not work well, as the culture was very closed, and difficult for senior people to share information with mentees. In contrast, a participant was assigned a mentor at Deloitte, renowned internationally for its excellent diversity practices. This support was excellent, but she didn’t make much use of it, due to shyness and unwillingness to say what was wrong. When her personal life caused a crisis, the mentor played a major role in helping her move on. She said: *“Mentorship is very important; I wish we had that culture here.”* Another woman had a formal mentor earlier, but it didn’t work due to the busy life of mentors in investment banking. The role was not as important as other pressures on their time. She strongly recommended informal mentoring.

FIGURE 1: SOURCES OF CLOSE ROLE MODELS & MENTORS

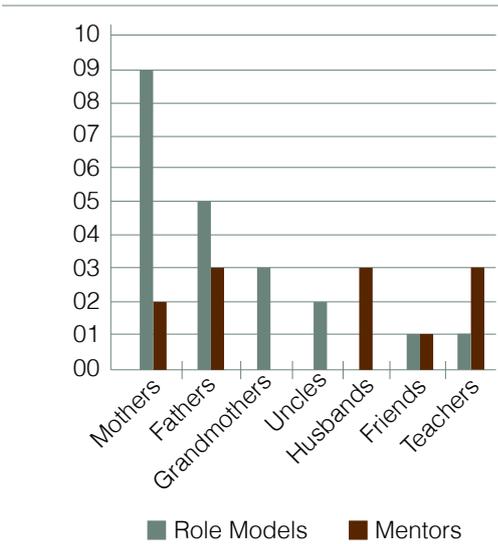
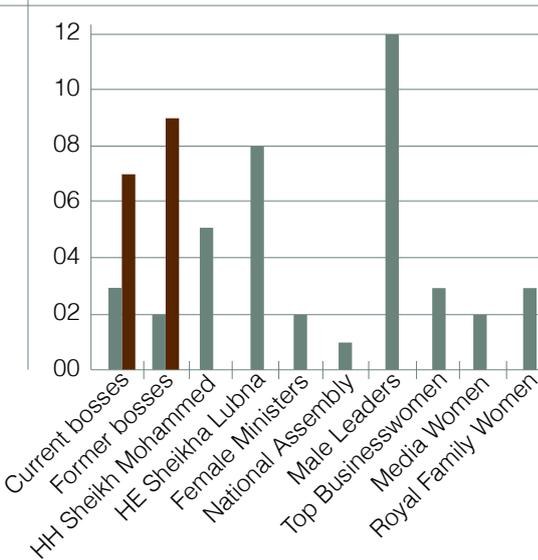


FIGURE 2: SOURCES OF WORK, GOVERNMENT AND EXTERNAL ROLE MODELS & MENTORS



Figures 1 and 2 show the sources of close role models and mentors, and those in the business world.

7. SUPPORT FROM NETWORKING

Networking is an important tool in developing careers. Interviewees were asked about their networking behaviour and preferences. Table 3 reveals their responses.

It is easier to build a network over many years, by keeping good relationships with former bosses, colleagues and clients. One woman said that after heading so many government departments and meeting so many clients,

TABLE 3: NETWORKING BY INTERVIEWEES

COUNT	RESPONSE
7	Network mainly with women
4	Network mostly with men
4	Just love networking
1	Keep business and personal networks apart
6	Enjoy mixed gender networking
2	Shy about networking
2	Networking is necessary for business
5	Mentioned networking internationally

her network was large. Another said that she was very shy at networking. The way she got over it was to think of networking as trying to help people find solutions. As she set up her own business, it became essential. She wishes that she knew that earlier.

There are women's networks in Dubai, Abu Dhabi, and across the UAE that provide social support for women; some are specific to professions, others are open to all women. Ten women said it was important to be networked with men. One said that she actively developed her network, but did not distinguish on grounds of gender. *"In my work I am not acting as a woman. In Dubai you are a professional, whether you are a man or a woman."* One said she liked to network with male colleagues and discuss work issues rather than chat with women about fashion. The only woman on one board said her field is so male dominated that it is natural that she networks more with men. Most of her Twitter followers are male. Another woman had good experience of networking in the USA and UK. On returning home, she found some barriers, but soon resolved them by inviting colleagues and their wives to her home. One public sector woman said that with only one female GM out of 27 heading government departments, networking is a way to gain access to information and support. Some women really enjoy networking, whilst others recognise it as an essential task to do business. Most of these successful women are proactively networking with men and women.

In the business world, powerful networks still are male dominated. The UAE is no exception. The traditional networking place for men is the *Majlis*, described as the cornerstone of Emirati society, a circular room where men gather at sunset to discuss informally the issues of the day. Most traditional homes

have a *majlis*. Women are excluded, although there may be a trend for women to set up similar areas for female guests. Much of the criticism of the *"old boys' network"* in the West applies to the *majlis*. Heads of families and businesses visit the homes of the most powerful people including royal family members and government leaders to discuss issues informally and make connections. Young men have the opportunity to sit and listen to their elders, to get known by a wider circle of powerful men, and be part of this powerful network with *wasta*, its embedded social capital (Metcalf, 2007). Women may not have direct access to that knowledge, power and influence, but some may gain it through husbands and fathers, or by taking the initiative to network in other arenas.

"For the women, their way is more difficult than the men. Because they have to prove themselves; 'I am not only a girl, I am a strong one, and professional, I am an expert.' She is always trying to prove herself. While this way for the men is the normal way -he will work, he will be promoted until he reaches there. His way to the higher management is easier than hers. The men can meet in their majlis, but she has only the work area where she can prove herself."

Only one interviewee mentioned the *majlis* as a structure excluding women.

CAREER CHALLENGES

CAREER CHALLENGES

1. CAREER BLOCKS

There were some blockages in the women's careers. Two women were engineers, and not surprisingly, they faced considerable challenges as women in that industry. One said that in her family, girls usually went into women-only occupations, so she had to overcome much resistance when she wanted to work in a masculine career.

"And then, because I was clever, and my percentage in the school was very high, I went to the best college, which was architecture. Then I liked architecture. But at that time, engineering, always it was known as a career for men. Because you will go to the site, you will deal with the labourers, at that time this was not very common."

Another civil engineer said that she met some gender problems but tried to tackle them as just annoyances. At the start, she was very enthusiastic, ambitious, and keen to get into sites. People said 'No, it's too difficult for a woman; the sites are not places for females.' She challenged them, adding, "Life is full of nonsense and obstacles".

"At the beginning you cannot just go and fight with everybody. So there are ways and means to overcome these obstacles and not make them as big issues that would stop you. That was actually my strategy. OK, go and do things but do them in a very reasonable way and in a good, kind way and you really don't need to fight to get things."

Another interviewee's challenge was to see that the teaching career she had chosen did not provide the advancement opportunities that she wanted. She saw people staying 15

years in the same position, and that bothered her. So she decided to consider moving to business or IT. She mapped out on a big chart the advantages and disadvantages of each career, and then chose business. Another teacher had the advantage of an Emiratization programme that moved her from being a young teacher to becoming school principal. However, that was a real challenge. She was very young; many girls were in their teens, so they were almost like sisters. She had to be very strict with them.

"The girls who were really very straightforward and knew this was the right way that they should behave, and I am looking after them to find the right way for them, they all loved me with my toughness. And out of the 14 years, maybe seven years of them, every morning I used to get a nice little rose on my table, one rose. And I didn't know until even today, I don't know who the girl is who used to put that rose for me, and I wish I knew."

Another blockage is the resistance of Middle Eastern men to powerful women. One interviewee had struggled to overcome this but was determined to succeed, which she has certainly done. She is very well educated, has an executive board role at a well-known institution and took over as chair of the family business after her brothers passed away young and her father became infirm.

"70% of men in the Middle East resist a powerful woman. So in the workplace, yes, I have struggled a lot, but being a stubborn person I thought, no, I have to stay and overcome the political obstacles in the work environment, and prove myself. Maybe I should be benevolent and I should be more

keen to cooperate with them, and understand why they are resilient. It was very difficult, and it still is because these men have become masters in blocking women from becoming leaders. But not all of them, but some of the highly-educated ones.”

The other women said that there were no career blockages that they could remember, apart from the one woman who mentioned the challenge of exclusion from the majlis networks cited earlier.

2. MANAGEMENT CHALLENGES

It is always a challenge for a woman to come into a new leadership role. One woman said that although she had managed hundreds of people previously, talked with ministers and other senior people, it was a big struggle to take up her new role as COO of the holding company of her family business. She was in charge of all the various general managers and managing directors of the group, who previously reported to the chairman.

“Even being here was a challenge for me, because for people to accept a woman here, MDs and GMs to sit with me and accept a woman, I had a very big struggle the first six months. To come here and sit with these GMs and MDs and try to convince them to listen to you and it wasn’t really an easy thing. First being a woman and secondly is that you’re coming in on top of them. It was a new position actually, so they used to go directly to the chairman.”

She dealt with the challenge by having separate meetings with each of the GMs and MDs, and also brought them together for discussions. That was a new thing for them, as everyone was just managing his own company. Now they were a group together, which she led as COO. She listens to them, they can see what is going on across their boundaries, and the culture has changed.

Being not only new but also relatively young can be a challenge for newly appointed women managers when they are put in charge of experienced and longer-serving staff. For one woman, the challenge was that the experienced staff would not give her full information on work projects, and they would have meetings without telling her so that she did not have the opportunity to attend. She felt that this arose from concerns about their own promotions. Her leadership style is to confront issues directly with the person concerned, but this can lead to a competitive and threatening atmosphere. Nonetheless she tackled the issue as it was important for her to create a well-functioning team, and as the leader, she needed access to the information and to be kept aware of meetings within that team. Through professional appraisals and development sessions with individual team members, she worked to defuse the situation and move the team forward.

Another woman was challenged when dealing with the finance staff of a bank in the UAE where she was a trainee. She was keen to learn, but the bank staff did not want to show her the details. Even her manager said that she just needed to check what the people were doing, but eventually agreed that she could do their tasks to understand how they did the balances etc. Those experiences gave her a really good understanding of the business. Several women said that this was important to have.

One woman faced a big challenge when she was asked to move to the UAE to set up a subsidiary in Abu Dhabi. Her preconceptions were that it was a male environment, patriarchal, difficult for women, so she was unsure whether to accept this opportunity to develop herself in this venture. She found that on the client side, she was dealing mainly with Emirati, Arab and Saudi men, because of the nature of the UAE company structure, and also in her office. She had to confront them head-on.

“The challenge was that it’s true I’m a woman, but at the same time I’m a business woman. I’m not playing a game here. And if you like it or not, in my office I’m the boss and I’ve been designated for that position.”

Earlier in her career, she had some challenges dealing with male clients, but ultimately she had to make it work, she had to have a satisfied client. She said that the challenge of being female becomes an opportunity, because she can attract conservative female clients who don’t feel comfortable dealing with men. As women in the UAE become more financially independent, they increasingly need to manage their finances and that provided her with an opportunity not so accessible for men.

3. CHALLENGES FROM PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS

Some interviewees mentioned personal characteristics that led to challenges. One interviewee had been shy from childhood. She wrote down her strengths and weaknesses. Always shyness was there as an area for improvement. Another woman has to overcome having a very quiet voice. She has been given the opportunity to sit on some high level committees, but feels she needs more gravitas. She tried speaking loudly but doesn’t like the unnatural voice,

so that is not the solution. She has to make many presentations, and it can be difficult to get her message across. This is such a common issue for women, and UAE women tend to have quiet voices. Prime Minister Mrs Thatcher took voice coaching to lower her voice tone and it worked very well, but it takes practice to get that presence.

Another woman said that she found being in the spotlight quite challenging. Her professional training did not include dealing with this. She has made efforts to practice, especially since she also started to run a charity where fundraising requires presentations and media attention. She says, *“It’s not 100% comfortable right now, but I feel like I’m getting there.”* Making speeches can be difficult. One now experienced woman had to give her first speech at the Higher Colleges of Technology, only to find that she was on the platform with Benazir Bhutto, who was an amazingly brilliant speaker!

4. CHALLENGES FROM FAMILY EVENTS

For some women, a challenge was when their fathers passed away. One woman was only 18 years old, and suddenly found herself totally unprepared with a seat on the family business board, dealing with other members all in their sixties. Another woman was only 22 when her father died, at the beginning of her career. She suddenly had to support herself. She says, *“I had to work harder than the others because I was living in other circumstances.”* A third interviewee said that when her father passed away, she really missed the advice that she used to value from her father. A further participant said that when her brothers died in a car crash, she unexpectedly took their place.

5. CHALLENGES OF INDEPENDENT AND OVERSEAS LIVING AND STUDY

One of the ways in which women became independent was to go overseas, for study and for work. This can be difficult for some women whose families do not want them to travel alone, and even travel to GCC countries may be considered inappropriate for unaccompanied daughters. One woman who was working in France for a multinational consumer firm needed to get some independence from the family and its business, so she sought a posting to Argentina, as she spoke good Spanish. She didn't have any special treatment; she had to learn how to go for promotion and pay rises, and be benchmarked against others, quite a change from being in the family business.

"I learned what it is to go and look for a promotion, ask for a salary increase, all these things that are so difficult to have in a family business, in a family context and this was fantastic. And also see that I would be benchmarked against other people. I didn't have any preferential treatment. Because whatever you do in a family business, it always looks like, "Oh you're the daughter of the owner," or, "You're the niece," so people don't really dare to treat you as they should, as an equal peer. So I got that in the multinational company and I'm very grateful and it gave me also self confidence that I was able to climb the ladder without any special favours."

Now in her family firm, they are introducing a constitution that family members must go and get educated and work four years outside their country, to bring new experiences, contacts and ideas to the business. Another woman went to the Sloan Business School at MIT, worked in her summer breaks at McKinsey, and then started work at Morgan Stanley in New York, before working out

of their Hong Kong Office, giving her great experience working with big companies and governments around Asia. She then went to London, and was eventually asked to come to the UAE. Such experience has led her to set up her own consulting company in Dubai.

Another interviewee did her medical specialisation in Germany, staying there for seven years. It was a challenge but a lot of fun. She spoke no German at all, living with a German family at first, but then she had to live alone. She had to go to a language institute because she had to pass a German test before getting a permit to practice medicine there, she had to get a licence to drive a car, and there were forms for everything. Now she is a consultant, as well as running the NGO providing medical treatment in very poor countries around the world. From that experience, she says that she is a better physician, has a better job, has learnt a new language, a new culture and has many new friends. An Emirati woman, who had gone to Cairo as her first trip on her own to study economics, went later to the USA and the UK to gain her masters and PhD. She explains very well the benefits that such independent travel and living can bring to young women in the UAE.

“Leaving family life and being independent, and thinking of yourself, this is the first step. And then exposure to the world. It was a great experience. That’s why, when I meet with my students here at the university, they ask “Why should we travel abroad if the education is here?” And when I wanted to send my daughter: “Why do you want to send her there, the education is here”. I told them “Yes, the education is here, but exposure to a different world, this will enrich their life, and it will make them independent”. If they are living with me here, going to the university, they will learn, the education is the same, it’s the same books. But the exposure to the outside world will shape their life.”

An Emirati participant undertook several courses overseas. She said that she was always accompanied until she had graduated, and she always covered, but was very comfortable there.

“We always respected our traditions. I was with my family and I never travelled alone until I graduated from university and knew what freedom meant in our context as Muslims and Arabs. Ever since I was young I travelled, so I was exposed to the international environment ever since I was young. Holidays, school, mostly yes.”

One Emirati woman said that her education in the US played a big role in developing her for her board role in the UAE. She learnt how to present herself well, follow the basic board etiquette, and get exposure outside the UAE. She commented on the different work ethic in investment banking, where people worked long hours, even showering in the office, but she added that these were self-made successful people who went from zero to MD. However, she added that there is an issue when coming back to the UAE. After working for a multinational and then going

to a local or government based company, one tends to expect the same high standard and work ethic in the new organization. So people should be prepared for that - not that overseas is better, but because the UAE is different.

6. CHALLENGING OPPORTUNITIES FOR GROWTH

Sometimes opportunities arise that are challenging, exciting and stretching, and here are a few examples. Women often say that they were lucky to be in the right place at the right time, but the reality is that they have to be prepared, confident that they can rise to the challenge, and draw on all their resources to make a success of that opportunity. One interviewee got the opportunity to set up the investor relations department of a major government financial institution at the time of the global financial crisis. She had to engage with investors, work with the rating agencies and improve transparency and disclosure. At the same time, she was asked to liaise with the Department of Finance, and manage the relationships with external stakeholders of her institution. All went well, so she was then invited to sit on the important committees that she sits on today.

One woman had a challenge in understanding the investment side of her job. She was very competent at the practical aspects and knew she had a good head for business. But like many women, when it came to numbers, she was not so sure. So she went to London Business School and did an MBA, applying her learning back in Dubai, getting help from her professor and from KPMG.

“I applied what I was taught the first six months and I was highly impressed by the feedback from my boss saying, outstanding performance. I was supposed to provide the Board with a financial report which I have never done in my life. So I did that, I presented it to my boss and what I had done had become a template for the rest of my colleagues, as we never had a proper procedure to follow in providing financial analysis or reports.”

Her willingness to deal with her lack of finance skills led her to get the best education to combat that weakness in her CV. Her excellent networking skills gave her access to contacts that could assist her in this new opportunity to create a financial template that would be adopted by the institution.

The third example highlights how opportunities can arise when one brings expertise from an earlier job or from a different country to the current employer. One woman worked in international finance at a global bank, studying for additional qualifications. She learnt that there are different ways that companies get finance, not only from banks. So when she went to work at an important financial institution, she found that people there were not always aware of the risks being taken. The financial services sector has to control against international fraud, and one of the new ways to do that is a particular approach, which they did not use. So when she started asking questions and showed her expertise, the top management became aware of her talent and knowledge. She then had the opportunity to become the business development director of this important financial institution. These stories illustrate that opportunities come, and if the women are able to shine, they are noticed and given sponsorship for further chances to succeed. But they have to be ready to go for it.

BOARD EXPERIENCES

BOARD EXPERIENCES

The experiences of these successful women are examined here. First, getting onto the board and initial experiences are discussed. The women talk about their board duties and corporate governance, including in relation to family businesses. They reveal their views of the boardroom culture, and how they personally learnt and added value to their boards.

