

Fostering Gulf Talent: Strategies for National Development and Retention in the GCC



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Introduction

In the rapidly evolving economic and social landscape of the GCC region, succession planning and nationalisation targets have become pivotal elements for organisational success and national development. The GCC countries are at a crossroads where the integration of local talent into the workforce is not just a strategic necessity but a national imperative. As organisations strive to meet ambitious nationalisation targets, they face the dual challenge of adhering to regulatory mandates while also cultivating a capable and resilient workforce.

Succession planning is no longer a peripheral concern but a core strategic function that determines organisational stability and long-term success. In the GCC, this process is further complicated by the rapid pace of technological advancements, shifting market dynamics, and the need to balance traditional business practices with modern management approaches. Effective succession planning involves not only identifying and developing future leaders but also ensuring that these leaders are prepared to navigate both the opportunities and challenges inherent in the region's unique business environment.

Nationalisation targets, exemplified by initiatives such as Emiratisation in the UAE and Saudisation in Saudi Arabia, underscore a broader objective of increasing the participation of local talent in the workforce. These initiatives are designed to drive economic diversification, reduce reliance on expatriate labour, and foster sustainable growth. For organisations, this means not only meeting regulatory quotas but also addressing the underlying cultural and operational shifts necessary for the successful integration of local talent.

The complexities of these targets are multifaceted. They involve understanding and adapting to regulatory frameworks, overcoming skill gaps, and implementing cultural transformations within organisations.

As highlighted in this paper, the success of nationalisation efforts depends on a nuanced approach that includes tailored talent development programs, proactive succession planning, and strategic partnerships with leadership advisory teams.

This thought paper aims to provide a comprehensive exploration of these themes. We will delve into the challenges and opportunities associated with succession planning in the GCC, the imperative of nationalisation targets, and the practical steps organisations can take to align their talent strategies with these goals. By examining key facts, figures, and case studies, we will offer actionable insights and best practices that Senior HR Leaders can employ to drive effective succession planning and nationalisation efforts.

Our discussion will also highlight the critical role of leadership advisory teams in shaping and implementing these strategies. Their expertise in tailoring talent development programs to meet nationalisation objectives is crucial for ensuring that organisations not only comply with regulatory requirements but also build a robust pipeline of local leaders who are equipped to drive long-term success.

Nationalisation Targets: Understanding the Imperative

Nationalisation targets, exemplified by initiatives such as Emiratisation and Saudisation, represent a strategic imperative for businesses operating in the UAE and Saudi Arabia. These initiatives aim to bolster the participation of local talent in the workforce, fostering economic diversification and sustainable growth.

To encourage compliance with nationalisation targets, governments have introduced regulatory frameworks and incentives, compelling organisations to adapt their talent strategies to align with national priorities.

One example of a regulatory framework and incentive introduced by governments to encourage compliance with nationalisation targets is the quota system. In the UAE, for instance, the government has implemented Emiratisation quotas requiring organisations to maintain a certain percentage of Emirati nationals in their workforce, particularly in key sectors such as banking, finance, and government. These quotas often stipulate specific percentages of Emirati employees that must be hired or promoted within organisations.

To incentivise compliance with these quotas, governments may offer various benefits to organisations, such as preferential treatment in government contracts, access to government-funded training programs for Emirati employees, or reduced visa fees for expatriate employees hired in conjunction with Emirati nationals. Additionally, non-compliance with Emiratisation quotas may result in penalties or fines for organisations, further motivating them to align their talent strategies with national priorities and meet the prescribed targets.

This regulatory framework and incentive structure compels organisations to adapt their talent acquisition, development, and retention strategies to prioritise the hiring and advancement of local talent, thereby contributing to the broader nationalisation objectives of the government.



“ To encourage compliance with nationalisation targets, governments have introduced regulatory frameworks and incentives... ”

Emiratisation Targets: Key Facts and Figures

The UAE government has intensified its efforts to integrate Emiratis into the private sector as part of a broader strategy to enhance the country's socio-economic development. The Ministry of Human Resources and Emiratisation (MoHRE) has recently expanded its Emiratisation targets, which now impact over 12,000 companies with 20 to 49 employees.

These companies, operating across 14 key economic sectors, are required to hire at least one Emirati national by the end of 2024, and an additional Emirati by the end of 2025. The targeted sectors include information and communications, finance and insurance, real estate, healthcare, education, and more – industries that are pivotal to the UAE's continued economic growth¹.

This expansion is part of a broader initiative by the Emirati Human Resources Competitiveness Council, *Nafis*, which aims to integrate 75,000 Emiratis into the private sector over the next five years. The initiative seeks not only to increase the presence of Emiratis in the workforce but also to enhance their competitiveness by equipping them with the necessary skills to thrive in various industries².

Companies that do not comply with these Emiratisation requirements will face substantial financial penalties. For instance, businesses that fail to employ at least one Emirati by the end of 2024 will be fined AED 96,000 per unfilled position, with this penalty increasing to AED 108,000 in 2025 if they do not meet the requirement to hire a second Emirati. These fines are designed to ensure that companies take their Emiratisation obligations seriously and will be enforced starting January 2025.

¹<https://www.mohre.gov.ae/en/media-centre/news/2/1/2024/mohre-begins-implementing-emiratisation-targets-on-over-12000-private-companies-with-20-49-employees.aspx>

²<https://u.ae/en/information-and-services/jobs/employment-in-the-private-sector/emiratis-employment-in-private-sector>



Moreover, the regulations extend beyond smaller companies. For businesses with 50 or more employees, the Emiratisation mandate includes a requirement to increase the number of skilled Emirati workers by 2% annually, aiming for a total Emiratisation rate of 10% by 2026. Non-compliance with this directive will result in a monthly fine of AED 6,000 per unfilled position, with the penalty increasing by AED 1,000 annually until 2026³. This structured approach to Emiratisation ensures that the integration of Emirati workers is consistent and impactful across various sectors.

The UAE government's commitment to these targets is further highlighted by its focus on compliance and the prevention of fraudulent practices. For instance, Ministerial Resolution No. 663 of 2022 outlines strict guidelines to avoid "false Emiratisation," where companies might falsely claim to employ Emiratis to benefit from government incentives. Violating companies, along with any beneficiaries who are complicit in such practices, are subject to severe penalties, including fines and other sanctions.

These measures underscore the UAE's dedication to embedding Emiratis in the private sector, not only as employees but as key contributors to the nation's economic vision. By enforcing strict compliance measures and offering robust support through platforms like *Nafis*, the UAE is ensuring that its national workforce is both empowered and actively engaged in driving the country's growth. The broader implication of these initiatives is a transformative shift in the UAE's labour market, where Emiratis are increasingly taking on roles that were previously dominated by expatriates. This shift is essential for the UAE's long-term economic sustainability and for achieving a more balanced and inclusive economy that leverages the full potential of its national talent.