These women sat on a wide range of boards, mostly on executive boards or in top teams as their main employment. Many sat on several smaller usually voluntary sector boards as well. Their organizations were amongst some of the largest public sector institutions, authorities and universities, and

major government-owned companies. Some of the women sat on both federal and emirate-level governmental boards. One woman was a Chairperson, four women were CEOs, one was Deputy CEO, two were COOs, and eight were heads of functions. Many of the women were also family board members, some in the top executive board roles of CEO, COO and one deputized as Chairman. These family boards represent several of the biggest holding companies in the UAE. Some women sat on private firm boards, but only three interviewees had sat as non-executive directors of private companies. Several women sat on their professional institution boards.

TABLE 4: SOME OF THE BOARDS REPRESENTED IN THIS STUDY

SOME OF THE BOARDS REPRESENTED

UAE Businesswomen Council	Abu Dhabi Economic Development Council
Abu Dhabi Businesswomen Council	Dubai Chamber of Commerce & Industry
Dubai Businesswomen Council	Abu Dhabi Chamber of Commerce
Dubai Women Establishment	Supreme Committee; Dubai Economic Council; Dubai Holdings
Dubai World	Dubai International Finance Centre (DIFC)
Dubai Charities	Securities & Commodities Authority (SCA)
	Dubai International Financial Market (DIFM)
	Several board members of some of the largest family-owned businesses in UAE
	Several very senior lawyers in private firms, including a CEO

1. GETTING THE BOARD POSITION

Most of the women became executive members/directors as a result of the job position that they occupied. One woman explained that she was asked to represent her public sector organization on a government board in Abu Dhabi, when she was Assistant Under-Secretary. She had been appointed to the Abu Dhabi Economic Development Council, and was very proud to be part of this strategic organization. She also chaired the Businesswomen's Council and sat on many voluntary sector boards as well as her main job as COO of the family business. Another woman had been appointed to the Dubai Economic Council, the Chamber of Commerce and the Dubai Businesswomen's Council, as well as running a large family business. Some appointments were by election, requiring women to build a good profile and reputation. These are significant achievements, and are approved after considerable deliberation.

The pioneering women were identified by government and groomed for future board roles. Some were sent in a delegation representing the UAE at major conferences in the USA and elsewhere, a role they took most seriously. They attended the conferences with the men, and had the opportunity to meet with women CEOs of the largest international firms. On their return, some women were eventually nominated by decree from the highest authority for board appointments in the UAE.

One participant was a member of a Dubai government committee, before becoming employed at a major financial institution. She was asked to be a director of a new subsidiary, because she had the requisite knowledge of the company and the sector. Another said her senior executive appointment automatically led to her executive committee membership, advising the CEO on strategic issues.

One woman was heading a university business school, and then became Deputy Vice Chancellor when the administrative head of the University resigned. She was then nominated and selected for the position of Secretary General. She believes that her finance and business skills were responsible for her selection, and she was also the first woman in such a position. Another woman is the Deputy CEO of a major regulatory body and sits on its board as well as another public sector board. One participant was a partner in a private professional services firm, and she was there early on. As it grew, the management team became the executive committee of partners. She had been the director of the Abu Dhabi office, and then came back to Dubai as a partner, sitting on the top team. One woman is the founder CEO of the Dubai branch of a major international firm, and sits on the executive board. Earlier she had sought to become an external board member, but partners were not allowed. However, she did sit on the advisory committee of the American University in Dubai.

Yet another type of board director was the CEO of a medical charity. She was appointed as medical director but became CEO and board member when the charity became a foundation. She had the idea for launching a major new initiative that went very well and was introduced in 13 countries. Afterwards she was invited to become CEO. She

talked about the difficulties in setting up the foundation. She had to manage getting funding, programmes, finance, set up an office and do her normal job as a medical consultant, but her strategic decision to focus on particular countries where there were many patients resulted in a very successful operation that led to more funding coming in. Similarly, another participant was very involved in setting up the Dubai Cares and the Make a Wish Foundations, where the major role was to bring in funds and volunteers. Budgets became the prime item on the board agenda, unlike government-funded boards where income was already agreed.

One participant had been a member of the regional board of a multinational company, when she became the sales director for several Middle Eastern countries. When her husband had to relocate, she resigned and joined her family business, becoming COO and also sat on the family company board. She has since set up her own business, but still sits on the family board. One of the younger interviewees is head of investor relations at a major government-owned business. She set up the IR Department. Recently she was appointed to three important government boards, but at this stage, she is a non-voting member. As well as her IR duties, her new role is to coordinate the relationship between her organization, the Government's Department of Finance and the Supreme Committee.

Several of the women were board members of their professional institutions and societies, such as audit, engineering, legal, medical etc. Some were UAE institutions, some were GCC and others were the major international bodies relating to the fields in which these women worked. One woman was on the board of her family's very large business, as well as having an executive director role for

one of Dubai's biggest government-owned companies, and sat on several such boards. It is striking that so many of these successful women had multiple roles as board members, giving their time and energy to make a difference in their fields and for their country.

2. BEING THE FIRST WOMAN ON THE BOARD

Nine women were the first female directors or executive committee members on their boards. This was a challenge as they had to prove to the existing board members that women were fully able to contribute as directors. One told of her appointment to the Abu Dhabi Chamber of Commerce.

"It was an interesting experience because before it used to be only men, and because we have worked hard on the business councils, and we have promoted women a lot, there was an agreement that there will be at least two women directors on the board of directors of the Abu Dhabi Chamber. We started working hard on this for two years until the decision makers were convinced: We will allow a woman to be on the board of the Chamber of Commerce."

She further commented that as the women were well educated and very experienced before they were invited to become board members, they could take up their roles very quickly. They said that they were really proud of their contributions. Not all the men have as much experience as they don't have to prove themselves in the same way - they are just accepted.

"Some of the men are really well-qualified, but some of them are not, they're just there because they were appointed. So you feel really proud that you are there. And you can talk, you don't fear of talking because sometimes you're more experienced than

them on certain issues. So I think women when they go onto these boards, they go by their expertise, their knowledge and not because they are wanted by somebody to just be put on the boards.”

One woman director said that when she was appointed on the Economic Council, she was usually the only woman present amongst 40 or more men. Whilst it felt difficult at first, she gradually got used to it. For another woman in a more masculine typed career, she was comfortable with being the only female, because that had been the case right from the start.

“I was comfortable with it. The first experience as a woman will be that you are always alone on the top. That’s something as you go up the ladder, there are always very few. We start big at the base and we end up with one or two of us. .. You would usually find I’m the only one there sitting in these high positions.”

For some women directors, there were cultural barriers to be faced. One said that if women distance themselves from male colleagues, then the men will distance themselves even more. In western business cultures it is common to shake hands when meeting business colleagues, especially at a board meeting, as it conveys a sense of trust. However, for Emiratis, this may or may not be acceptable, depending on personal preferences and family traditions. When meeting Emirati or GCC business colleagues, an assessment needs to be made whether to offer to shake hands or not. However, that tension can be removed by a warm smile instead.

“I kind of feel sorry for them, because he’s probably standing outside like thinking, oh, shall I or shouldn’t I? It is extremely awkward. And once you greet them and you’ve got a smile on your face, then they feel comfortable dealing with you, and they’ll work with you better.”

Several women were the first to take an active role in running or governing their large and historic family businesses. One woman was the first female director on her family board after more than 100 years. So she was a pioneer in a different way from those entering major public sector institutions.

“I’m the first woman after a hundred and more years of family history to be working in the family business – I was at that time. Because my grandmother, all my aunts were looked after by the brothers, so I think unconsciously for me and for the family system, it was something new to have a woman at managerial level from the family.”

For her and some of the other women on boards, there was an additional issue to be faced, and that is being relatively young on a board, as well as being female. One whose father had passed away early told of how her much older uncles had to renegotiate their relationship with her as their niece and now as board member.

“In the boardroom I was the only one from the new generation facing my uncles, so I was 32 and they were more in their 60s and having to speak in the boardroom and have my voice when I’m from another generation, and they probably still see me as their young niece that they used to put on their lap and This was quite difficult. It’s not a blocker, but it was a complication. So the generation gap and the fact that I was the first woman.”

For this young woman, it was very challenging to speak up when she felt that the older board members were going the wrong way. She said she was “*the voice of the other perspective*”. She came to terms with the role gradually, but it was not easy. Another woman director said that being the only woman on the board was an advantage, but also a potential disadvantage. The key was to make a positive impression for the first two meetings.

“I function very well, because I’m the only lady. Well, it depends on how you represent yourself in the board. Being the only lady can be a great advantage, but it can also - excuse the word - but it can kill you. And especially if everyone else is of a different gender. It all depends on how you represent yourself at the first two board meetings.”

So being the first woman on the board, and for some, being the first woman and the youngest person on the board is not an easy experience, as such women have to combat traditional attitudes and barriers to progress that their male peers do not have to face.

3. BOARD INDUCTION PERIOD EXPERIENCES

Whilst induction is nowadays common for new directors in the West, even for executive directors, it is much less common in the UAE. Those appointed to non-executive positions may occasionally receive a formal induction. However, executive directors also need to learn the ropes and settle into their new roles and understand their wider strategic responsibilities. Only one woman reported that she had an induction, when joining a private company board. New directors were taken around the company to get familiar with the on-site activities. That was useful for new directors with little knowledge of the operations of that type of business. One

woman commented that even on the board where she now sat, new directors arrived but had been given only a cursory induction. They also need to learn board monitoring skills, to understand finance and accounts. One woman said that she knew very little about such things at the start, but soon made it a point to gain expertise. Indeed she was later invited to join a financial services board, and could take it on with confidence. Another director had been surprised that new directors would come without asking about the local by-laws, or the governance structure. She felt that induction of directors is not good enough.

“I think the on-boarding of board members in this region is really poor and in my case it was poor, so there is big work to be done. On-boarding is a critical piece that we have to work on. So it’s about being exposed to the business, meeting its key people, being exposed to all the by-laws. I’m shocked for example if the board director doesn’t ask for the by-laws, for the laws of the country. These things should come in the package like the induction.”

It may be challenging to speak at the first board meeting, and most of the women commented that they did feel nervous. One very experienced interviewee told how she felt on that occasion.

“The first time you speak, you feel that, oh, am I going to say the right thing? Will they listen to me as men? And, in fact, they did and they were my supporters. ... I do owe them to say thank you, because they really encouraged me. And they’d really listen to me.”

She was welcomed by the chairman in a light-hearted way. When the newcomer already knows the board members, it is not such an ordeal, even if the other directors are senior and very experienced.

“The Chair (CEO) did welcome me by name, and everybody knew who I was. ... It was very pleasant. .. So I am around the same table as someone who was my mentor. So it is comfortable. I was nervous, but I did not feel threatened.”

Some of the women had worked many years in their field, and had built up substantial networks. One said she knew everybody, and had not just come from the backyard and jumped onto the board. Another director said that at her first board meeting, she was able to make a contribution because she had so much relevant experience and knowledge.

“It was a very interesting meeting, I think as an organization we are a very young organization, very flexible, very dynamic, very different from my previous organization which is very English and very stuffy the way it is run. But it was also very young, and because I had so much experience, I was able to bring so much on board.”

One woman said that she was very excited at the first meeting, felt a sense of empowerment, and enjoyed the experience on this side of the table.

“I was very interested, very excited. I feel that my opinion is very important and people are asking me about something before they take their decision. So a sense of empowerment, it's very OK. I like to be on this side of the table, be the one who makes the change. I know them, and I wasn't shy to express myself or talk about anything.”

A woman ex-director from a major consumer firm's Levant board told of her first meeting, where she was the only female and the youngest board member. She suddenly had to stand up for her function and discuss budgets at this international level with a group of much older men. She had to draw on her courage to take this on, and wished that she had some training to do this. Later she took a corporate governance course so that she could enhance her skills for later boards. Another woman director was sent for corporate governance training before her first meeting, which helped her start her board duties with confidence and updated knowledge on her role.

4. BOARD DUTIES AND GOVERNANCE

4.1 GOVERNANCE TASKS

For women on their executive boards, there were the usual tasks associated with the business. In other boards, they are playing more of a monitoring or advisory role, ensuring that the entity is being run properly with due processes and structures, that strategy is being formulated, and that the finances are in good shape for the future. Such tasks require considerable time and effort from directors, and one woman said that she took the job so seriously that she would only take a board role if she could “*dedicate sufficient time*”. Another board executive said that she had to ensure that adequate systems were in place and knowledge imported to improve the quality of decision-making “*so decisions are made on a learned basis, as opposed to decisions being made a bit off the cuff*.” One woman talked about the wider strategic role that being a board director entails. Whilst this is naturally part of a non-executive role, it is sometimes difficult for executive directors to move past lobbying just for their own territory. For some women in this study, their board duties carried much responsibility, as they sat on holding boards with many MDs reporting up through them to the chairperson. These are big tasks for anyone, and these women took their roles most seriously.

4.2 PRIOR KNOWLEDGE OF CORPORATE GOVERNANCE ISSUES

Women were asked how much they knew about corporate governance before taking up their roles. Three were experts beforehand. Two had been involved in drafting governance rules for the financial markets in the UAE. One was a director of a Corporate Governance Centre. They were instigating better governance structures in their organizations. This requires some diplomacy to make the necessary changes. One woman had worked with the IMF on

corporate governance standards. Other women said that they had some knowledge before joining their boards. Six had studied corporate governance. For another, it was self-learning, from books and practice. She found that there were no governance structures, and she had to implement a change programme in her division. Another felt that poor governance had made the financial crisis worse, as directors did not speak up.

“I carry a responsibility being a board member. It’s the understanding of this. This is what makes you work properly. A lot of the things that happened during the crisis were because board members were not really doing their role. A lot of people shut their mouth, did not talk about a lot of things and just went with the flow. This is terribly wrong.”

After taking a corporate governance course, one woman noticed that in her organization, board members carried out their duties to the best of their knowledge, but were not really governing well. For example, they were getting involved in management rather than focusing on strategic issues. Another woman felt that directors need to be aware of their duties, and a course really helps.

“This is one of the really good tools that would help also directors to learn about their duties and to understand that you just don’t sit on a board and accept whatever people tell you. You need to discuss, you need to understand that you are an observer also and you need to change things if they are wrong. You’re not just an observer. No, you are an observer with an opinion that needs to be said loudly if something is happening that is wrong in this company.”

One woman said that she knew little about governance when she was appointed to her first board. She thought that accepting the position meant that she had to turn up for meetings. She quickly learnt that the board's governance was inadequate and needed the framework that the new Federal law on corporate governance will provide from now on. Another woman director said that whilst she knew broadly about corporate governance, she needed to understand better the implications that it had for running an organization. She therefore took a governance course. She said that governance *"really serves as a backbone of the relationship between the board and management and the stakeholders. So it is definitely needed, the awareness is needed."*

Part of the experience of the women on these boards was the learning that took place. Women appointed to corporate boards learnt a lot about how the companies operated. But importantly, they said that they learnt a lot from other board members, who were often investment bankers and finance people. Some women lacked finance skills, and could gain very useful knowledge from board colleagues that will better equip them to undertake the board's monitoring and audit functions. One woman was invited to become a board member of an insurance company. She also advised would-be directors to undertake corporate governance courses before they are appointed, so that they understand the nature of the role, its duties and the need to play an active role.

"I was invited to be a board member of board of an insurance company. And I said, "Well, guys I don't know anything about insurance. I just insure my car, but I don't really know much." They said: "Don't worry, you'll learn."

The other issue to be aware of is the personal responsibility that membership of boards entails. One very experienced director said people need to understand that there are legal responsibilities for directors of public listed companies.

"It's not a luxury being a board member, it's a responsibility. Some men look at it as a luxury, I'll be on this board, I'll be on that board, But don't look at it as a luxury. It's a responsibility that you need to fulfil, especially with public companies. Maybe private companies, people don't care a lot, but I think now there will be also a difference in the law. And they will also carry a responsibility but especially with public companies, you are responsible."

She stressed that it is the director's duty to learn about governance, which is different from management of the business: *"When you are on the top level, you manage minds rather than business."* She also added that at the top there are so many different and highly knowledgeable board members from a variety of emirates and authorities. As the discussions are very strategic, one can learn about different ways of dealing with issues and find solutions to benefit one's own business. One woman said that a good way of learning is to listen especially to the chief financial officer of a global consumer company, and to see how the chairman runs the meetings. She said this was very useful, different from her family board style that could sometimes be emotional. *"It was a great development for me."* Another woman learnt a lot from her father, chairman of the family conglomerate, when she was appointed to her first board. He told her that she was very good, and that many doors would now open for her, but she should be very careful. He advised her to listen twice and speak once, advice that she has taken from him.

“That was the advice I got from my father. I said, what do you mean, you are scaring me. He said, No, don’t be scared, you are good and you are tough. But the only thing you have to learn is when to talk and when to keep quiet. And don’t think that if you talk you will be important, you might be more important if you keep quiet and listen. Make the right use of the senses provided by the Creator, listen twice and talk once!”

Women said that part of the monitoring role of the board is to assess the financial status of the company, so it is essential that directors have adequate financial and audit skills. They need to be able to read balance sheets, and if they don’t have those skills, then they need to acquire them. It is so important to ask questions. One participant said that she wanted to learn about the whole family business from the bottom up, first as an employee and then from the managers of the various departments. The most important learning was to understand how to read the accounts, and she asked the chief accountant to take her through it, what to look for first, which were the most important figures to monitor. Later she was able to take up the mantle of her father, and he then referred any questions to her as the expert on the figures. She was adding value to the family business through her learning and practice and became its chief executive.

5. GOVERNANCE AND FAMILY BUSINESSES

Several interviewees talked about the need for better governance in family businesses. Family members do not always want to take much part in governing the company, but one woman who had gone through two rounds of succession planning stressed that they have to be more responsible as owners, partly for their own future but also because others depend on them for employment.

“I told them, whether you want to work in the business or not, you will be an owner one day; you will have shares. So you have to be a responsible owner. You have to start from now understanding your family dynamics, the communication between the different people, have your eyes wide open. You cannot go to the beach every day and one day you’re going to have 45% of this company. You have to know the governance, the laws, have all these files at hand and understand a little bit about the strategy, where the company is going, even from afar, but you have to be a responsible owner. I really speak from the heart. Because we had two successions in our family business.”