³<https://www.mohre.gov.ae/en/laws-and-regulations/laws.aspx>



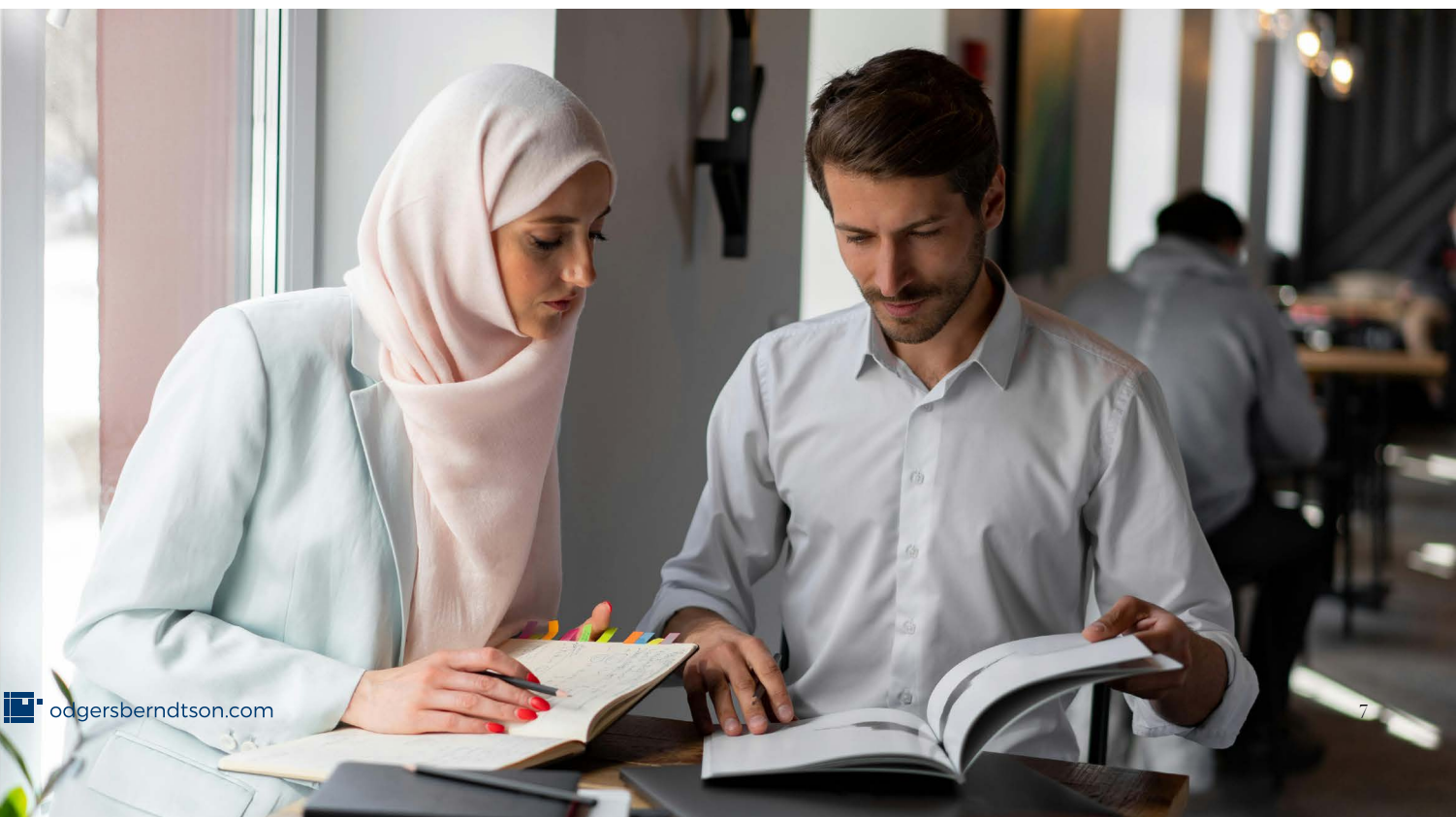
Saudisation Targets: Key Facts and Figures

The *Nitaqat* Program, launched in June 2011 through Ministerial Resolution No. 4040, is a pivotal initiative in Saudi Arabia's broader Saudisation strategy. This program, spearheaded by the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development, aims to increase the employment of Saudi nationals within the private sector by mandating specific employment quotas for Saudi employees across various industries⁴.

The *Nitaqat* system classifies private sector companies into six distinct categories based on their compliance with Saudisation targets. These categories are Platinum, High Green, Mid Green, Low Green, Yellow, and Red. Each category reflects a different level of Saudisation achievement, with Platinum being the highest tier whereby organisations are eligible for various incentives, including expedited visa services for expatriate workers, greater flexibility in hiring, and fewer restrictions on business operations. The Red category is the lowest which represents companies that have failed to meet Saudisation requirements. These companies encounter severe penalties and restrictions, including potential business closures and operational constraints.

The *Nitaqat* Program mandates that private sector employers with more than nine employees must hire a specified percentage of Saudi nationals, which varies according to industry and company size. The exact requirements are designed to accommodate the diverse needs of different sectors and businesses, ensuring a balanced approach to increasing local employment. Companies with fewer than ten employees are exempt from these specific percentage requirements but are still required to employ at least one Saudi national.

⁴<https://www.hrsd.gov.sa/en/knowledge-centre/decisions-and-regulations/regulation-and-procedures/832742>



The implementation of *Nitaqat* has had a profound impact on the Saudi labour market. By the end of October 2013, there was a closure of over 200,000 private firms in 2014 that failed to meet the Saudisation criteria. In the second quarter of 2013 alone, Saudi Arabia successfully regularised nearly four million foreign workers as part of the *Nitaqat* program, which included significant changes to the legal status of expatriates, such as profession changes and sponsorship transfers.

The *Nitaqat* Program underwent further revisions in 2021 with the introduction of Ministerial Decision No. 182495. This update aimed to simplify the classification process by consolidating sectors and introducing a dynamic Saudisation rate that adjusts based on company size. These adjustments were intended to provide greater regulatory stability and facilitate a more gradual increase in Saudisation requirements as companies expand.