Another woman described a company board on which she had agreed to sit. At the first meeting, she found the rest of the board were friends and relatives of the chairman. Although he was the majority shareholder, the company was a public one. Nonetheless he thought he could run it the way he used to run it. She waited for the second meeting, as they were supposed to meet at least quarterly, but there was no invitation and no results provided. After five months, the accounts were brought and the directors were asked to just sign them off. She protested, but the chairman tried to insist. Eventually the authorities came in, and told the board members that it was their responsibility as a

board to monitor the accounts, not just the chairman. That gave them the authority that was lacking.

“So the second meeting I said, “Mr X, you cannot do what you used to do before. This is not your own company, it is listed. It’s on the exchange. We cannot accept this. Even the authorities asked us, You need to bring a proper CEO,” (because he was doing everything himself), an excellent or qualified CEO that could manage this company and manage the operation of the company. You need to let go of certain duties that you are keeping to yourself and you need to involve the board in these strategic decisions.”

Things improved from then, but she was clear that in future, she would be tougher in her governance role. The new governance law should start to improve family businesses, as at present, influential family members often overrule the rest. Another director felt that UAE family businesses would benefit from having foreign or independent outside directors on their boards to make them more competitive and more open to ideas such as board evaluation. This would be challenging for families to be open to interference but it would strengthen the company's future as a better governed business. This suggestion was made by a number of Emirati women who had worked or been educated overseas, who had realized the benefits that diversity, including gender and international diversity, could bring to the boardroom. Further comments were made about family members needing to understand the finances.

6. SUCCESSION PLANNING

The proportion of UAE businesses that are owned wholly or mainly by families is very high. Hence such businesses offer significant opportunities for those family members qualified to become directors. If the chairpersons of the board are wise, they will recognize that drawing on the talent of just half of their families (i.e. the males) is wasting a lot of talent that could benefit the future of the business. They should encourage the girls and women in their families as well as the boys to get the best education possible, and to gain employment that is relevant to their future potential positions in the boardroom, should they merit that honour. Some well-known families have already been doing this for the last generation. Now a few highly educated, professional and experienced women are taking charge, and some women in this sample were in that category.

Several interviewees commented on the need for women to be integrated into succession planning, particularly in private sector and family businesses. However, one woman said that very few people have a goal of being on the board, except in television dramas. Nonetheless, given that the UAE and other GCC countries have so many large family businesses, there is a need to look at succession planning to see what could be improved (Clyde & Co, 2012). One of the lawyers commented that inevitably there comes a point in time when succession issues can cause real difficulties for the continuation of the business. Owners have to consider who in the next generation is best qualified. That should not always mean that the sons or nephews are going to take up the lead role. Women should also be in the frame for consideration.

One woman CEO of a family business revealed her thoughts about the need for stewardship and succession planning, conducting family discussions to set “*adequate guidelines and regulations of how the business would be passed on*”. As inheritance processes can take many years in the case of a very large group of businesses, good governance will enable the generation transition to move smoothly, without losing major partners.

“We had a family discussion on creating a succession plan. When I was asked why such a plan is needed, I explained that it was important to enable us to carry forward everything that has been built painstakingly through the years. Without guidelines for transition, the next generation would never have the authority or the knowledge to take over the business when the need arises. This would be detrimental to the business, since trading partners will require transparency and faith in the business’ corporate governance to continue partnerships. My viewpoint was understood and accepted. It has worked in the favour of the family and the business as a whole.”

One woman described how she had taken on the chairman’s role when her father was not well. He assigned her as proxy for him. This transition was not without difficulty as she had male relatives who also would have seen themselves in the running but they respected her father’s decision.

“I do face some difficulties but because I comply with governance, at the end of the day they cannot argue at all. I’m quite strong towards my decisions and I always make sure he knows what the decision will be, and most of the time, 70% of the time it’s his decision, it’s not mine. I just make sure that he is aware, so if they call him right after the meeting, he’s aware of it and he knows. .. No one can really

manipulate him or change his mind, and he always wants to do what’s best for everyone.”

Another woman said that the local tradition of the eldest heir with the necessary qualifications and abilities taking over the family business, rather than just the eldest male, was now offering opportunities to females, as they were often better-educated than their brothers and cousins.

7. GOVERNANCE AND TRANSPARENCY

The lack of transparency was another aspect of corporate governance that the women directors mentioned. One said that there was an unwillingness to think about delegation in the case of leaders being absent, and to share the necessary information that successful boards would need to perform their monitoring function

“Everybody is working in silence, nobody knows what you are doing, or what he is doing, or what I am doing. I am keeping the information away from others. So as a team, the team I work with, we started to change this culture; we needed to build a coherent group of people who work together.”

The woman heading a foundation said that as a charitable organization, they had to be scrupulously transparent, and that a regulatory authority took all the board papers and audited everything.

“In order for us to be registered the next year, we have to go through all that. So nothing is off the record, everything is clear, and in a charity everything has to be transparent, so that’s the key point. And we have an annual book every year where we mention nearly everything in it; the board, the activities, the numbers. Because if you didn’t have that transparency, you will lose the trust of people who are funding you, and we don’t want to get to that.”

One woman who had studied corporate governance in the US said that she was struck by the lack of transparency when she came to the UAE. She had to balance between being sufficiently open with clients and keeping information restricted as directed by her senior management. She said that the UAE culture is not yet comfortable with transparency. This can also be seen in the frequent lack of information about directors of companies published online or in reports.

8. BOARDROOM CULTURE

Women interviewees revealed the boardroom cultures in which they worked. One woman described the very different boardroom cultures that she had experienced. Her current board is young, dynamic and flexible whilst the other was very formal and English. The young board was very friendly, multi-national and non-hierarchical. Her experience on all-Emirati boards was that the culture is slightly different than on mixed boards. With some dominant personalities, the quieter voices do not always get heard, in part due to the Emirati characteristic of relative shyness.

“It’s all Emiratis. It is a slightly different culture because they are very senior people and very successful people, we have some board members which are very strong personalities, some board members which are not very strong personalities, and the

strong personalities tend to overpower them, because also Emiratis are very shy by nature. So you’re either one of those that is really loud, or you’re actually very quiet. So I think if you were in the western world you would tend to have a slightly better balance.”

Having very senior people on the board has advantages in terms of their name and connections, but often they are so busy that they don’t have time to interact with the executives as much as would be appropriate for the board monitoring and stewardship role, so this can be a disadvantage.

“I don’t know if this is an Emirati thing, but because maybe they are very important people, they have so many responsibilities generally, that they don’t have so much time to devote. So they don’t get so engaged with the executive. I think they’re more pragmatic in the sense that they just want to see the final things and then they make the decision, so there is not a lot of discussion there.”

There is a need for the board to be culturally sensitive, given the multi-national and multi-cultural aspects of the UAE’s business world. One director commented that she tried to encourage this skill, depending where they were doing business. Another woman described how sitting on an international board was not always easy, as people from some countries did not give respect to females. She served on an otherwise all-male board which was chaired by a Saudi of high birth, who at first would not allow her as a woman to speak at the board meeting. It was a very stressful time for her. It took a lot of political skill to lobby for support from other board members, and time (over three years) to overcome these difficulties, but she persisted and that board is now working well. Another woman said that it was very normal for boards to disagree with each other, and

have problems. The key for her is not to take it as gender discrimination.

One of the female CEOs described the culture that she was trying to instigate as collaborative, with openness and information, guided by a vision.

“A collaborative one, where a lot of information is discussed and a lot is disseminated about what the strategy and the vision is and to seek a lot of other opinions about the direction of the firm and where we should be heading and what we should be doing. Not to get bogged down with detail, but to me it’s more of a strategic drive.”

One woman participant served on a female dominated board, but said that she preferred a gender balanced board, to keep meetings more focused on the business of the day. This is interesting, because women on other boards talked of disappointment when senior male directors spent very little time on decision-making. Another participant also served on an all-female board and was missing the diversity of perspective that a balanced board brings. The key must be somehow to get a balance of people, skills, diversity and personality types on the board.

9. HOW WOMEN INTERVIEWEES ADD VALUE TO THEIR BOARDS

Several women revealed how they personally added value to their boards, in their view, whilst describing their board experiences. One interviewee said it was her courage to question, her integrity, her deep sense of detail and analysis, her professionalism and a good conscience. In particular, she was very aware of the dangers of group-think so her independent mind countered that. Another woman added that she made efforts to engage her board members in the activities of the organization, giving them a sense of

belonging, a sense of community. She also ensures that the board meets when it should and on time. Several women commented that it is not just about getting onto a board, but you have to add value to it, by participating actively, and directing some debates when you have the right expertise. An experienced executive director commented that if you go on a board, then you have to contribute sufficient time to do the job well.

“This is the benefit when you are on a board, you become really a value. You will be able to really participate. You will be able to put an opinion. Sometimes even to direct certain discussions towards a result.”

“We’ve had a lot of major issues of governance in the region. Of completely ineffective boards that were just either not coming to the meeting or just approving decisions and it created problems. I believe, and it’s supported by some article that I read in Harvard Business Review, if you want to be a board director, you really have to spend some time in the business, not as an executive, but just to see what’s going on. Because also coming six times a year just in a room, sometimes they do that offsite, where’s the sense that you have of what’s going on? If you want to do it seriously, you have to dedicate time.”

One woman told how she had been appointed to an important committee, when she didn’t feel confident about the substantive aspects of the committee’s work. She was worried that she would not be able to add value, but her boss told her that she had to learn. In the end she did the task well.

“He said “Don’t think of yourself, there will always be something that you can add to this committee”. I was scared, because most of the people on this committee were of high rank and experienced people, and I was

the only one who was in the lower ranks and inexperienced. So I was a little bit hesitant. But it was really a learning process for me. I learned a lot from that committee, and I also added a lot of things to the committee.”

One of the ways of adding value is to bring current corporate governance expertise to the boardroom table. One director inherited a board seat, but questioned her qualification to take up this important role. She sought out a course in corporate governance, and strengthened up her finance skills in the process, to help with the audit role for which she as a director was now jointly responsible.

“Because I fell in the boardroom by inheritance. I know the business, I know it inside-out, but does it make me a good board director? For the last three years governance has become a passion of mine and so this course has built on that passion and reassured me that I knew a lot. But also it helped me a lot in the audit part, audit committee’s role, not one of my fortes. It helped me because I felt I was more in tune with the strategy part, the general governance part, but audit and finance were things that this course really helped me and reflecting on different governance issues. So I think it gave me the confidence and the credibility that yes, I’m there and I’m worthy to be here, I deserve to be there and I’m really adding value and now I can do it for other companies one day.”

One interviewee said that she was the youngest person and only female that the organization had ever had, and when they needed to appoint a director, she had the necessary skill set and met their requirements, despite her youth. Another woman said that she brought both company knowledge and sector knowledge to her board. She was knowledgeable about the new subsidiary that was being set up, having

sat on a related government board earlier as an executive director. On the board of the new organization, she said that she added value by her ethical stance and responsible attitude, to change things for the better, and to leave the organization in a better shape than before.

“I discovered that I had a lot of responsibilities towards the company people, especially if you work for the government. I really feel responsible towards the company in terms of ethics, consciousness and morality. I really think these are number one, this is what I felt. And my father used to say this to me again and again, and I never knew what it was worth until I sat on a Board, and I became a member. I would really want to make change, positive change and I want to be remembered for this. I do not want to leave the Board and have a terrible reputation behind me, and creating some disaster to the company, or to the people. I really feel responsible towards humanity.”

These successful women reported that most of them did not apply for their board positions, but were nominated by the government or the board seat came with the job. Nine women were the first females on their boards, and some met with resistance whilst others were welcomed. They had varying knowledge about corporate governance before taking up their board role, but many have undertaken governance courses to improve their knowledge of their board responsibilities. Generally they have had challenging but positive experiences as UAE executive board members.

10. FUTURE CAREER GOALS OF INTERVIEWEES

These highly successful women were asked about their goals for the future. As their ages ranged from 30 to mid-50s, their 10-year goal horizons were very different in one way, yet very similar in that most of them said they wanted to continue to contribute to UAE society and do something meaningful in the future. Two wanted to become CEOs, heading their own business and for one, working in the family business. For one woman who already headed her significant firm, the goal was to be head of an expanded business that was renowned as the best in its class. She wanted to leave a legacy of her presence at the helm of her firm. Another woman also talked about passing on her work by becoming a mentor to those who followed her.

Becoming COO was the dream of another woman, who was already on the top executive committee, but she also aspired to sit on the corporate board as she now realized how much of a contribution could be made at the higher decision-making overseeing board.

"I am not limiting my 5-10 year career to staying in an organization. I definitely aspire to contributing, and, but it is something I feel very strongly about; giving back to society, in whichever way or form. As for sitting on a board in the future, in the past it was never on my radar, but now that I am sitting in committees, I slowly see the contribution that one or two people can have in decision making. But boards add value in a completely different way." (L)

One woman who had chaired many boards and councils had a desire to become a non-executive director on the corporate board of a large bank. This had so far eluded her, but she still had this ambition. Another woman's goal was to do something philanthropic, after 20

years in business. However, she loved sitting on boards and so she wanted to continue contributing that way. Continuing this theme of giving something back, another participant wanted to continue in urban planning to make a better life for the UAE, and to pass on her knowledge and experience to the next generation to make the country even better. One woman wanted to continue as she is for the next few years, chairing her board and doing her charity work, but dreams of being a writer. Another woman always admired the women in the National Assembly, and one of her goals is to become a member, but also to complete her PhD, teach at university, and sit on boards. Her other ambition was to set up a legal firm staffed by women lawyers, specialising in legal services for women, but some things will have to wait! One participant missed doing the research that had excited her before she was promoted way above that type of work, so she was looking forward to having time to do that. One woman said that she didn't want to project so far ahead, as she was happy with her current life. One unmarried woman said that she might get married. Finally, a very busy lawyer told us that she would like to retire and sit on a beach! More than half of the women still had ambitions to sit as board members in the future. Several of them had already taken the Directors' Development Programme, preparing for future board service, wanting to contribute to the UAE and other women.

QUALITIES THAT WOMEN
BRING TO BOARDS

QUALITIES THAT WOMEN BRING TO BOARDS

Women were asked whether the UAE needs more females in the boardroom and why. Several commented on the different qualities that women can bring to the boardroom. Women leaders tend to be more emotionally intelligent than men, and also tend towards transformational and collaborative leadership styles, compared to men, although these are sweeping generalisations. However, the favoured view was that both sexes are needed, not just women, on UAE boards, as their skills are complementary, a partnership as one interviewee described it.

“Because women bring a very different perspective, a different leadership and that you need both. There are all these things that are written about transformation and leadership versus the transaction leadership of men, transformation being maybe a softer approach to things, a more emotional intelligence, more empathy, greater listening skills, more social intelligence, so I think women are good at building relationships and keeping relationships. Definitely because we are different, we bring a different thing and the diversity is good.”

“The way of management is different between women and the men. The women always believe more in teamwork more than the men, they believe in gradual change and not the fast change that happens. So the style of management of the women is different than the men. This is very important for this country; we need all these skills, we need all the different styles of management.”

One woman said that the board becomes more relaxed, as women smile more than men, making the atmosphere less aggressive. A more open culture allows all board members to give their opinions and benefit of their expertise. Taking a determinist gendered perspective, another commentator on the value that women bring to the board added that men were very aggressive and risk-takers in the boardroom, because that is their nature. In contrast, women were naturally protective and unwilling to risk reputation and money by going into risky ventures.

“Women are not like men; men are so more aggressive in the Boards and they take very strong decisions. Because of the way God has made them. I am not standing with the men, I am myself a woman. But their obligation towards life is completely different than the woman’s obligations. Now, a woman being a mother, she is more protective, she’s not willing to go into any deal which will lead her to the court. And she is not willing to go into any business that will lead her to questions and answers, and why did your cheque bounce? You will hardly ever see a businesswoman being in trouble like men.”

Furthermore, women are more likely to aim for steady growth rather than fast returns, and this again is better for the longevity of the business, as too much greed for returns leads to risky investments and other decisions.

“But the woman will never dare to do that, they are very protective, they are, I can say, they think for a long-term business. They are

satisfied with smaller portions, and they try to grow it. But for men they want the whole cake and they want the icing, and they want the candle and they want everything, and that is not the way.”

Adding to that comment that women want to grow their companies, another participant said that women added depth to the decision-making, making sure that the decision was well explored and responsibly made rather than going for a quick overview. They also contribute diversity in terms of different viewpoints as women, which would be lacking on an all-male board.

“The women have always been very in-depth when they did the job. Men like to just make the decision based on what they understand, they just go with this. Where women will always think of what can I do better to improve it. That’s what women can add to the board, they always bring new ideas, new stuff. Whereas men, when they listen, if management bring in things, they’ll analyse it, they will just take the information and try to build a decision.”

Another point was that boards need women who are well-educated with the right level of expertise to contribute. Some women are starting to come on boards, but a wider talent pool is needed.

“I believe now things are really evolving and I believe you need the culture of having a woman in the board. Because it’s not easy, but we do have four or five women sitting in different boards of companies. Sometimes it comes from power, sometimes it comes from money and fortunes or sometimes we have a good connection, but we need to give a chance for educated and well known women or women with expertise in the field to be part of the boards.”

There were views that the UAE needs to facilitate the access of women to boards as a return on its investment in women. It is a waste of their education and talent if those investments are not used in improving the quality of the country’s boards. Another consequence is that more expatriates would be appointed to the high level jobs that require such education and talent, rather than Emiratis.

“The UAE needs more women in the boardroom, on top management committees because women are the majority, they are highly educated, they are part of what you invest in them. If you don’t use their knowledge or their skills the economy is losing, and what will happen? You will import more expertise from outside.”

Another comment was that women are good at getting education, and hence if boards appoint women, they will gain from their updated knowledge. Certainly many women in this study had embraced life-long learning and many had taken corporate governance courses to learn to be good directors. One woman said that some male directors *“just attend and they play with their Blackberry all the time and they are looking at their watches, they want to go out.”* But women are serious about their responsibilities and want to do a great job as a director. An experienced woman said that it may be better to look at skill sets that are needed on UAE boards. So many women do not want to be on boards, and there are good chances for those who do. However men’s chances are higher as there is usually a wife at home to support them.

The above quotations show the value that the participants believe women can add to a board. They include different leadership styles, more flexible culture, more steady

growth and less chance of risky ventures. In addition, having women on boards leads to better diversity of thinking, more in-depth decision-making, better knowledge from women's advanced education, and a return on investment in the UAE women's education. Finally there was a view that those responsible for appointing directors should focus more on the skill sets of the existing board and what is needed, rather than just going for a female appointment.