The National Labor Observatory's 2023 report highlights the private sector's critical role in Saudi Arabia's employment landscape, with 11.4 million employees, including 2.34 million Saudi nationals as of April 2023⁵. This growth reflects the effectiveness of government initiatives like the *Nitaqat* Program, under Vision 2030, aimed at reducing unemployment and boosting female workforce participation. Notably, Saudi female unemployment dropped to 15.5% in 2023, down from 33% in 2016. The Human Resources Development Fund's substantial investments in training and empowerment programs have further supported these goals, aiding nearly 74,000 Saudis in securing private-sector jobs in Q1 of 2024 alone.

⁵<https://nlo.gov.sa/landing/reports/report-details/263?lang=en>



Cultural Transformation for Nationalisation

Central to the achievement of nationalisation targets is a cultural transformation within organisations. Cultivating an inclusive and diverse workplace culture, rooted in cultural sensitivity, is paramount to attracting and retaining local talent.

Companies must go beyond tokenistic efforts and embrace genuine inclusivity, fostering environments where all employees feel valued and empowered to contribute. Drawing from successful case studies, we explore actionable strategies for cultural transformation that can drive nationalisation objectives forward.

Mubadala Development Company (UAE)

Mubadala Development Company is a strategic investment and development company owned by the Government of Abu Dhabi. Mubadala has implemented comprehensive Emiratisation initiatives across its various business sectors, including aerospace, technology, healthcare, and energy. One key aspect of their cultural transformation strategy is the establishment of a specialised training and development program targeting Emirati talent called the *Maseeraty Development Programme*⁶. This programme offers tailored mentorship, skill development, and career advancement opportunities to young Emirati nationals, empowering them in the early stages of their careers through different pathways and certifications. By investing in the professional growth of local talent, Mubadala not only meets Emiratisation targets but also fosters a culture of inclusivity and diversity within its workforce.

⁶<https://www.mubadala.com/maseeraty-brochure/index.html>



Qatar Airways (Qatar)

Qatar Airways, the national carrier of Qatar, has implemented innovative strategies to enhance nationalisation efforts in the aviation sector. As part of its cultural transformation agenda, Qatar Airways has prioritised the recruitment, training, and advancement of Qatari nationals within the airline industry. The company offers a creative hub called Al Darb which encourages nationals to engage, create, connect and lead through mentorship opportunities, and career development pathways tailored to the needs of Qatari employees, enabling them to thrive in various roles within the organisation, including pilots, cabin crew, and management positions⁷. Qatar Airways' commitment to nurturing local talent has not only contributed to the achievement of nationalisation targets but has also strengthened the airline's reputation as a global leader in aviation, reflecting Qatar's vision for a diversified and sustainable economy.

Saudi Aramco (Saudi Arabia)

Saudi Aramco, the national oil company of Saudi Arabia, has implemented cultural transformation initiatives to support Saudisation objectives in the oil and gas sector. The company has invested in the development of Saudi talent through targeted training programs, apprenticeships, and career advancement opportunities. Saudi Aramco has also prioritised diversity and inclusion within its workforce, actively recruiting and promoting Saudi nationals to leadership positions. The company's commitment to nationalisation is reflected in its strategic partnerships with educational institutions and vocational training centres to develop the skills and competencies of local talent. Some examples include the *Board of Energy Sector Training* and the Saudi-based Technical and Vocational Training Corporation⁸. By fostering a culture of meritocracy and equal opportunity, Saudi Aramco has successfully aligned its talent strategies with nationalisation goals, contributing to the socioeconomic development of Saudi Arabia.

⁷<https://www.qatarairways.com/en/nationalisation.html#:~:text=Al%20Darb%20is%20a%20creative,a%20culture%20of%20collective%20belonging>

⁸<https://www.aramco.com/en/sustainability/responsible-business/supporting-communities/economic-and-community-projects/education-partnerships>



CASE STUDY

Strategic Talent Benchmarking in the UAE Government Sector

In a recent engagement with a prominent government entity in the UAE, the Odgers Berndtson Middle East Leadership & Advisory team was tasked with conducting technical benchmark assessments for UAE nationals as part of a broader initiative to enhance succession planning and nationalisation efforts.

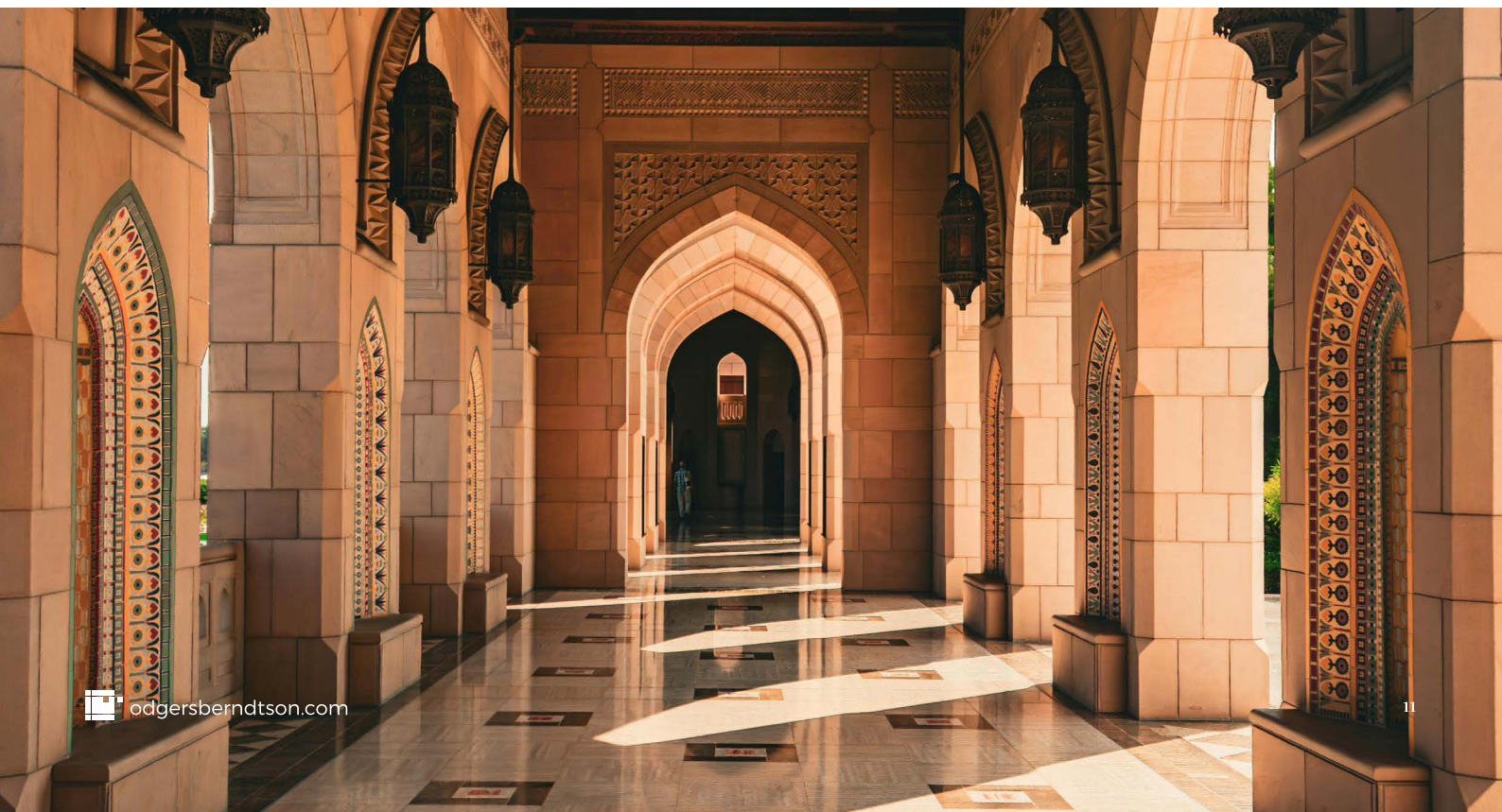
This project aimed to objectively evaluate the technical and functional proficiency of senior employees, ensuring alignment with the organisation's strategic goals.

Project Overview

Our recommended solution involved utilising senior subject matter experts (SMEs) from various sectors and functional practices

to conduct detailed technical benchmark interviews. The primary objective was to assess each nominated employee's technical capabilities against the organisation's technical competency framework, providing a comprehensive and evidence-based evaluation.