SHOULD GOVERNMENT
INTRODUCE A QUOTA FOR
WOMEN ON BOARDS?

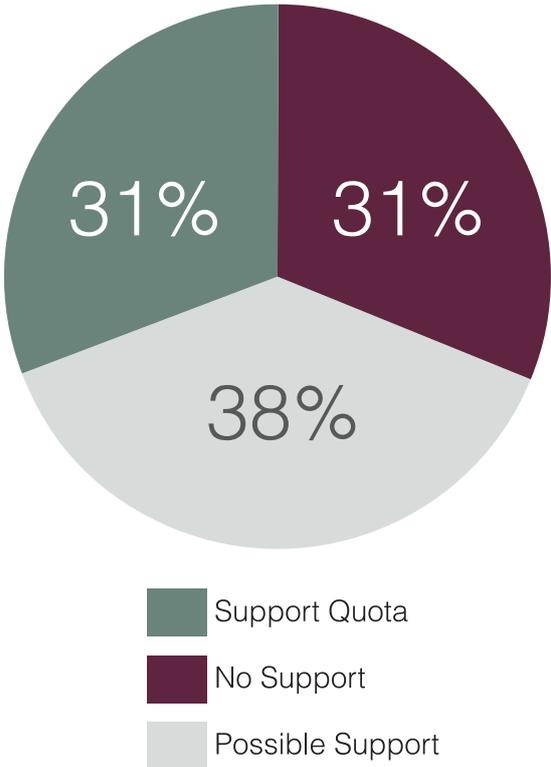
SHOULD GOVERNMENT INTRODUCE A QUOTA FOR WOMEN ON BOARDS?

The women were asked if they would support the introduction of a quota for a certain percentage of women on corporate boards, as has been introduced by recent legislation in several European countries. (See Figure 3. Note that this question was only introduced after the first three interviews.) Nine interviewees did not initially support quotas for UAE women directors, although six of these women later had ideas for improving such a policy. After discussions, over two-thirds of women who were asked about quotas would broadly support some type of intervention. But several arguments were given against quotas. One woman said there is a time lag between the proportion of well-educated women and their accession to board level appointments, so the problem will disappear.

“You see more women handling, more women on boards, more women as CEOs, all the big families. We have a statistic published by the United Nations in 2004 in the UAE. In 1997 women going to university was double that of the men. And now this number has increased, so automatically in 5-15 years’ time you will see those women leading, because men intellectually if they don’t have this information and this university background – maybe you have exceptions. In 5-15 years, I can see more women working and it will affect the GDP. So it will come. It is coming.” (F)

Another argument against quotas is that people at work should be promoted regardless of gender. One woman said: “I always look at myself as someone who competes against other professionals, not because I’m a woman”. There should be a meritocracy that identifies the best talent, whether male or female, and that the quality of the work of qualified women will shine through and she will be offered the board

FIGURE 3: SUPPORT FOR QUOTA



position if she merits it, by the organization. One participant commented that quotas are a double-edged sword for the women who are appointed, if they do not really meet the required standards, but are placed because they are women. As they are inexperienced and less qualified, the women would struggle and go under. Rather than quotas, those responsible for board appointments should be reviewing the skill sets that are needed. In family owned and controlled businesses this is often neglected in favour of the appointment of the next-most senior family members, possibly leading to boards that are ill-equipped to meet the demands of the rapidly changing economy.

A mechanism is suggested for women who are qualified to become directors to be evaluated and put into a pool, so that those responsible for board appointments could find them.

"I am always against quotas. We might bring in a woman, because of the quota, that will create a disaster to the institution, or the company. But if she is qualified, she should be encouraged. She should be given the support. So there should be an evaluation, we shouldn't leave it to the director because the director might be against women. There should be an open channel that will make the women's voice heard at the highest levels, so that they are given the opportunity to excel and to add to the institution." (J)

One of the women against a quota law felt that there should be an incentive for boards to take on female directors.

"I don't think a quota is the way to go, I mean if this is a free economy after all and I don't believe that the government should impose putting people on boards, or on companies. I don't think that this is the best practice to

do. But I think there should be an incentive, meaning if a board would have a woman then you would have an incentive yes, a reward, but not a compulsory appointment." (K)

One way would be to explain to boards and nomination committees the advantages of gender diversity and the benefits that could accompany the appointment of a female director, such as diversity of ways of thinking, or diversity of experience and diversity of views on how corporate governance should be enacted.

Four of the women would definitely support the introduction of a quota. One very senior participant commented that the old Western economies still had very low percentages of women business leaders, whilst the UAE is only 40 years old. The quota for the representation of women in the UAE parliament has introduced new blood and diversity of views, and a quota for women directors could bring similar advantages downstream, after the women have been there a while.

"But the achievements and percentages for women in the UAE are significant, 22% of them are in the cabinet. Some people might say, 'But half of them are appointed.' Even though they have been appointed, but at least you are placing the right people in these positions and their capabilities will also impact those who are elected. This will result in varying points of view, give rise to new thoughts and there will be fresh perspectives that will emerge." (G)

Another woman was very supportive of a quota for non-executive directors. She felt that women with the right expertise should have an opportunity to present themselves before the nomination committee or whoever was responsible for board appointments.

Even if she is selected, she still has to go through an election by shareholders, and would only be elected if considered suitable.

"I know it's hard for a company just to have a woman on the board if they don't have the expertise, but if she has the expertise, why not? It's not that she would be appointed, she will be elected. So just give her the chance to promote herself and to show people her experience. I believe there's a nomination committee in each company, so why not just give her the chance to do so." (K)

Recommendations were made that if a quota law is to be considered, it should start in the government sector. There it would be easier to identify women and implement training. One woman said she did not have enough experience of the private sector to comment on a quota there.

"The Government should introduce a 20% quota within three to five years, but only in the public sector. There are enough women out there, but more should be trained in corporate governance. Their placements should not be limited to female-related areas such as social affairs." (P)

Training the women first was seen as the best way forward, partly because not every woman will be adequately qualified for board membership, even after training. This could be done by mandating more director development training for senior management.

"The first thing is to build the competencies and to focus on training courses to give them chance to participate. The second thing is try to enforce it initially. Let's say there is a percentage that should be in every board. Let's say one member only, in every board... We have 25-27 boards maybe (I'm not sure). If we had 27 ladies there, having their opinion and they have their effect on this, it will make a difference." (C)

The latter point is strongly made. If the UAE had 25 women directors on the listed company boards, that would increase the availability of role models to inspire women in the country, especially young and mid-career women, for whom opportunities to progress are not at present very clear. One of the interviewees commented that if a quota is to be introduced, it should be for two women to be appointed, as research shows that a single woman on a board is often treated as a token member of her gender, whereas two or more women are seen as individual directors first and female second, hence are able to be more effective working with their male peers.

"It's very tough to only have one woman on a board, so let's say you have a board of eight people and you have one woman, she will not be able to be as effective as if you have two women. So you also need to figure out the right ratios because unless you're able to find one who has such a strong personality and doesn't care and will always express her opinion, more often than not you won't find the woman being able to do that." (I)

One woman raised the issue of multiple directorships, where individuals held more seats on boards than they could realistically undertake. If a quota were introduced, there was a danger that women in some of the biggest family businesses would be offered directorships from their various relations. This

woman felt that directors should not sit on more than two or three boards to be effective. Also such a policy would mean that more directorships would be available for other men and women. One comment was that quotas could be targeted only at companies and organizations with no women on their boards. Another suggestion was that there could be a quota law just for a short period, but also that the quota should be enforced with strong penalties. In other countries, for example in Norway, non-complying companies have had to deregister from the stock exchange, and in France, non-complying firms will not be allowed to appoint new directors unless they are female.

One woman said that if a quota is to be introduced, then there would have to be a pool of women available for board level appointments. She recommended starting with a small group of women who wanted to become directors, who could be groomed and trained to be really good at the job.

“But you start with them. You don't need to go to 100 on one day. Take ten. And I can already name ten. There are enough that you can start doing it and then it will grow, but the second you start having more of them, they become role models for the younger ones. They'll want to be encouraged to do better and grow more. So we shouldn't look at it if it's all or nothing. No, let's just start putting the seeds in. Let's just start doing it. (I)

The same woman also suggested that it would be useful to have a nationally diverse group of women, as that would add the benefits of additional diversity to the pool of talent. Another non-Emirati had a similar view on opening up the talent pool for Emirati boards by including non-nationals on semi-government boards such as universities and not for profit organizations.

She recommended that non-Emiratis could be appointed as directors for one year at a time, without voting rights or stock benefits, to reduce risk.

Another way to move things forward is for companies to set corporate targets. (What gets measured gets done!), for a certain percentage of management and board level posts to be occupied by women by a set date. If companies were required by government to do this and report results publicly, then this could be a strategy for consideration by the government rather than a mandatory quota. This is the path taken by the UK Government, following the Davies Commission, and there is already some improvement in female share of new appointments and disclosures on targets (Sealy et al, 2011).

“I'm not really in favour of quotas myself that are imposed by the government. I'm not sure it's the best way, and I see in the UK you're trying to avoid it through raising the conscience and the awareness of the public and private sector. I think this is the right thing to do, but I would really love that companies themselves put a target.” (B)

One interviewee commented that there had been only a slight improvement over the last ten years, with most of that coming through family firms. Some interviewees had experienced the success of targets for gender diversity in other countries. So setting targets is strongly recommended, with some kind of monitoring to ensure that progress is continuing. There is still a debate about whether to set high level targets which are unlikely to be reached but which make companies strive hard and achieve at least part of the goal, or whether to set more realistic lower targets that could be easily met, but which might lead to complacency and less success.

**FIGURE 4: PARTICIPANTS' ARGUMENTS FOR AND AGAINST
A QUOTA FOR WOMEN DIRECTORS ON UAE BOARDS**

FOR QUOTA	AGAINST QUOTA
Few women are getting through to the top now. Only a handful of women are on listed company boards.	Support is already there, women just need to take advantage of it.
Reserved female seats worked well in political assembly. Appointees are now experienced and well qualified.	In a meritocracy, if women are the best, they will rise to the top anyway.
Do the same, start with government boards.	Not right to interfere in a free economy.
Introducing women brings, new blood, new ideas, new solutions to boardroom.	Bad for women, stigma of being appointed because they are women, even if they are the best.
Set up a mechanism for qualified women to be officially listed as available board.	If quota women struggle, men will stereotype all women as unable to perform well in boardroom.
Identify a talent pipeline of high-level women, develop them till they are ready to put onto the official list of available women. Don't waste half the UAE's talent pool.	Well-educated women will come to the top in 5-15 years.
	It's not fair to men.

*RECOMMENDATIONS BY
INTERVIEWEES:
WHAT MORE SHOULD
GOVERNMENT DO?*

RECOMMENDATION BY INTERVIEWEES: WHAT MORE SHOULD GOVERNMENT DO?

1. MUCH HAS BEEN DONE BY GOVERNMENT ALREADY

Building on the previous section about a possible quota, this section provides a range of responses that the women made to the question about what more the Government should do to help promote the access of women to corporate and other boards. Most commented on how much the UAE Government has done already in a relatively short time, driven in Dubai by the vision of the Ruler.

“Even in his strategic vision, HH Sheikh Mohammed has put that he wants women in UAE to play a bigger role and he has not only an intention or a vision or a strategic intent; he really made it happen. In the parliament, in the government we have a lot of prominent women and he’s one of the few leaders in the Arab world where you see his wife. So he’s done a lot. So for women on boards, the government I think they are really doing a strong effort.” (B)

“In my personal opinion, the government has pioneered supporting women here in the UAE. Compared to the region, we have women holding ministerial positions, they are CEOs of business. His Highness is always an advocate of women, so I definitely think that we are very lucky that our government supports women the way it does.” (L)

A third of the women felt that as the Government is already so supportive, further measures to increase the number of women at the top are not really needed. Several women have been appointed as ministers, some at a young age compared to the men. If women want to get to the top and are well-qualified, the support is there. The issue may be more about the culture and number of women who are motivated to get to such levels.

“We need women who have the drive and ambition within them. It is not just about government support. The government is fully committed to assisting those who would like to get ahead. The facilities and opportunities are plentiful, but it is up to individuals to seize the chances and achieve the results.” (G)

Another woman commented that more than half of government employees are women. Many are running organizations. Hence the government *“cannot do more because they*

are already putting them in the positions.” The support is already there in the public sector.

“For any special person who gives the effort and time, in the end he will have what he deserves... I think the government is giving equal chances to men and women. We have equal salaries, and we have equal chances of promotion. It depends on the work environment the girl or woman is working with. Maybe some working environments are very negative, and they are not supportive.”
(O)

Whilst at federal level achievements had been made, there was a comment that the pace of change in the developing Emirates was not fast enough. Women there were still to be found mainly in the lower ranks of the organization, despite the strategy and support.

2. REGULATE BOARDS AND CORPORATE GOVERNANCE

Another area for Government to consider, as recommended by the women in this study, is to regulate for better corporate governance. Whilst codes of practice have been drawn up, many firms have not addressed the recommended changes.

2.1 PRIVATISE MORE GOVERNMENT COMPANIES AND CREATE BOARD SEATS

One senior woman suggested that the Government should consider privatizing more government companies. This would allow for new governance structures to be put in place for government-owned businesses and organizations to face the future. Such action would require establishment of executive and non-executive boards, and create many new seats. Candidates for the new boards should include eligible women who should

be required to have governance training so that they would be really effective from the start.

2.2 LIMIT THE NUMBER OF BOARDS PER PERSON AND SET A TIME LIMIT FOR BOARD DIRECTORSHIPS

A way of increasing opportunities for women to become directors is to limit the number of board seats that one person can hold. One interviewee commented that a boy's club of the same men sit on many boards, where they cannot be effective at governance. They are not keeping up with their duties as directors because there is not the time available to do the work involved. She suggests that there should be a limit, perhaps five boards maximum, for men and women directors. Another woman added that if board members were limited to the number of years that they could sit on one board, then that would open up more board seats that women could also apply for. In family-owned businesses, very often the chair person is in place for many years.

“The good governance codes say that you shouldn't stay as a board director for more than X number of years, even as a chairman, because you need always independence and fresh air, so in family businesses I don't think it has been applied.... And board members being family members also are there for a long time.” (B)

2.3 ALLOW FOREIGNERS TO BECOME NON-EXECUTIVE DIRECTORS

Five interviewees (including two Emiratis) suggested that the UAE should allow non-Emiratis to sit as directors on UAE boards. This would bring much value from international experience and variety of knowledge. Two women suggested that such appointments could be given for shorter periods for non-UAE directors, with voting rights and stock options restricted, to reduce risk.

“One thing this country's doing itself a disfavour from is there are other women here that could add value as well. So while I think it's very good to push and encourage and nurture Emirati women to come forward, don't forget you have a massive amount of international knowledge, so go and get it. Even if they sit on your board for six months or one year as a non-exec director, what people can learn from each other across boardrooms is fantastic.” (F)

They said there should be a mix of people, with different backgrounds and different nationalities, as well as gender. One explained that given the nature of business and life in the UAE with so many expatriates, it would be better to bring insight from them into boards too.

“So, having women, yes, as well as men, and different nationalities; so not necessarily UAE nationals, but women from other backgrounds. And balance is the key.... So having pure UAE nationals on the board, you lack that point of view that an ex-pat would bring. And we have to face it; in our nation the majority is ex-pat, so that kind of insight always contributes to whatever discussion is being had.” (L)

2.4 REQUIRE NEW DIRECTORS TO HAVE GOVERNANCE EDUCATION

Interviewees felt that the Government should encourage corporate governance education. However, some thought that this should start right at the beginning of careers, even at university. It was suggested that modules on corporate governance could be included in a number of degrees at Masters level when people are more mature, or in part-time diplomas. It could be done in MBA courses but also in law, finance, accounting, human resources and other degrees. They suggested that the Government should consider whether a governance qualification should be made a requirement for new directors in future. One suggested that as women may not be sufficiently knowledgeable about finance in relation to board governance duties, there should be in addition to the director development programme, a specialist course on advanced finance for would-be directors without such expertise.

“Encourage some kind of education for that particular board member. Push the Directors Development Programme in the government organizations. ... I believe financial knowledge for women as board members is key to participate in the board room especially when it comes to decision-making discussion and understanding financial models of organization. The candidates should go through assessment tests and interviews, for enrolment acceptance.” (N)

Such education would in time renew and refresh governance practice in family businesses or entrepreneurial firms, as well as government, private and not for profit sector organizations.

2.5 MANDATE TRANSPARENCY IN TERMS OF BOARD MEMBERSHIP

An important facet of good corporate governance is transparency, including details of exactly who is on the board, and their biographies that reveal the human and social capital that they contribute to the board. In the West, this has facilitated the monitoring of board membership, especially in terms of diversity, but there were doubts as to whether it could happen in the UAE. Some UAE organisations, especially Government institutions, have started disclosing such information.

“Transparency and disclosure covers quite a wide array, everything from governance, the number of committees, who’s sitting on the committees, what skill-sets they’ve got. ...So I think all transparency is good and if they could include that in the CSR reporting, it would be very good. How many would do it voluntarily, I don’t know.” (H)

Figure 5 summarises the recommendations for Government to consider regarding directorships.

FIGURE 5: INTERVIEWEES’ RECOMMENDATIONS REGARDING BOARD SEATS

Limit number of Non-Executive Director (NED) seats per person

Time-limit seats (eg 6 years) so that companies have to report to any exceptions and reasons, eg. long-serving family directors

Allow foreigners to be NEDs, gain benefit of diversity & wider networks

Require all new directors to take Corporate Governance course consider extending the above to private businesses, to improve governance across UAE business

Mandate transparency of board membership

Privatise more government agencies, improve governance and create more seats

3. IDENTIFY TALENT AND BUILD PIPELINE FOR DIRECTORSHIPS

Government should set up and publicise a mechanism through which those women (and men) who are likely to reach top positions in government sector, private firms and other organizations can be identified, developed and prepared for senior office. There needs to be a system for connecting up those in the talent pool with those responsible for appointing directors in both public and private sectors. The women also need to prepare themselves, as one experienced

CEO commented, adding that the readiness has to come from them.