“ The primary objective was to assess each nominated employee's technical capabilities against the organisation's technical competency framework... ”



Insights and Recommendations

Our collaboration yielded several key insights from the SMEs involved in the project. One significant area for development was the need to reduce siloed working practices and encourage greater collaboration across departments and sectors. To address this, we recommended implementing forums, cross-departmental projects, stretch assignments, workshops, and enhanced knowledge management and sharing initiatives.

A refresher session on the organisation's vision and strategy was also suggested to help employees better understand how their KPIs align with broader organisational goals.

In addition to these developmental areas, feedback highlighted a high number of engaged and enthusiastic employees, presenting an opportunity to leverage this positive energy. An idea discussed was using the organisation's internal learning platform to spotlight successful initiatives, where employees could share their experiences and ongoing development activities.

Furthermore, a focus on professional career tracks, rather than just current roles, was recommended to provide more holistic career development support.

Participant Feedback

The impact of these assessments was reflected in the feedback from employees. One employee expressed their gratitude, stating:

"I am thrilled to have been selected for this programme and am eager to make the most of this incredible opportunity. The feedback report has given me invaluable insight into what I should be looking for in my future career. I appreciate the time and effort put into analysing my strengths and providing me with detailed feedback."

This project not only strengthened the client's succession planning framework but also contributed to the broader nationalisation goals by ensuring that national employees were effectively prepared for leadership roles. The collaboration demonstrated the positive outcomes of strategic talent development and the importance of aligning individual growth with organisational objectives.

“ I am thrilled to have been selected for this programme and am eager to make the most of this incredible opportunity. ”



Potential Challenges

While nationalisation initiatives align with long-term economic and social goals, they present several challenges for different stakeholders, including employers, employees, and government bodies. Effectively addressing these challenges would require a multi-faceted approach involving policy refinement, education, and corporate adaptability.

Skill Gaps and Workforce Readiness

One of the primary challenges in nationalisation efforts is the existing skill gap between local workers and industry requirements. Both Saudisation and Emiratisation initiatives face the difficulty of matching the skills of local workers with the demands of rapidly evolving sectors, such as engineering, IT, and healthcare. The education systems in both countries have traditionally been more focused on public-sector employment, resulting in a workforce that may lack the practical and technical skills needed in the private sector. This gap makes it difficult for employers to find qualified Saudi and Emirati nationals, leading to hesitance in replacing expatriates with local hires.

Addressing this challenge necessitates significant investment in education and vocational training tailored to industry needs. The Saudi and Emirati governments have recognised this and are working on improving educational curricula and establishing partnerships with private-sector companies to offer on-the-job training and internships. In Saudi Arabia, programmes like the Human Capability Development Programme under Vision 2030 are designed to bridge these skill gaps by aligning educational outcomes with labour market needs⁹. Similarly, the UAE's National Programme for Advanced Skills focuses on upskilling Emiratis to meet the demands of the future workforce¹⁰.

Cultural Barriers and Workplace Integration

Another challenge involves integrating Saudi and Emirati nationals into workplace environments that have traditionally been dominated by expatriates. Cultural differences can create friction in workplace dynamics, particularly in industries where the work culture differs significantly from what local nationals might be accustomed to. For instance, the private sector often demands longer working hours, a fast-paced environment, and different management styles, leading to a higher turnover rate among local employees¹¹.

Overcoming these barriers requires cultural sensitivity training and inclusive workplace practices. Companies that have successfully integrated Saudi and Emirati nationals into their workforce often achieve this by fostering an inclusive culture that respects local traditions while promoting a global work ethic. This might include flexible working hours, mentorship programmes, and creating career progression pathways that align with the cultural expectations of Saudi and Emirati employees¹².

⁹<https://www.vision2030.gov.sa/>

¹⁰<https://www.uae-advanceskills.gov.ae/>

¹¹<https://www.arabnews.com/>

¹²<https://gulfbusiness.com/>

“Addressing this challenge necessitates significant investment in education and vocational training tailored to industry needs.”

Employer Reluctance and Resistance to Change

Many employers, particularly in the private sector, resist nationalisation mandates due to concerns over productivity, cost, and potential disruption to business operations. Expatriate workers often have years of experience and may accept lower wages than local hires, making them more attractive to employers from a cost perspective. The mandated replacement of expatriate workers with Saudi and Emirati nationals could lead to increased labour costs, training expenses, and potential productivity losses, especially in the short term.

To address employer reluctance, the governments of Saudi Arabia and the UAE have implemented a range of incentives and penalties through their respective nationalisation programmes. In Saudi Arabia, the *Nitaqat* programme rewards companies that comply with Saudisation targets with benefits such as expedited visa processing and priority in government contracts, while penalising those that fail to meet these targets with restrictions on hiring expatriates and potential fines¹³. In the UAE, the Emiratisation programme offers financial incentives, such as salary subsidies and training grants, to companies that successfully integrate Emiratis into their workforce¹⁴. Additionally, fostering a public-private partnership approach, where companies collaborate with government agencies to develop tailored training and employment programmes, can help mitigate the perceived risks and costs associated with nationalisation.

Economic Impact on Expatriate Workers

The emphasis on nationalisation can have significant economic implications for expatriate workers, who have historically played a crucial role in the economies of Gulf countries like Saudi Arabia and the UAE. The reduction in expatriate jobs due to nationalisation policies can lead to a decrease in remittances to home countries and create economic challenges for expatriates who may have settled in the host country for years. Additionally, industries heavily reliant on expatriate labour, such as construction and hospitality, might experience labour shortages, affecting their operational efficiency.

One approach to mitigate the negative impact on expatriate workers is to implement a phased approach to nationalisation, allowing both the local and expatriate workforces to adapt over time. This could involve gradually increasing the Saudisation and Emiratisation targets while providing support for expatriates to upskill or transition to other sectors where their expertise is still needed. Moreover, the governments could introduce initiatives to encourage entrepreneurship among expatriates, enabling them to contribute to the economy in new ways.

¹³<https://www.hrsd.gov.sa/en/knowledge-centre/decisions-and-regulations/regulation-and-procedures/832742>

¹⁴<https://u.ae/en/information-and-services/jobs/employment-in-the-private-sector/emiratis-employment-in-private-sector>





Public Perception and Social Acceptance

The success of nationalisation programmes also depends on public perception and the social acceptance of these policies. There is a need to balance the economic goals of Saudisation and Emiratisation with their societal impact, ensuring that the local population views these efforts positively. Resistance can arise if the public perceives that nationalisation leads to job displacement or if the quality of services declines due to inexperienced workers replacing seasoned expatriates

Effective communication strategies are essential to address public concerns and build support for nationalisation programmes. The governments of Saudi Arabia and the UAE, along with private sector companies, should engage in transparent dialogue with the public, highlighting the long-term benefits of nationalisation, such as economic diversification and increased job opportunities for locals. Success stories of Saudi and Emirati nationals excelling in various industries should be promoted to inspire confidence and demonstrate the positive outcomes of these initiatives.

“ There is a need to balance the economic goals of Saudisation and Emiratisation with their societal impact, ensuring that the local population views these efforts positively. ”

Recommendations for Emiratisation in the Private Sector

The findings from the inaugural PwC Middle East – Emiratisation Survey 2023¹⁵ reveal a significant challenge in retaining Emirati talent within the private sector.

While there is a growing interest among the younger generation in private-sector employment in the UAE, a substantial portion of Emirati employees working in private companies are considering returning to the public sector. This trend poses a risk to sustained economic development for the UAE and undermines the long-term business benefits that companies seek to achieve through Emiratisation initiatives.

The survey, which polled 500 nationals working across the public and private sectors as well as new graduates, highlights that despite efforts to attract Emiratis into private enterprises, perceived longer-term prospects and overall working experiences often do not meet employees' expectations. Without targeted investment to boost national talent retention, recruitment programs may fail to deliver tangible benefits for both companies and the UAE economy. Moreover, private-sector employers face the risk of government penalties for the under-representation of Emiratis in the workforce.

The survey identifies compensation, career growth, and progression as the most influential factors impacting job preferences among Emirati workers in the private sector. A significant majority (59%) of Emiratis in the private sector prioritise career growth and compensation when considering job opportunities, considering these as essential factors. While attributes such as employer brand, autonomy within the job, and organisational culture may not initially determine employer choice, they can significantly influence employee retention over the long term.