“Mentorship is the key, but women should feel empowered to achieve top positions. The process will take some time, but it largely depends on individual motivation. Women should upgrade their talents and sharpen their skills. This will aid their advancement in the corporate hierarchy.” (G)

As women get appointed, they will become role models and inspire the younger women. One woman's advice was that they did not have to be all Emirati, as diversity can bring such an advantage in decision-making. However, she felt that there were already potential Emirati candidates who just need some structures to become good directors.

"I cannot stress enough how important I think this is ultimately going to be, because from what I've seen there's a lot of capable young Emirati women. They just need to have the tools and the ability for them to get to realise their full potential. I think we all need to encourage it and we all need to do our part." (I)

Where there are already eligible women in the government sector, then one woman thought that the Government could give them the right to nominate themselves to be considered for their board.

"It can start off in the government sector where they can pass a law and say if there are senior women in the organization, they should have the right to have seats on the Board, if they're eligible. If they're not ready, they should have training, they have Hawkamah, they have all the resources they need. It's as simple as that." (M)

When asked about how the women wanting to sit on boards become known to those appointing directors to boards, one participant said that when women are ready, *"their performance will speak for them"*. But getting exposure to a wider audience is difficult, and the role of the chairman or chief executives could include taking their top women to events, so that there are women visible. This is something that this participant felt the Government is already encouraging at the highest levels, as evidenced by the

Young Leaders Programme. She recounted how her chairman had nominated her to attend an event in Russia, and how proud that made her feel. Such affirmation that she was worthy to represent the organization was extremely powerful, reinforcing her view of herself. Other chairmen could emulate this practice.

Whilst the Government had set up organizations such as the Women's Councils, there was a view that identification of local talent and building of a pipeline and talent pool for new directors should not be left to the Women's Councils, as some of their members are not so experienced in professional development. Many of the senior members are excellent, but new blood is also needed in these organizations. There needs to be a separate initiative, funded by Government, to identify the talent pool, develop it and promote a list of women ready for directorships. This needs to be seriously and very professionally, following up graduates' careers.

"But the problem with a list it shouldn't be from top bottom, it should be bottom up. Just go and find the ones who are actually known to be competent. They might be 2% or 5%. Go and find the graduates of 1990, 1994. What are they doing now? Try to find them. That's the way to do it as well." (N)

There were comments that women should not just look up and think that it is an easy path to tread to the boardroom. As young Emiratis often have an unrealistic view of the requirements to work hard and climb the ladder to achieve senior positions (Al Waqfi & Forstenlechner, 2012), it should be made clear to young women and men that board directorships require that kind of commitment, and that running organizations is a serious business.

4. PROMOTE THE SUCCESS OF WOMEN WITHIN THE EMARATI CULTURE

More should be done by the Government to promote the issue of women's access to top positions. Incentivising young women to follow career goals to reach the top was one suggestion. Perhaps the Government could get more senior women involved in talking to young women in schools and universities, and running workshops for them. The media could also play a stronger role to convince people that women should be represented on boards.

"We should spread the culture that women should sit on boards, because still there's a lot of resistance. Organizations such as the media should have a new campaign to convince people that we need women sitting on the board... It's not only boards of firms related to women such as cosmetics and fashion companies and all this stuff. This shouldn't be the case any more. It should be also professional and economic boards."(K)

The latter point is important, as women can and should contribute not just to female-typed industry boards, but to boards in general.

There was considerable pride in the success of women in the UAE. Comments were made that compared to other GCC countries, "the UAE has the best model for supporting women", women felt "nearly equal to men", and they haven't had to lose their culture.

"Keep a little bit of your culture with you wherever you go. So that's a big challenge, and I think Dubai is addressing it in a really good way and I hope it just continues." (E)

The issue of national dress is an important one, and Emirati women take pride in wearing their abayas. One successful woman was told by a journalist in Europe that her dress

was an oppressive restriction imposed by men in power. She countered by challenging him on why he was so unprofessional, when he was there to interview her about UAE business. She told him in no uncertain terms that national dress is an important part of her culture and identity that she chose to maintain even when overseas. This is an issue that is hard for many Westerners to understand, but with education, increasingly there is respect on this issue. UAE women leaders have an important advocacy role in this regard, showing internationally that women here are not oppressed, that they have achieved the pinnacles of power as ministers and judges, have successful careers, lead businesses and play a full role in the leadership, business and politics of their country.

5. IMPROVE UAE EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Women interviewees recommended that the Government should provide more training for women to improve their business skills. This should start early so that women from more closed families could become more confident and independent and with better communication skills.

"They come from a close house and a close family so - things are different nowadays, with the internet, but still you find women that they are very shy. So you need to improve them, give them communication skills, trust in themselves. So when they start work they'll be prepared and wouldn't have to go through an adjustment period." (K)

A serious comment was made that despite much progress, UAE education standards in some cases have not yet reached where they should be internationally. If Emirati public school education is not competitive, then local men and women will not be selected as the best for promotion in the private sector. Or

if they are pushed into senior management by an Emiratisation programme, then they may not be as effective at their job, which is bad for that person as well as their organization.

6. EMIRATISATION: CONSIDER DEVELOPMENT OF MORE WOMEN

The women talked about Emiratisation, and the advantages and disadvantages that such a policy brings. The downside is that some young Emiratis feel entitled to a good job and high salary (as has been reported recently) without getting educated to their best potential and without working hard. Several women are concerned that the country's wealth might dry up and then the UAE workforce would have to compete to international standards. Taking advantage of the highly educated, motivated women in the UAE would address this concern, rather than wasting their talent by not giving them access to career development and top jobs. At present, foreign expertise is imported, but expatriates are temporary and the country is vulnerable to their exit.

7. SUPPORT PRIVATE SECTOR APPOINTMENTS FOR UAE WOMEN

The private sector has very few Emiratis, despite an Emiratisation policy. Few Emiratis apply for jobs in the private sector, and employers may be reluctant to employ them on cost grounds unless they are really outstanding candidates.

"Give them the opportunity in the private sector. There are a lot of positions that women can take there and I think they could really excel in it. If we need them in the private sector, there should be more regulation that makes it a friendly environment for women."
(A)

"The problem with the private sector is that it is always assessed that we are expensive, always there is a cost benefit analysis applied. We are going to hire a woman, who will take 45 days maternity leave, she will take two years to look after her kids, and this is always something that they will look at. But the government could put a regulation that will compensate the private sector company if a woman is leaving her job for a period of time." (J)

As well as suggesting that the Government should consider regulating for a more female-friendly environment for women in the private sector, another participant argued that there could be a financial incentive from the Government to take on more national employees. There could also be a scheme to compensate private sector employers for the additional costs of benefits that have to be given to Emirati employees compared to non-nationals.

8. REGULATE AND IMPROVE MATERNITY LEAVE AND FLEXIBLE WORKING

Whilst there were comments about employers needing to improve practice regarding maternity leave, the successful women interviewees wanted to see an intervention by the Government. The current maternity leave of 45 days is considered as a barrier for working mothers.

"I think the government needs to act its part. There's a point at which organizations, firms have to take their own initiatives, but there's a point at which the government needs to enforce certain things." (I)

The view was to increase maternity leave at least to three months. On average, the married women in this study had three children, so they had good experience from which to make recommendations.

“Yes, it’s not the employer, but a law which will help. It’s not realistic because even if you leave work the day that you deliver, 45 days is not enough if you are breastfeeding your baby. Physically you don’t recover within 45 days. And you come back to work and two or three weeks later you feel extremely tired, extremely exhausted and it affects your brain. There are exceptions with some employers, but if you have a law, that is the law.” (F)

“I think six months is too much. Maybe it can be two months maximum. We can make it sixty days. After two months she has also her annual leave. She can use it. She has another 30 days. So this will be three months. Then, as a working woman, she should have somebody else to support her.” (O)

Some of the women commented that the UAE’s very short maternity leave is not only bad for the working women but also for their organizations, as new mothers either come back within the 45 days and are stressed, or they decide to give up their work.

“There should be something done about it. There are a lot of women who leave their work... And this is a loss to the institution. Last week one of my female staff, who is a very smart, very motivated woman, resigned. She said “I have to take care of my kids”, she had just started her family and wanted to look after them.” (J)

“I absolutely think it’s too little. Sufficient time would be 60 days, because if you look at the psychology of a woman she goes through a great experience. Giving birth is not just giving birth or an operation, it’s a psychological shock. You produce a human and it is sitting right next to you. You need time to digest this and get back into the normal mind-set. If a woman is away for 45 days and comes back, she will definitely be absentminded, definitely.” (M)

As the country needs its women both to have careers and to embrace motherhood, the Government should help them do both.

“Because women are playing both roles, working and taking care of their family. You need those women to prepare the next generation. If they prefer to choose to go with only their career path, and they will not look at their kids, this is a disaster. So there should be a female friendly policy that really encourages women to be a woman, and balance between her family life, and at the same time building her career path.” (J)

Women often added holiday entitlement to their maternity leave, to extend the 45 days. The difficulties for new mothers returning to work when their babies were only one month old were recounted by the study participants in many cases from personal experience. As women now often are still working when they become grandparents, they are not available to undertake childcare duties for their daughters, unlike the previous generation, particularly Emiratis. Several women commented on the guilt they still felt at leaving their babies when so young. One felt this particularly strongly when her own daughters made the different choice to give up work when their babies were due and withdraw from work whilst the children were young.

One young Emirati woman wished the Government would provide longer maternity benefits similar to those in the West, with an initial period of leave, extended with half pay, followed by a right to part-time work.

“Now that I am married, I definitely wish we could imitate what is happening in the West for women. So to have us, not suffer - it’s a harsh word - but it is really difficult to come back to work after such a short period. So I wish that we could have an extended period of maternity leave, even half pay. If you look at it from a macro level, to have first the mother be there with her child, that is very important. And then to encourage women to come back to work.” (L)

One CEO said that she had to fight for maternity leave in her company to be similar to that in the West, because she felt that it would not be possible to recruit the best female candidates to the new office in Dubai. Those potential staff would look at the short maternity leave and decide not to come to Dubai. Following the decision to extend the leave, she and the company now benefit from the increased commitment of women returning to work after that longer maternity leave.

The introduction of crèches in government offices was welcomed as a measure to reduce the number of women leaving work entirely. Several interviewees felt that the lack of a right to return to work after maternity leave is a big issue. In the UK, for example, women on unpaid maternity leave have the right to return to their jobs up to 12 months later. However, for one of these successful women, the short maternity leave was not a problem. There was much to do, and she was very keen to get back to work.

“Personally, I didn’t have a problem. But I think we need to expand it. It is a problem, because you need to stop feeding and things like that. Maybe I’m very passionate about work, so I was really keen to come back. If I stayed for a very long time away from my office, I feel there are so many things that need to be done.” (N)

It is a particularly difficult rule for expatriate women, many of whom have to return to their own countries to deliver their children for nationality reasons, and they are not allowed to travel after 32 weeks, so their time off work has to be much longer. As they work mainly in the private sector, it is then a question of negotiating additional unpaid leave with their employers.

Some women recommended government intervention to introduce a right for women to work flexibly. Flexible working covers a wide range of modes and times of delivery of work, but for most women in this study, the issues were about shorter working hours for those with young children, and new ways of working using internet and video-conferencing from home.

“So I really think what this is about is to have empathy with employees and to treat them like humans and give them the opportunity to work from home, or to work with flexible hours. Especially if they’re parents or guardians.” (M)

One very senior woman felt that the working hours were a particular hurdle for her younger Emirati colleagues with children, and that her achievements would not have been possible under present working hours for mothers. She urged the Government to reconsider public sector working hours.

“Employed Emirati women face a lot of issues. If they want to get married and have a family, they have to make sacrifices. While a mother can leave very young children during working hours in the care of extended family, as the child gets older, he or she needs more maternal guidance and care. A mother is the earliest teacher and guide. Hence, it’s a big challenge for Emirati women looking to balance the home and workplace duties.” (G)

“Couples need to have two incomes to manage their lifestyle in the UAE, and flexi-hours would help a lot. Now women are having much fewer children so that they can manage their careers. But in the UAE society, a woman is a mother first.” (P)

FIGURE 6: INTERVIEWEES’ OTHER RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE UAE GOVERNMENT TO CONSIDER

Set up, develop and evaluate Talent Pipeline of women

Promote a list of qualified women to those appointing directors

Promote success of Emirati women more widely

Encourage more Emiratis to work in private sector

Continue to improve Emirati education at all levels to the highest international standards, to make Emiratis competitive with the very best expatriate talent

Extend official maternity leave to 60-90 days

Give mothers a right to return to job within 12 months

Mandate right to flexible working for new mothers

Even if maternity leave were extended by the Government, the issue of mothers being unable to give that personal involvement in daily life, monitoring homework and transmitting good values to their children when they are growing up needs to be addressed, according to interviewees. Otherwise more women will opt out of work. Another senior woman commented that in private sector companies, start time was 9 am, and so expatriate mothers were able to bring their children to nursery themselves. Often they were able to use their lunch hour a bit later to go to pick up the children and take

them home, before returning to work. She tried to encourage flexible ways of working but had to follow the rules of her public sector department.

“We don’t get that privilege. Women in the UAE, you see that they are working, but the women in the private sector, you see that they are really having their time for their kids. Even though they work, but they have enough time for having time for breakfast, for networking, for their kids.... I think working time in the UAE should not be 7:30, it’s too early. Imagine the woman leaves the house before her children

for school, this is really something; they don't have breakfast, they don't have anything. So I am the one who actually encourages flexible timings, and management by objective, but it's not what the government departments do. So I have to adhere with the rules that they set."

Several interviewees recommended that the UAE should look at best practice elsewhere and see what is feasible and affordable, especially flexible working. The support for flexible working and increased maternity leave was strong, and most interviewees urged the Government to legislate to improve these so that more women, especially Emirati women, would be able to remain in the workforce and continue their careers.

*RECOMMENDATIONS BY
INTERVIEWEES:
WHAT CAN
EMPLOYERS DO?*

RECOMMENDATION BY INTERVIEWEES: WHAT CAN EMPLOYERS DO?

1. HR CAREER SUPPORT

1.1 PROVIDE COUNSELLING SERVICES

One participant strongly recommended that all organizations should have career counselling support in HR, which would have two functions. First, it would support women who need to consult HR about personal issues such as harassment. Second, it would help those who want to discuss their options in confidence, not with their line manager.

“If a woman is feeling, for whatever reason, uncomfortable or harassed or not fitting in, or just not being given the opportunity, that she has someone that she can talk to without it affecting her career. It is very important to feel that you can go somewhere and be able to express concerns. I think there are probably more situations where a woman leaves the workforce because they are uncomfortable with the way that they have been treated.” (K)

Such a structure would help women continue their careers.

1.2 INCREASE TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

Some interviewees said that training opportunities should be more accessible to women, but training for women is already encouraged in many UAE organizations, especially in the public sector.

“There are some institutions that really encourage women to get their training. The programme yesterday that I attended, almost

50% were women participating in this. So there is always training available to both genders.” (J)

Whilst one participant felt that the women should not get additional support compared to men, several others thought that there should be more focus on developing female talent. One felt that training should not only be targeted at Emirati women, but that talent identification should encompass non-nationals as well. She recommended, *“Put them in the programme together”*, as part of corporate social responsibility. Some said that women-only leadership development courses can be useful, but others felt that women-only training was not the solution, because *“women and men have to work with each other”*. One woman reported that she had been very involved in a leadership development programme that included both male and female Emiratis.

There were recommendations for training of women right from university through early career to higher ranks. One participant reported that in her public sector organization, there was a training programme for newcomers, including time within a peer authority, so that they came into the job with good knowledge and some experience, together with a feeling that they were valued. As some training requires travel away from home, there is a cultural restriction for women from conservative families. One

woman suggested that training should be tailored to facilitate the participation of such women in development activities. Whilst one solution for those who could not travel was to have on-line training, this was seen as negative and as cost-cutting by another interviewee. Another point was to “*send a group of people for training and ask them to come back and train the rest of the people*”. This merits consideration, as several women said how much they enjoyed being involved in developing their younger colleagues. One recounted her experience in the US, where her employer was seeking to increase the proportion of women at the top. Following her own leadership training on off-site small-group leadership courses, she then participated in training courses for junior women. The senior women took ownership of the courses for younger colleagues. Organizations could encourage and expect senior women and men to take on such responsibilities.

1.3 MENTORING SCHEMES

Mentoring is a supportive activity that can bring significant advantages to the mentee, as well as benefits for the mentors and also for the organization. It can range from the totally informal where mentoring pairs meet by chance to formal schemes where individuals are allocated to each other by the organization. The interviewees discussed their own mentors earlier in this Report. Six women specifically recommended the introduction of mentoring programmes for UAE women. Several participants reported enjoying mentoring of young women, and suggested that match-making events organised by the organization could help women gain the benefits of inter-personal chemistry for their mentoring partnerships.

“What you can do is have a series of senior women, say that they would volunteer their time for mentorship and then do a bit of a

matchmaking rather than, “Okay, here’s an assignment of five people for you,” because you want people to have the real personal initiative to want to make sure that that programme works.” (I)

Most of the women thought that formal mentoring would suit the culture of the UAE business world. The formal scheme does offer some protection, in that those who are mentors and mentees sign an understanding of trust and confidentiality. Two women commented that unless trust is there, it is very difficult for a woman to make comments about her boss, who may be the cause of an issue, or about the level of support that she is getting. Formal schemes usually have some training for the mentee and mentor, so their precious time together is not wasted by misunderstandings and feelings of unmet expectations on both sides. Research shows in the West that females mentored by senior males are likely to receive more promotions and higher pay. Such mentees benefit from a successful senior male’s perspective on the issues she is facing. Women in family-owned businesses are likely to have more easy access to the senior male relatives, once they have shown that they are serious and want to play a part in the family business. However, in private businesses, it can be difficult for a junior female to approach a senior male for mentorship, if there is no formal scheme. Several women felt that that was less of a problem in the UAE. It requires people to be open-minded about the issue, and if women have both male and female mentors, then they can bring different concerns to the respective mentors. One senior woman commented that “*strong women do approach men for mentoring*”, and younger women can draw on their confidence, and go for the challenge.

There may be opportunities to set up formal schemes for the most senior tiers of management, in preparation for board level duties. One lawyer said that *“governance can be integrated into any formal or informal mentoring processes.”* Such mentoring of pre-board level employees should be done by board members, but could be done by directors of another organization as well, so that they gain insight into governance in other organizations as well as their own.

2. STRATEGIC HRM - TALENT MANAGEMENT STRUCTURES

Two women felt that organizations should have stronger, more independent and more effective HR functions. Another said the UAE should promote excellence in HR, by getting the Ministry of Education to find out what is best practice internationally, and to *“take them towards the excellence standard for quality, all these new concepts, new initiatives”*. If best practice were implemented, this would help with the development of the UAE female talent pool. One public sector participant said that assessment centres and personal development plans had started for lower management tiers. There should be no discrimination in favour of men in theory, but she was not entirely optimistic.

“Just practice what they preach”, was the call for CEOs to do about recruiting and developing more women. Aiming at the male hierarchy, another woman said, *“Give women a chance”*, otherwise they will just leave and give up. She felt that this masculine culture was particularly important for the UAE to address. Even in Dubai which has such a large proportion of local women working, a culture change is needed to ensure that Emirati women’s contribution to society and economy is facilitated, and that female talent is retained and developed for mutual benefit.

“If you’re female and working in the government sector or private sector, men often walk past you as if you do not exist. This really frustrates women. Sometimes they’ll say, I’ll just stay back home, not achieve anything.”

There was a view that employers need to take action to promote access of senior jobs for women, not just ‘talk the talk’. Even in the public sector, whilst those at the top endorse the call for women to have equal chances, and speak about the need for increased diversity, there is a reported blockage at the line manager and section head implementation level. Males are still preferred and appointed, even where there are apparently well qualified women available. Interviewees felt that education and gender awareness training for line managers would help to address the need for their behaviour to change. They should face up to the fact that women may have children, that many will want to return to work, and that this is normal life, essential for the continuation of a healthy UAE society. The offering of flexible working could help remedy the issue for both women and their managers. However some of the other women felt that employers were doing a great job, and that selection was not based on gender, hence action to promote more women was not necessary.

“It’s all based on their education and their experience, at least in the government sector where I work. And you see women reaching out to have positions like ministers, ambassadors, so there isn’t actually a difference between hiring women and hiring men.” (E)

There was also a call for companies and organizations to identify the upcoming talent, as part of their corporate social responsibility. One woman commented that such a talent pool should contain not just Emirati women but also expatriate women, to share their learning and get on better together.

Figure 7 summarises interviewees' recommendations for employers.

FIGURE 7: INTERVIEWEES' RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EMPLOYERS TO SUPPORT WOMEN'S CAREERS

TALENT MANAGEMENT	CAREER SUPPORT	FOR WOMEN AS MOTHERS
Set up structures for men and women Increase career training opportunities for women Set up formal but friendly Mentoring Scheme	Train middle managers regarding unfair practices. Walk the talk of leaders. Set up counselling scheme for personal advice and career support	Improve maternity leave Keep jobs open for 12 months Offer flexible working patterns

*RECOMMENDATIONS BY
INTERVIEWEES:
WHAT MORE
CAN MEN DO?*

RECOMMENDATION BY INTERVIEWEES: WHAT MORE CAN MEN DO?

1. WHAT MORE CAN MEN AT WORK DO?

Several women commented that senior men often had traditional views of gender roles, and whilst men now usually accepted that women were taking up employment, they were not convinced that women should ascend into more senior roles (Mostafa, 2005). Many senior men's wives were not working. Hence such men saw women's role only as wife and mother in the domestic sphere. Women participants said that they had to be strong enough to fend off comments such as "*Women should just have children and stay at home*". Men need to stop this stereotyping and change their views. It was not necessary for women to compete with men, but men need to realise that women are different and bring different strengths to the workplace that complement those of men. As an example, the male argument that women are too emotional at work can be countered by the fact that women will offer a more people-focused perspective on strategic issues that men would miss.

"So more support, more encouragement, not to compete, we are different, not better. We complete each other; we are not competing against each other. And to appreciate the differences that we have, not to look at the differences as a weakness. Okay, I'm emotional, I take care of my family, this is my priority and I have a better emotional side than him, but this is not weakness, this is strength because I will have a say in a decision that

people will be part of it, I will see this part, the one they are not looking at." (C)

Men should not gender-stereotype jobs as being for one sex only. Most jobs can be undertaken by either sex, and it is cultural attitudes that determine whether the other sex can do them. The same can be said for senior management and board positions. Whilst up to now, these have mainly been occupied by men, there is no reason why women with good education and professional experience should not now be able to take on such roles. However, as women become more senior with visible success, this may trigger jealousy amongst their male colleagues. One woman interviewee said that when she did something very distinguished, or presented a new initiative, some male colleagues made snide remarks behind her back as if she as a female did not merit the success. This made her sad but she was a positive person, and just had to get on with work and forget their comments and attitudes. However a few of her male colleagues were proud of her and celebrated the success with her, which brought warm feelings of support and inclusion.

Men needed to recognise that women do not want special treatment, but a fair chance to succeed. Whilst in some countries such as Norway, Spain and France, quotas for women have led to an increase in female directors, interviewees feared that those women would

be seen as getting to the top because of their gender rather than on merit. If women were given the right education and chances by those in power, just as men have for many years, then women too could succeed fairly.

“In some parts of the world people are giving women more chances than men, because they sympathise with them. And as a woman, I think that’s not fair for both, because I have worked hard to reach to where I am, it shouldn’t be through sympathy. And a man maybe worked equally as hard as I did, so why shouldn’t he have a chance? So I think if men realised that, men in power realised that, then everyone will have a fair chance and that’s the idea.” (E)

Another issue raised was the masculine culture at work, and the way that women feel excluded from the workgroup by the behaviour of their male colleagues.

“But men tend to forget that there is a woman in the room, or they are like “Oh, because she is here I can’t say what I really want to say” because he probably wants to say something rude. Now that further highlights that I am different, I am not like them, etc. Or they just huddle and they talk, they digress. So they sit there telling about which place has the best cigars and I am sitting there.” (L)

Such behaviours could be modified by more awareness of how women feel, by training and by role modelling of more correct behaviours by the most powerful males supporting the progress of women. This is a leadership issue and senior men have a duty to show more awareness of the problem, which resides in the men. The women say that they have to be robust enough to overcome their feelings of exclusion, but inevitably over a long time such feelings will have a negative effect on their motivation and ambition. The UAE

cannot afford to let such behaviour damage the talented and well-qualified women who could make such a contribution to the economy of the country.

2. WHAT MORE CAN MEN AS FATHERS DO?

All the participants recommended that fathers should bring up their daughters just as they would do for their sons. However, in the UAE there are still families where girls receive only schooling, when they would love to go to university. Fathers play such an important role, in how they treat their daughters, how they treat the girls and the boys, how they encourage them to study and have careers. Often girls do work more diligently than their brothers, endearing them to their fathers who then support their education and careers. Another comment suggested that fathers should find some way of incentivizing their daughters to want to succeed in education and career. Many of the women described how they had really wanted to please their parents, especially their fathers, and they gained much pleasure in their fathers’ approval and pride. One very senior interviewee described how some fathers have such a great influence on the development of their children, including girls, *“to build a free personality, so she can give her opinion.”* This really prepares them well for later careers. However, other girls are brought up with negative rules about how she should behave.

“Of course there are some traditions that she should respect, but the way you make these things inside her make her a hesitant person, she is afraid to give her opinion. So when she grows up, as a professional she is always afraid to talk. She feels that everybody will maybe not respect her opinion, because she is a girl. She has the feeling always that people underestimate her. This can go in

two directions; for some girls they would be hesitant people and always have no open personalities to say what they like and to be creative. And for other personalities, it will give the effect that they want to prove themselves, and they want to say, I am better than that, I can do things.” (O)

Supporting and trusting the girls, so that they could go away from home for university studies overseas, would enable them to gain excellent international qualifications similar in standard to the competition in the UAE business sector. Whilst UAE universities are improving, there is a view that they are not yet up to the highest standards in some subjects, and hence women who do not have access to overseas universities may not realise their full potential.

“It’s to give them the opportunity, to open that door. Getting a good education is very important. More often than not, it’s hard for an Emirati father to send his daughter to the US or England. It’s very tough and often they end up in universities over here which may not allow them to start realising that potential. So it’s allowing that barrier to be broken, but it’s a very tough barrier to be broken to begin with. And then encourage them that they can actually have a career, they can actually work, they can actually progress. I think it takes time to get that to work.” (I)

Educated parents tend to understand this need. *“If you raise the girl well, then you wouldn’t be afraid to let her go by herself.”* Such parental support and education empowers girls to take charge of their careers and fulfil their ambitions and talents. Another issue raised was that some parents did not support their girls, and that some girls remained uneducated and single. One interviewee commented that this might be due to culture or religion, but she urged fathers to

understand how important it is for all girls to be given education and a chance of a career. All of the women in this study emphasised the importance of family support for girls’ education, and the evidence above shows just how strong an influence fathers have on their daughters’ development into *“free spirits”* with independent minds, preparing the ground for successful careers within the UAE economy.

Some women from family businesses felt that it was not just the way that fathers should raise their daughters in the same way as their sons by letting them study abroad, but also by letting them get experience, whether in the family business or outside. Let them start them as an ordinary employee, to understand how business functions at all levels. Several of the interviewees had done this, starting at grass roots level to understand the business, the people, the operations and the finance, which gave them a secure base when they reached board level.

Traditionally Arab women have married young, but as girls become more educated and want to work, fathers need to understand that their daughters may want to progress in their careers before getting married, sometimes even to doctorate level.

“Society is starting to change. But there is still the story, is she’s going to be a professional, is she ever going to get married? My parents were afraid after 25 that I was a career woman and will I ever find a guy who’s going to be able to cope with such a woman and who thinks differently and is independent, has their own salary.” (B)

Interviewees from Emirati and Lebanese families felt that although they understood parents' concerns, such choices need to be made by the girls themselves, within their cultural framework.

3. WHAT MORE CAN MEN AS HUSBANDS DO?

It has been the tradition in the UAE as elsewhere that women take responsibility for the family. In the past they have not usually worked outside the home once they are married. Husbands need to understand why women have such a strong desire to have careers, even when the husband earns enough to support his wife well.

"I would say sometimes there is pressure because they don't understand why I do what I do; they think it is very simple. So everything is an equation for them. "If you are not happy leave, why are you staying?" No, there is no emotion. But I think that is men everywhere." (L)

The women who have done so much to get educated and progress their careers do not want to give it all up, even when there is pressure. So a better understanding by the husband would help the woman through the pressure peaks with that support.

Some women interviewees said that it was difficult in society for men to have a successful wife. This is the case even in Europe and the US, where many women earn more than their husbands, which is a major social shift. This is now happening in the UAE and the Lebanon. They felt that it was easier if the couple were both successful and fulfilled, and if the husbands were confident and not driven by their egos. However, "not every man is like that, so I think this is the difficulty for women, it's finding a man that understands that." There is a cultural issue

here. Men with more successful wives may be personally supportive but face critical comments from family and friends that his duty is to protect and financially support his wife and that his position in society is diminished. A related issue raised was that husbands who do not want their wives to work often feel sorry for their wives and the multi-tasking that they have to do to cope with a job and family duties. However, if the wife becomes more successful and earns more than the husband, then he will criticise in a dismissive way.

"A supportive husband will understand the challenges faced by his wife who has to manage both the home and office. But in some cases, if he feels that there is neglect within the home, the complaints will arise." (G)

So successful women need to be sensitive to this issue, and their husbands should be more supportive and help remedy the problems at home. The biggest change in younger family men's lives has been their increasing involvement in dealing with the children. *"Emirati men have really progressed into taking a bigger role."* They are very evident in the shopping malls these days, not just at weekends but also in the evenings. *"Suppose the wife wants to go somewhere, he is pushing the pushchair and he's looking after the baby"*, even for the whole day if his wife wants to go to a wedding. But some husbands should do more, according to the women in this study.

"But the most important thing is that the husband supports. This is very important. Taking part in their family life, because here in this country men don't know about what women do at home. So they don't support the kids, they don't know about their education, always this is only the women's role." (J)

Figure 8 summarises the advice for men given by the interviewees in this study.

FIGURE 8: INTERVIEWEES' RECOMMENDATIONS FOR UAE MEN TO SUPPORT WOMEN'S CAREERS

MEN AT WORK	MEN AS HUSBANDS	MEN AS FATHERS
Stop stereotyping roles and genders	Understand women's needs for self fulfillment	Educate daughters like sons
Create inclusive culture	Support women's needs for work travel & long hours	Send them abroad for education
Welcome women	Don't be jelouse of wife's success	Include daughters in family business succession plans
Understand unfair present systems	It's a partnership	Be proud of your daughters

*RECOMMENDATIONS BY
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In this section, the advice of the successful women interviewees to younger women is given according to their early, mid and top career stages. However, there are some recommendations that apply right through the career lifetime, so these are presented first.

1. ADVICE FOR WOMEN THROUGHOUT THEIR CAREER

1.1 UNDERSTAND YOURSELF

The successful women emphasised that it is really important to understand yourself, your strengths and your weaknesses in relation to your career goals and available support. Unfortunately self-understanding often only comes with maturity and reflection. Taking the time, when in your twenties or even earlier, to understand who you are and who you want to be will be very useful, according to one interviewee.

“The first thing I would say, and I wish I had done it earlier, is knowing yourself. Through my work and work on myself after my 35 years, I started to understand who I am and what I want and what’s my purpose, what are my values. It would have been great if I had known that at 25.” (B).

Another interviewee said that confidence comes from knowing your ability. Self-knowledge comes from learning to trust your own judgement about yourself. It is particularly important not to let other people’s negativity influence your view of yourself.

“You need to challenge yourself to change, also to do better and trust also your abilities that you can perform well. Because some people can be so negative to you that they will convince you that you are not good and this is where you need to really have the positivity in you that you can do things.” (A)

1.2 HAVE PASSION FOR YOUR WORK

Five of the interviewees mentioned the word ‘passion’ when asked to give advice to younger women wanting to be successful. This is coupled with working hard, working with commitment and working towards excellence, all of which are easier if there is passion for the career.

“Work hard. Life doesn’t really offer a lot of breaks, so if you want to get there, there are some sacrifices there to be made. But work to the best of your ability and conviction. Also work with things that you have passion for and you believe in and if you don’t like something, work to change it. So don’t be average.” (D)

“Be tenacious, prove yourself. It’s not about necessarily positioning oneself as much as it is about proving oneself. A young professional should just simply do an outstanding job, whatever their job is and hopefully that gets recognised. .. So it’s important to find a job in something that one is passionate about. Work hard and be passionate and the combination of those will help get you to further places.” (I)

An interviewee told the story of her father’s wisdom on this point. He told his children: *“I wish for any of you to work in your hobbies because that’s when you’ll excel.”* And another very senior woman advised that new graduates should be less focused on salary and more focused on choosing work for which they have passion.

“The very important thing is that they work with what they like. Because the time that you will spend at work will not be stressful, it will be a time you enjoy. And you will not be creative until you work at what you like.... Now some of the freshly graduated are looking for money. If you work at what you like, money will come later. You need to have the passion. .. Give more time to their work, and more passion, not only time.” (O)

These women are advising young women that it may be more demanding to have a job that they are passionate about, but that is what will drive them to be hardworking and excellent, qualities that will prepare them for success. Several interviewees commented that some younger women (and men) did not want to work so hard, and that these women need a reality check to change their attitudes. Women are not taking advantage of what is offered by Government and families.

“In the younger generation, not everybody is so motivated to work, listen it’s a hard life working. I think people tend to want to get married or have an easier life and to get to that level- but you don’t just get there because you’re a woman, you have to work. So I’m not sure how you do that, you have to change the mentality or the culture.” (D)

“I don’t think that women in this part of the world lack power, I don’t think women in this part lack any resources, the government are heavily supporting us, and families, some families. The infrastructure is built in a way to assist women, and we’re very lucky. Some women are not taking advantage of this.” (M)

Again recommending to young women that they should work hard in their careers, another interviewee commented that whilst life may be very easy when they are living with their parents, and have domestic help, this will not necessarily continue.

“Another very important point that I’ve realised about the coming generation, the growing teenagers, is that they think life has always been that easy. They’re living an easy life with their parents; they don’t have to worry about income, or sometimes even about cleaning their plates. Life is not that easy and I learnt it the hard way.” (E)

She also said that if someone wants to have a good career, they need to make some sacrifices for it. What kept her going was the knowledge that at the end of her sacrifices, she would be coming back to the UAE well educated, well trained and ready for her career and to contribute to a wider society. It was not just for herself.

"They should work harder and stick to their beliefs. Actually, it was a lot of hard work to get to where I am, and to get people to notice my work, I had to work hard. But because I was training, and if you want to get a good practice then you have to sacrifice for it. That's fine with me because I always thought that at the end of the seven years I will go back with a good education and better opportunity and that I will benefit people around me as well." (E)

A director added that even though it is hard work to get to the boardroom, the effort is worth it, because the work at that level is so interesting. So she urges young women, work hard, it is worth it!

"Try to learn, try to be open-minded, and try to work hard; because some girls, they don't want to reach the boards because it is extra work. But it is very interesting to be a part of the company, or the organizational decision making and developing the organization; it is worth it." (O)

1.3 BALANCE CAREER AND CULTURE

An important issue for Emirati women is how to balance their career progression with maintaining their culture and traditions. There are certain very visible symbols of the culture, such as retaining national dress, whilst other symbols are behavioural, such as going or not going overseas alone for university education and professional training.

"It is a very big challenge that they should really maintain their traditions and religion, and keep within that boundary and progress their careers." (G)

"I believe your cultural identity, who you are, is something that comes from your upbringing and your home. That plays a significant role in whether or not you lose it, or you misuse

it, or you let it work to your advantage. Here in the UAE the way we dress is already an identity, I don't need to say anything or do anything, because I have this on, I am already identified, I have a certain profile. ... But all it takes is for you to come back home and remember how you were brought up, and what your principles are, and it is something I believe is ingrained within you." (L)

One of the interviewees talked about how her UAE identity is not just at the national level, but also her very persona is situated within a visible nest of family relationships, through her family name. She went abroad for her university education, and through that experience she recognised her own "*cultural capital*" and values.

"In our culture, identity and physical appearance, and a family name, it's so intertwined; I am not L, I am L, the daughter of 'Y, the sister of 'Z'. ...Because we are a very small society. But that also affects how we identify ourselves, because we get lost in, 'I am connected to X-Y-Z, therefore I am limited in what I choose to do.' And it takes a lot of strength, and a lot of self-confidence, to come out of that and be your own person. And I think the US has taught me how you can be your own person, and still maintain that balance." (L)

This successful woman now advises younger women not to let the cultural issues be a limitation, but to be strong and confident that they will become whatever they want to be whilst balancing respect for the family and cultural traditions. Another interviewee advised young Emirati women that they need to work hard, to build reputation and add value to themselves, their families and their country.

“So don't ever think that, okay, I'm rich or my parents are rich and I go to a good school, and eventually I'm going to find a good job and that's it. It doesn't work that way, and it might work for a couple of years, but then you're going to hurt yourself, you're going to hurt the reputation of your family and your name, and your image and everything that goes with it. So when we work we always should have this mentality in our mind that I am actually working to benefit myself, and benefit the people around me.” (E)

1.4 BE SERIOUS ABOUT YOUR CAREER

A point made by several interviewees was that if younger women want to get to the top, they need to be more serious about work and in their private life. Two comments were made about excessive shopping. Being successful is not about buying and consuming things, but rather about making a good contribution to society through one's career and hard work.

“Women in our society need to be more serious, about work, and think outside the box. Life is not just about following the activities of celebrities, newest trends or acquiring the latest items from luxury brand names. There is more to it and women need to extend their thinking and skills.” (G)

“Spend time constructively. Become less of a consumer and more of a producer in this society.” (M)

Another very important point was made about the need to treat people with respect with awareness of the environment. This is particularly important in a multi-cultural and multi-stratified country such as the UAE, where different nationalities are often involved in work situations. *“It's a very rapidly developing world. Always treat others with respect.”* This advice is relevant at work, at

home and in life in general, particularly as women proceed up into management levels, where they are responsible for other people and their lives, and where they need to draw on resources across levels where they do not have direct responsibility. If one respects others at all times, then they will in turn be respected as a good colleague, manager and leader.

2. MORE THAT YOUNG WOMEN SHOULD DO

2.1 CHOOSE STUDIES THAT LEAD TO A JOB AND CAREER

As young women tend to choose their favourite subjects at university, they should remember that choices will have consequences when they come to the end of their studies and seek employment. Several interviewees initially took the wrong courses, starting on idealised career paths before realising that these careers were not for them, and they were not going to succeed or be happy unless they made significant changes. So the advice to the women is to do the research first, get the facts, understand the opportunities within that field and if they don't know much about it, then find someone who does. This may not be their parents, so they have to be proactive about this task.

Young women were advised that they should look beyond the education sector for their careers, as there are excellent opportunities for women in professional jobs such as law, medicine, engineering and the financial markets. The eco city of Masdar was mentioned as a great initiative offering interesting and varied careers. More Emirati female role models are needed in the media, not just in the press and behind the scenes in television, but as serious programme presenters and directors. Urban planning was another suggestion as a great career for young women to consider, not

just as architects but as economists and social scientists. So after choosing their career, young women need to gain the right educational qualifications and set out on their journey well-equipped for the future.

2.2 BUILD UP EDUCATION, SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE

All the women interviewees had degrees; eight had masters and four had doctorates. They emphasised the key importance of education initially, as a foundation on which to develop skills and knowledge about their chosen fields. Young women should capitalise on their knowledge and skills to build up their profile.

“And you need to build up your skills and knowledge. You can build your confidence because it comes from your ability... if you’re empty from inside, you cannot give to others. ... So you need to have the proper knowledge that will enable you to succeed in what you do.” (A)

“They have to really capitalise on their skills, get training, refine themselves career-wise. This will build a profile for them. And this is the best way and the organizations should be helping them towards that direction.” (M)

Importantly, according to the interviewees, education should continue as a lifelong activity, whether formal or professional learning. Some may not be encouraged by their bosses to take courses, but women should take matters into their own hands to get it.

“Focus more on building their capabilities. I notice that one of the reasons why people don’t like to hire some women is that they are not very focused on taking more professional courses or diplomas. They don’t have the strong competencies that we see in men. ...

Maybe they don’t have encouragement from their senior management and maybe the good courses are given to the males versus females.” (C)

“Education is very important. We see a lot of girls who don’t take their studies or education seriously. Even the new generation should understand that if you don’t take care of your education, you won’t get anywhere.” (E)

Another comment was that as well as learning, young women should also be prepared to help others to learn, as teaching is another way of learning.

2.3 FIND SOLUTIONS TO CAREER PROBLEMS

The successful women gave young women advice not to take ‘No’ for an answer. For many of them, this was related to Emirati family concerns about the daughters’ careers. One unmarried woman thought that in Dubai it was no longer a big issue to allow the girls to go abroad, but in other parts of the UAE and in very conservative families, it may still be a hurdle.

“I don’t have to fight with my father to go abroad by myself, I just have to find another alternative either here, or travel with someone that he’s comfortable with. For every problem there’s always a solution, I just have to look for it. ... Like sometimes you have to change your career if you really want to make it, and have a successful life and a successful job. Don’t just say “He said no and I’m going to stay at home and do nothing”. There’s always a way.” (E)

This is useful advice as women may become downhearted about some desired option that is disappearing from the horizon, but if they think outside the box, and also seek wise advice from a neutral source, they are likely to come up with a perfectly acceptable alternative.

2.4 HAVE STRONG SELF-BELIEF, TAKE RISKS AND LEARN FROM FAILURE

Although understanding yourself was the advice for lifelong careers, there are particular times when self-belief becomes really important. One interviewee said: *“As women you need trust in your ability. You need to ensure that.”* Another successful woman recalled how she had been so scared when offered responsibility that she almost didn't take it.

“Women should believe in themselves and be confident that they can do it. Because, from my experience, when I was given responsibility, and I was scared I couldn't do it, yet when I started doing it, it was easy. There is nothing that distinguishes you from men, so if you have the confidence, and you believe in yourself, you will always excel. If you are motivated, this is very important.” (J)

Yet she took on the responsibility and did the task very well. It was her self-belief that was lacking, before a senior person told her that he had trust in her to do it well. Afterwards she was so pleased and grateful to the person who gave her that opportunity and affirmation. However, not all challenges go the way we want them to go, and sometimes women will fail at a task.

“Life is a challenge so you always will be challenged by people and by situations, by certain circumstances that tell you, “No, you can't be here, or don't think about it, it will not happen. You will fail.” And you will fail sometimes. You shouldn't just let this failure takes you back. It's the failure that you learn from and will build your confidence... will build your expertise, will build your knowledge, then you can learn from this and build on it and go forward.” (A)

So a key lesson for young women in early career is that you have to grow by taking on challenges, some of which may not go well. It is essential to understand the failure, see what you can learn from it, and move on to the next task. Gradually confidence will be regained and from the experiences, you will recognise how to tackle difficult situations with the best possible efforts and capabilities.

3. MORE THAT WOMEN IN MID-CAREER SHOULD DO

3.1 SHOW EXPERTISE, BUILD PROFILE

The mid-career stage has many challenges for the career woman, as she builds up expertise and reputation, and takes on more responsibility for projects, people, management and budgets.

“They need to show themselves, because if you don't show yourself, in the right way, it won't be there. Don't do it in the wrong way, but do it in the right way. Show your expertise and your experience, and work hard, because if you don't work hard, people might support you for the first or even second year, but if you don't perform so good, they aren't going to. And then you are out of the door the third year. You have to be good enough to be there.” (A)

Another interviewee recommended marketing oneself in an authentic manner without bragging. Men often brag about their achievements, but if women do it, they are heavily criticised. So women have to build their profile in a more sensitive way, but nonetheless be aware of impression management as a useful tool.

“Market yourself in an authentic manner. But it is a problem for women everywhere. .. But men do that very well. We think that we’re going to be noticed and why speak about what I’ve done. So market yourself, open your stall and talk about what you’ve done in a nice way.” (B)

Women should recognise that competition is good for them and for their organizations. It makes people strive to be the best, and in fair environments, women who want to go forward should succeed as long as they are the best at what they do. Understanding how to communicate better with male work colleagues also needs to be addressed, because men may see women’s manner and qualities as weak, and hence it becomes more difficult to build the profile of someone deserving of promotion to higher levels. So the first impression that one gives is crucial.

“And dealing with men, I had to come from their side to understand how to communicate with them and then talk with them in their own language. And some of these men, if they see you like quiet and calm, they think that’s a weakness. The first day, the first impression I had to give was to tell them that I exist and I’m here.” (M)

Another director also talked about the importance of the first impression. She added that whilst there was a view that women at the top should be strong, there were two meanings of the word. Some women want to

show that they have a strong personality and will emulate those who shout to get their way. In her view, being strong was to be expert and able to lead decision-making.

“Be an expert, then you will be strong. Then you will make the others respect you, not because they are afraid that you will shout. Some people get their way this way, and in experience they are not that strong. And others prefer to be strong and make you close the argument with their right decision. With my experience, bide the time I will get the respect; the respect of the experience, not respect because you are afraid of me.” (O)

Following on that theme, there is a myth that women should adopt an aggressive tone and manner in order to climb up high in the organization. One woman said that younger females were doing this.

“They may think that that is how you need to be, in order to climb up the ladder. And it could be too idealistic for me to think that your work speaks for itself, and you just need to make sure that you deliver, and you do your job right, and it will take you to where you deserve to be.” (L)

She added that it is important that women do not blame their female gender for not getting a promotion, but keep doing the best that they can, focusing on the job. Another commented that women need to show that they can be focused, practical, and can think strategically. The other advice is to be flexible in their mind-set. This is important in the fast changing context of the UAE.

“Work hard, also focus. We know how to be emotional, but I think that we should let go of that, we should be very practical, just to gain the confidence of men. In the men’s society

or men's dominance, we should show them that we are practical, we can think, we have certain thinking, so I mean to be able to do that you have to show it." (K)

Women in mid-career start to attend more important meetings and chair committees. Advice from a successful woman was to prepare well for any meeting, and to extend knowledge of the industry situation by reading quality newspapers, reports and books. This also helped with good writing.

3.2 ASK FOR HELP, DEVELOP GOOD TEAMS

In mid-career, many women are facing increased work responsibilities just when they are taking on parental responsibilities, yet they see it as a weakness to ask for help. Women are often afraid to ask for promotions, for salary raises, for opportunities to try something challenging and new. This can leave them a few years downstream with lower salaries and less challenging experiences than their male peers, making it less likely that they will develop to their full potential.

"Don't be afraid to ask, that's the other thing I would say. Men ask and ask, and finally someone says, "Okay fine." But women don't ask – they should. Just have the courage to ask for what you want and you will most likely get it. But many times women don't ask, they don't get it and then they get upset by the fact that they didn't get it." (I)

The other point raised about needing help is that women should recognise that they cannot do everything themselves. They need to create good teams to support them, and learn to manage them as successful and coherent units.

3.3 DEVELOP POLITICAL AND INFLUENCING SKILLS

There was advice about the need to be politically astute and skilled as women move up the organization. Women should not just assume that they will be noticed for their hard work and then rewarded. Indeed, it may suit their bosses very well if the women continue to work hard to support them, rather than think about promoting them.

"A lot of men, they play the political game. But when you go up the ladder, it's not only a matter of competence because women believe that if we work hard, we're going to be noticed and someone's going to come and tell us like the princess thing, I'm going to put the tiara on you, you're going to be a princess. This is not how it happens." (B)

So women need to develop influence as well as competence, and *"know the written rules of your organization but also the unwritten rules; there are a lot of unwritten rules."* Understanding when and how decisions get made in the organization is important. Often major discussions happen the day before or even minutes before the board meeting, so women should arrive early.

"The meeting is just to say yes. So understanding how decisions are made in your company at senior level. Developing not only your competence (which is what we do well usually), but your influence within the organization, so this would be more advice. Play the political game in an authentic way. .. Understand who makes decisions, understand who is an influencer, understand who can be a career enabler for you and be very aware of that." (B)

As the quote above illustrates, it is possible to build up political and influence skills, but it needs to be handled well and appropriately.

3.4 FIND A GOOD MENTOR

Finding someone to give advice and act as a sounding board, to help one think through the concerns at hand is recommended by all of the interviewees. The other comment is that there may be very senior executives from a variety of nationalities in the UAE who may want to give something back to the community, so there is a source of good advice there.

“Now I would ask young ladies to go and engage with people that they admire and tell them, men or women. You have a lot of foreign CEOs here or managing directors, either from Arab origin or from Europe or Australia or whatever, that are in a stage in their lives where they want to give back to the community, they want to leave a legacy and they would welcome having one or two women that they want to help and sponsor or mentor.” (B)

3.5 BUILD UP YOUR NETWORK

As well as making contact with mentors, women were recommended to build up their business networks, and always be prepared to hand over a business card and have a welcoming sentence ready. However as one interviewee revealed, such behaviour does not always come naturally.

“I always have a set of business cards in my bag. I have no problem exchanging cards and just finding a door opener when I meet someone and just saying, “How are you doing today?” This was something I couldn’t do four years ago. So networking is of absolute importance – I realise that now. I wish I had known that before, tell young women.” (B)

Interviewees were asked whether networks should extend between sexes. The view was that the network should be business focused and professional, and hence gender

should not matter. Women often take comfort from their female networks, but should also network with men. Another interviewee added that it was important to stay in touch with the community, and its international aspects, using social media such as the internet, to build and maintain good networks.

3.6 DON'T FORGET THE STRATEGIC PERSPECTIVE, SET PERSONAL TARGETS

A perceptive comment was made by one of the successful women about women’s typical behaviour. She said that women care so much about their work that they get focused on the detail of the task. They are so keen to deliver a perfect result that they forget that they need a strategic perspective on their work and their career. She had missed out on opportunities to study because she was so intent on delivering the task in hand. Whilst this is not to recommend that tasks go unfinished, it is important to deliver what is needed on time to a specified standard. They should not take a perfectionist view of the task, nor take such personal ownership of it that it disrupts one’s other chances to move on. Allied to the previous point, it is recommended that women set targets for themselves, if they want to reach board level appointments.

“You need to put a target for yourself and build to reach that target to become a board member. You don’t just try to push yourself to be a board member, but you need to pull sometimes away from work for your own time, to build yourself to get some kind of education, or get to know the ways of getting into being a board member.” (N)

The rewards are high, despite the hard work that is necessary. *“It is very interesting to be a part of the company, or the organization”*, said one Emirati board member.

4. MORE THAT WOMEN SHOULD DO WHEN AT THE TOP

4.1 GET ONTO A SMALL-SCALE BOARD FOR EXPERIENCE

One piece of advice was to consider getting onto small-scale boards, to get the experience: *“Start with some experiences in non-formal boards or NGO boards.”* However another woman said that the legal personal responsibility of a voluntary sector board director was nothing like that of a corporate director, so there was still a big step up to be made. A participant said that becoming a board member does not necessarily mean that giving up their current job. The would-be director could use annual leave for board meetings, if absence was not given by the employer.

4.2 LEAVE A LEGACY

Three women mentioned the importance of leaving a legacy of a well-managed or well-governed business, especially for family businesses. One woman was preparing for her eventual replacement, and she saw her own success reflected in how well her organization would continue after her.

“I’m preparing a position for someone to come, to come after me. Because that’s actually the success. The success is not that I appear how many times on TV or in the newspapers. Success is that when you leave, and I always say this to my staff, “When I leave I want the people coming after me to say, ‘She really did a great job and we’re taking over now.’” And this is, for me, success and I think this is one thing that the new generation should be aware of.” (E)

Succession planning is a big issue in the UAE, where there are many family-owned firms. Women with corporate governance training and experience could help bring such boards into better shape for the future,

helping businesses in terms of setting up governance structures and processes to tighten up stewardship of the firm’s resources for the next generation.

4.3 SENIOR WOMEN SHOULD HELP OTHER WOMEN

The women in this study reporting doing a lot to support younger women, including mentoring, setting up women’s career development groups in their organizations, public speaking, sponsoring and giving references. They said that those at the top should be more supportive of those coming up behind them. One interviewee said that during her career she had met a number of women who had been unhelpful to other women, and felt that *“women in the workforce too could be a little bit more supportive of each other, especially as they get senior”*. Another participant echoed the sentiment, taking the view that senior people should support and encourage and teach the younger generation so that they too can be successful.

“Always women should support other women. Even if you don’t agree with them, or there is a conflict of interest between you and them. You should just support them, encourage and teach them that they should be in this position. And this is what supported me. I found a superior who was always encouraging, and always motivating, and this is what made me reach my goal. So my role is to help the younger generation to be in the same position.” (J)

Such generosity of spirit is inspiring, and the women participants in this study have certainly contributed to the next generation of women directors by giving their time, their honesty and their advice.

5. WOMEN AS MOTHERS

The advice for women as mothers is that it is very difficult to be both a good mother and a successful businesswoman or leader. “I’m sorry, it is very difficult” said one of the interviewees. Another participant commented that working women should protect their family’s needs, and balance these with their career.

“I always thought we have to work and we have to really be successful. After having also a family and children, I started to think maybe, not a different way, but you need

to also protect your family and you need to ensure that you are giving time to your children, to your family, beside also giving time to what you do, what you work. We really need to balance things out.” (A)

A further point made by an interviewee was that mothers should treat their children equally, whether boys or girls, a reminder that so much of who we become depends on our upbringing, particularly our parents. Figure 9 maps out the advice to women at all stages of their careers.

FIGURE 9: INTERVIEWEES’ RECOMMENDATIONS FOR UAE WOMEN

YOUNG WOMEN	WOMEN AS MOTHERS	MID-CAREER WOMEN	WOMEN ALWAYS	TOP WOMEN
Careful choice of studies	Bring up girls equal to to boys	Build expertise & profile	Set goals	Try small NFP board
Persistence	Encourage education	Manage first impressions	Self-knowledge	Leave a Legacy
Self-Belief	Balance	Get Mentor	Passion	Help other women
Enact life-long learning		Influencing skills	Hard work	
		Team Building	Balance career & culture	
		Network	Respect others	
		Keep eye on career process		

OVERALL CONCLUSIONS

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1. WOMEN'S JOURNEYS TO THE UAE BOARDROOMS

The aim of this project was to identify the challenges that women face in their journeys to the boardrooms of the UAE and their integration on boards, and to facilitate discussion on possible solutions. This report has revealed a series of journeys made by some of the most successful women in the UAE today. They all have coped with many challenges en route, but acknowledge the enormous support that they have received from family, mentors, role models and business superiors in a rapidly changing environment. The participants all commented warmly on UAE government support for the progress of women. A key part of this study was to understand women's experiences as board members, often as the first woman board member. For many, it was challenging, and for some, doubly so due to their position not only as the first and usually only woman but also as the youngest board member. Women emphasized the need for corporate governance training, in order to undertake the financial monitoring aspects of the board role. This is very important for board members of family businesses, where governance structures are often limited, due to the patriarchal nature of the board. Women also should be included in family business succession plans.

2. WHY DOES THE UAE NEED WOMEN ON BOARDS?

Participants said that UAE boards need women, because of the particular qualities that they are likely to bring to the boardroom. These include the more transformational leadership style preferred by women, better team-working and a reduction in aggressive

boardroom culture. Furthermore, women are much less willing to take risky and unethical ventures, going for steady growth and improvements rather than a fast but risky return. Women bring diversity of views and experiences, and hence decision quality is improved as issues are well explored, with people concerns also more likely to be taken into account. Another contribution from adding more women is that they are so well educated and keen on lifelong learning, they will contribute their up-to-date knowledge to the decision-making and board monitoring functions. Finally, the UAE should not waste women's potential but get a good return on the investment made in women's education and development in recent years.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS BY THE INTERVIEWEES

Interviewees made four sets of recommendations. The first was for the Government to consider, and the strongest views were to do with quotas for women on boards. Whilst four women are not in favour of introducing a quota, more than two-thirds of the women participants discussed the implementation of a quota with serious consideration of the positive aspects of such a measure. Those not in favour believe that in time, talented UAE women who have taken up education in the last two decades would progress to board level positions, and so there is no need for intervention. They also believe that a meritocracy has to prevail, despite the imbalance in board membership. In contrast, many of the other women supported a quota to achieve faster change, and suggested that this should be implemented first in the public sector. Other suggestions were made to improve governance in UAE

organizations and to extend maternity leave. The second group of recommendations were for employers. These were focused around talent management structures for women and men. The third set of suggestions concerned men at work, as fathers and as husbands, and how they could better support women's careers. The final group of recommendations were about what women should be doing throughout their careers to help themselves.

If a quota is considered necessary, then there needs to be some lead time for compliance, possibly three to five years. There may be insufficient qualified talent at present, and it is not advisable to mandate appointment of under-qualified women to boards simply to fulfill quota requirements, as this is bad for the women, their boards and the organizations. The lead time would allow for the development of a talent pool of women who can take up the role of director effectively. The women should undergo formal corporate governance training in the duties and role of board directors. This would counter views that women are just on boards because of the quota and that they are not to be taken seriously. After preparation, these women would be well-qualified for future directorships in both public and private sectors. A government mechanism needs to identify the women to go into the talent pool, and to highlight and profile the women who are ready for board appointments.

There is another advantage in such a development process. Corporate governance in the UAE is still in its infancy, and needs better implementation in many sectors. Many family businesses in the UAE are already privatized, or considering listing in the future. The introduction of a mandatory seat for a woman well trained in corporate governance would refresh the skills and knowledge of the family board, as well as providing diversity of experience and values by her gender.

Another important resource that has been mentioned by some of these senior women is the goodwill and sponsorship of chairmen of UAE institutions. They could form an action group to identify and mentor one or two women just below board level in non-competing companies for a couple of years, to help them gain a better perspective of the director's role, to introduce them to their networks and act as sponsors when the women are ready for assessment and directorships or public office. A group of UK chairmen has been doing this for the last few years and has made a real impact on the numbers of women being appointed to FTSE boards. This should work well in the UAE.

This Report presents research that is part of the first phase of a major initiative to address the lack of women on UAE boards. Further studies are needed to identify senior male directors' perspectives and reactions to the suggestions made here by their female peers. Studies are needed of private sector boards, where there are so few women, to see what the barriers are according to the board members, and according to the senior-most women in the organization, whatever level that may be. The study could also be extended to GCC countries, to share experience and possible solutions.

This project would not have been possible without the support of the 16 women executive board members who gave their time to be interviewed, and who offered the benefit of their own experiences and advice. It is hoped that this Report will prove useful to UAE women, as there is much good advice here that they can enact themselves. It also should make clear to the UAE Government that women appreciate what has been done already, and these suggestions are made with a desire to make the UAE an even better place to work and live, for both women and men.

WHITE PAPER:
DIVERSITY & THE BOARDROOM
THE CASE FOR WOMEN IN REGIONAL (UAE) BOARDS

WHITE PAPER:

DIVERSITY & THE BOARDROOM

THE CASE FOR WOMEN IN REGIONAL (UAE) BOARDS

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Corporate governance broadly defined as the way corporates and organizations are managed and controlled have taken root globally and regionally. One of the areas of focus in the development of corporate governance frameworks has been board diversity, that is to the extent boards create an appropriate dynamic to challenge group-thinking with an eye towards enhancing shareholder value. As a matter of fact a whole body of research has shown that a diverse board generally is an effective board as manifested in company performance. In particular corporate governance codes in the UAE attempt to address the board diversity issue by laying out a definition of 'independent directors' and prescribing that there should be, at the very least, one-third of the board being independent directors. To explore and develop pools of potential directors, Hawkamah and Mudara IOD with the support of the Dubai Women Established, launched the Women in Boards Initiative coming from the notion that women can be a good source of this director talent pool.

Reviewing board memberships of listed companies in Abu Dhabi Exchange (ADX) and Dubai Financial Markets (DFM), there are only 11 women directors serving in UAE publicly listed company boards and only one UAE listed company has 2 women directors serving its board. The situation is definitely different in the Governmental Sector, where 30% of female employees are in senior

posts and cases of female ministers are not rare, and in legislative bodies. Thus lessons can be learnt from the way the government nurtured women engagement in the public sector labor force, as well as identified and developed leaders.

Quotas may represent a solution to favor women's engagement on boards, sending a political message of the government's vision for more diversity in leadership, but this should be supported by various initiatives. First, mentoring and support programs for women could allow for 'safe space' for women leaders to flourish. Even though they need to go beyond this 'safe space' as board appointments come about by being more public about ones accomplishments and the networks that would support ones candidacy for board seat. Last, investing in ongoing career development that also enhances ones network is another solution. Joining and being active in professional bodies, trade associations and chambers of commerce would facilitate in the network building, information sharing, and personal development.

2. CASE

Corporate governance broadly defined as the way corporates and organizations are managed and controlled have taken root globally and regionally. The global financial crisis and a series of corporate scandals have highlighted the urgent need to address corporate governance issues on the

regulatory, shareholder, board and executive levels.

In response, international organizations, governments, and professional bodies have issued policy statements, codes and principles, guidance and best practice documents, and regulations to create a common framework on corporate governance that builds on laws and regulations, better business practices, and business culture.

One of the areas of focus in the development of corporate governance frameworks has been board diversity, that is to the extent boards create an appropriate dynamic to challenge groupthink with an eye towards enhancing shareholder value.

A whole body of research on markets outside of the GCC and MENA has shown that a diverse board generally is an effective board as manifested in company performance. An August 2012 study by Credit Suisse's Research Institute looking at 2,360 global companies have shown that those companies that have some female board representation outperformed those with no women on the board in terms of share price performance. Additionally, the study showed that stocks with greater gender diversity on their boards tend to perform best when markets are falling and exhibit less volatility.

The same study also highlighted various approaches by governments and regulators in creating a path towards greater board diversity. Some markets have advanced coercive action and creating quotas (as in Norway), others have encouraged voluntary commitments (as in US and Canada), while others adopted a collaborative approach (as in the UK).

Corporate governance codes issued by MENA and GCC capital market regulators and some central bank regulators attempt to address the board diversity issue by laying out a definition of 'independent directors' and prescribing that there should be, at the very least, one-third of the board being independent directors. While most of these codes follow the 'comply-or-explain' model of regulatory oversight, the articulation of such an independence requirement in boards is a positive step towards better corporate governance practices.

Hawkamah, Institute for Corporate Governance, as a 'think-and-do-tank' developed for the Middle East and North Africa (including the Gulf Cooperation Council) countries has been doing pioneering work in creating benchmark research with an aim to push the corporate governance agenda, engaging regional regulators and companies to articulate the best way forward for better corporate governance practices.

Meanwhile, in working with many listed companies and in conversations with regional regulators, Hawkamah has discovered a growing concern of a dearth of capable non-executive, independent directors. Hawkamah responded with its Mudara Institute of Directors initiative to build and develop the capacity of directors to serve the region's board rooms and push for director professionalism.

According to Hawkamah studies, 35% of listed companies in the MENA region do not have independent directors serving in their boards. Nomination Committees that have been introduced in the corporate governance codes are mandated to identify these directors and address succession plans. But where do these committees and boards find the independent directors? A

growing number of companies are utilizing board appointment services by various head-hunting agencies, even though many boards still rely on their networks to identify these independent directors which by itself undermines the independence criteria.

As an alternative to explore and develop other pools of potential directors, Hawkamah and Mudara with the support of the Dubai Women Establishment, launched the Women in Boards Initiative coming from the notion that women can be a good source of this director talent pool.

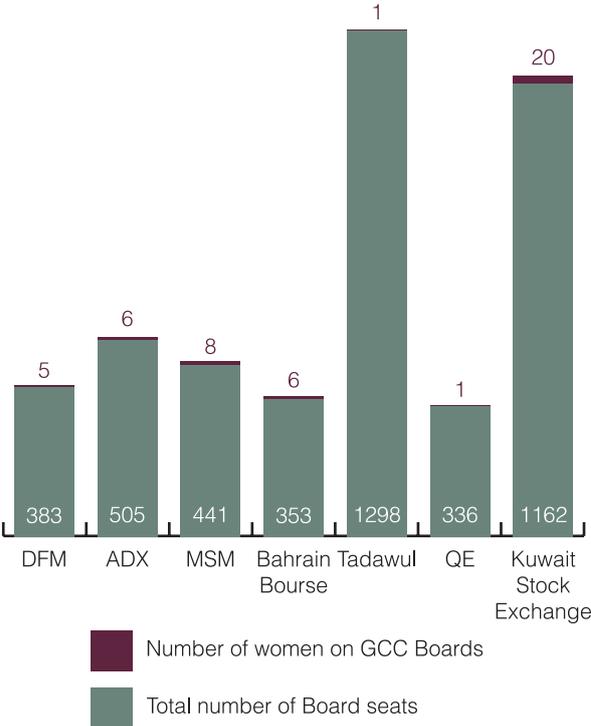
The case for women makes sense as women's capabilities are typically underutilized in the GCC region. World Bank studies have shown that only 27% of the total women population is in the workforce, compared to 84% of men. However, literacy rate for women in the GCC is at an average of 84%, and female graduates in the GCC outnumber male graduates.

3. CURRENT STATE OF WOMEN IN BOARDS IN GCC LISTED COMPANIES

Previous research conducted by Hawkamah and The National Investor in 2008 showed that over 60 board seats in the region are occupied by women, which represents 1.5% of the total board population. Since then, Hawkamah collected publicly available information (from stock exchange disclosures, annual reports and company websites) using 2011 annual reports and found out that there was a decrease in female board representation from 63 seats in 2007 to 43 seats in 2011.

Of the GCC companies that have more than one woman in its board one is an insurance company, two are in the financial services industry, one is in tourism sector and another is in technology.

BOARD SEATS AND WOMEN REPRESENTATION



Source: Stock Exchange Disclosures, Company Reports & Hawkamah Research

Looking at the women in boards universe on a national level amongst GCC countries, it should be noted that Kuwait has more women serving its listed companies boards, followed by the UAE, Oman, Bahrain and Qatar respectively.

4. WOMEN IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR

As a matter of government policy in the UAE, Saudi, and Qatar, governments have fostered women serving in the public sector, with female ministers in the UAE, Bahrain, Kuwait and Oman. In the UAE alone women constitute 66% of the public sector workforce, 30% of which are in senior posts, according to 2010 UAE Statistics Office. In Saudi, 31% of the government work forces are women.

Another source of talent is those women that sit in various legislative and regulatory bodies. According to data collected by Inter-Parliamentary Union, 17.5% of the UAE's members of the Federal National Council are women. UAE, by far, is one of the leaders in the GCC in having women represented in government. Bahrain follows with 10% of its legislative body being women, and Oman at 1.2%

there is growing interest by GCC women towards entrepreneurship.

World Bank data has shown that only 13% of businesses in the Middle East and North Africa (which unfortunately does not include GCC) are owned by women. The below Gallup research is not necessarily inconsistent with the World Bank data.

Comprehensive data does not exist on women entrepreneurs in the GCC, however recently released Gallup research suggests that, while coming from a low benchmark,

WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS IN THE GCC

COUNTRY	% OF WOMEN OWNING A BUSINESS	% OF WOMEN PLANNING TO START A BUSINESS IN THE NEXT 12 MONTHS
UAE	2%	4%
BAHRAIN	3%	4%
KUWAIT	2%	4%
QATAR	6%	32%
SAUDI	2%	2%

Source: Gallup Research (March 2011 - January 2012)

5. MOVING FORWARD

While senior leadership positions occupied by women in the GCC are still few and far between, various indicators are showing a rise in more visible women leaders in the region. The promise is there, but what needs to happen to accelerate more women in regional boards?

Is a quota system necessarily the best approach? Experience of Norway has shown that announcing a quota target facilitates, but quotas alone will not necessarily provide the solution to the challenge. Many academics, in trying to explain the lack of women entrepreneurs in the GCC, have cited unfavorable cultural attitudes towards women and business, cumbersome business environments that are a challenge to men (and more so women because of the unfavorable cultural attitudes), and family laws influencing economic regulations thus complicating even more the business environment for women.

An institutional approach that attempts to facilitate and support women leadership maybe a way forward. Lessons can be learned from the way the governments nurtured women engagement in the public sector labor force, as well as identifying and developing leaders. Quotas maybe a solution to send a political message of the society and government's vision for more diversity in leadership, but this should be supported by various initiatives.

Mentoring and support programs for women could allow for 'safe space' for women leaders to flourish. But they need to go beyond this 'safe space' as board appointments come about by being more public about ones accomplishments and the networks that would support ones candidacy for board seat. The 2012 Gallup poll cited that women

in the GCC report to have less access to a mentor, which is crucial to their career development.

Last, investing in on-going career development that also enhances ones network is another solution. Joining and being active in professional bodies, trade associations and chambers of commerce, whether gender-specific or not, would facilitate in the network building, information sharing, and personal development.

Disclaimer

Hawkamah's White Paper series is a collection of short briefing papers on pressing corporate governance concerns facing the region. The White Papers are aimed to raise critical issues that regional companies and policy makers need to address.

In cases where White Papers are developed by specific authors, the opinions expressed in the related article are the author's and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of Hawkamah nor any of its affiliated organizations.

We welcome your feedback or response to this White Paper by emailing us at either info@hawkamah.org or info@mudara.org

ORGANISATIONS

DUBAI WOMEN ESTABLISHMENT



GOVERNMENT OF DUBAI

مؤسسة دبي للمرأة
DUBAI WOMEN ESTABLISHMENT



The Dubai Women Establishment (DWE) was formed in 2006 under law no. (24) by His Highness Sheikh Mohammed Bin Rashid Al Maktoum – the UAE Vice President and Prime Minister, and Ruler of Dubai. DWE is headed by Her Highness Sheikha Manal Bint Mohammed Bin Rashid Al Maktoum – Wife of His Highness Sheikh Mansour bin Zayed Al Nahyan – UAE Minister of Presidential Affairs. As a statutory body of Dubai Government and as per its founding decree, the Establishment aims to encourage and facilitate the participation of Emirati women in the workforce and society.

Mandate includes extensive research to identify and quantify status of women in the workforce of Dubai, as well as initiatives towards women's further development opportunities. Awareness and policies that are conducive to women in the workforce will be recommended to Dubai Government as solutions to enable women to play a greater role within the UAE and on a global scale.

CRANFIELD INTERNATIONAL CENTRE FOR WOMEN LEADERS

CRANFIELD UNIVERSITY, UNITED KINGDOM



The International Centre for Women Leaders, directed by Professor Susan Vinnicombe OBE is committed to helping organisations develop the next generation of leaders from the widest possible pool of talent. We are unique in focussing our research, management development and writing on gender diversity at leadership level. The objectives of the Centre are to:

- Lead the national debate on gender diversity and corporate boards,
- Provide a centre of excellence on women leaders, from which organisations can obtain the latest trends, up-to-date research and benchmark best practice;
- Identify and examine emergent issues in gender diversity and leadership, through sponsored research in partnership with industry and government;
- Share research findings globally through conferences, workshops, academic articles, practitioner reports and in the international press.

For more information on the Centre's research and executive development, please visit our Centre website at www.som.cranfield.ac.uk/som/research/centres. There is also available a list of our research articles in areas such as women on boards, ethnicity on boards, leadership, diversity management, gendered cultures, role models, impression management, and flexible working. We have a number of doctoral researchers studying for PhDs or DBAs within our research centre.

HAWKAMAH

THE INSTITUTE FOR CORPORATE GOVERNANCE



Hawkamah, The Institute for Corporate Governance is an international association of corporate governance practitioners, regulators, and institutions advancing home grown yet globally integrated corporate governance best practices in the region. Hawkamah's mission is to promote corporate sector reform and good governance, and assist the countries of the region in developing and implementing sustainable corporate governance strategies adapted to national requirements and objectives. By promoting its core values of transparency, accountability, fairness, disclosure, and responsibility, Hawkamah works on policy and practical aspects of corporate governance reform in the region.

For more information about Hawkamah, please visit www.hawkamah.org

MUDARA

INSTITUTE OF DIRECTORS



Mudara - Institute of Directors (IOD) is a professional membership organisation serving board members, directors and governance professionals in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. The institute promotes director excellence by advocating the interests of boards and facilitating professional development through education, research, information, networking and dialogue. The institute works to enhance the role of company directors within the public sector, private and family run businesses by providing information, research, advisory services and professional programmes to assist members and boards in raising standards of corporate governance as well as business practices.

Mudara - Institute of Directors (IOD) mission is to establish an internationally recognized institute committed to best practices for directors. For more information about Mudara IOD, please visit www.mudara.org

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AN INITIATIVE OF

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