For private-sector employers, retaining Emirati talent poses a strategic challenge that requires proactive measures. As reflected in the survey findings, retaining hard-won Emirati talent is likely to be the primary challenge strategically and over the long term. Therefore, private-sector organisations must focus on enhancing Emiratisation programs by addressing factors such as compensation, career advancement opportunities, and organisational culture to improve talent retention and achieve sustainable growth.

¹⁵<https://www.pwc.com/m1/en/publications/emiratisation-survey-2023-the-retention-riddle.html>



Senior Talent Development Programs

As organisations navigate the complexities of nationalisation targets, the development of senior talent emerges as a strategic imperative. Tailoring talent development programs to align with nationalisation objectives is essential for cultivating a pipeline of local leaders.

From leadership development initiatives to mentorship programs and competency assessments, organisations have a range of tools at their disposal to identify, nurture, and empower high-potential local talent. In this section, we explore best practices and innovative approaches to senior talent development that can drive organisational success in meeting nationalisation targets.

Leadership Development Centres

Alongside traditional leadership development initiatives, organisations can establish Leadership Development Centres or Assessment Centres tailored specifically for local talent. These centres offer immersive experiences and simulations to assess and develop key leadership competencies, such as strategic thinking, decision-making, and change management. Participants undergo a series of structured assessments, feedback sessions, and coaching interventions to enhance their leadership capabilities and prepare them for senior roles within the organisation.

Succession Planning and Career Pathways

To ensure a steady pipeline of qualified leaders, organisations can integrate succession planning with competency-based assessments. By identifying and assessing high-potential individuals against predefined leadership competencies, organisations can proactively groom future leaders and align their career trajectories with organisational goals. Career pathways can be structured to include developmental assignments, stretch assignments, and targeted training interventions to accelerate the growth of local talent.

“ Participants undergo a series of structured assessments, feedback sessions, and coaching interventions... ”



Continuous Learning and Development Initiatives

To address the evolving needs of the workforce, organisations can invest in continuous learning and development initiatives that encompass both technical and behavioural competencies. This includes providing access to specialised training programs, online learning platforms, and professional certifications to enhance technical skills. Behavioural competencies, such as communication, teamwork, and resilience, can be developed through targeted workshops, coaching sessions, and peer-to-peer learning experiences.

Assessment and Development of Technical and Behavioural Competencies

Organisations can utilise competency frameworks to assess and develop both technical and behavioural competencies among their senior talent. Competency-based assessments can be conducted through various methods, including psychometric assessments, 360-degree feedback, and structured interviews. Feedback from assessments can be used to create personalised development plans that address competency gaps and support career progression. Additionally, organisations can offer specialised training and coaching programs to strengthen specific technical skills and behavioural competencies identified as critical for success in leadership roles.

These examples demonstrate how organisations can integrate leadership development centres/assessment centres and competency-based assessments into their talent development strategies to effectively meet nationalisation targets. By focusing on the assessment and development of both technical and behavioural competencies, organisations can cultivate a well-rounded pool of local talent capable of driving organisational success in the long term.

“Feedback from assessments can be used to create personalised development plans that address competency gaps and support career progression.”



Conclusion: Charting the Path Forward

The journey towards effective succession planning and successful nationalisation in the GCC region is both complex and critical. As demonstrated throughout this paper, addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive approach that integrates strategic foresight, cultural sensitivity, and proactive talent management.

A crucial element in navigating this landscape is the collaboration between organisations and leadership advisory teams. Such partnerships are instrumental in developing talent programs that align with nationalisation goals while advancing broader organisational objectives. By integrating diverse insights and proven strategies, these efforts ensure that local talent is nurtured and equipped for leadership roles, transforming succession planning and nationalisation targets into a strategic initiative that enhances organisational resilience and long-term success.

Moreover, the need to balance immediate regulatory compliance with long-term talent development is paramount. Organisations must focus not only on meeting nationalisation targets but also

on creating pathways for career growth and development that retain and nurture local talent. This dual approach will enable businesses to build a robust pipeline of future leaders who are well-prepared to contribute to both their organisations and the broader socio-economic objectives of the GCC nations.

The path forward requires a collaborative effort—between the public and private sectors, expatriate and national workforces, and traditional values and modern business practices. By leveraging the expertise of leadership advisory teams and investing in tailored talent development strategies, organisations can ensure their sustainability and contribute meaningfully to a more diversified, resilient, and inclusive economy in the GCC.



About the Author



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Kavita is a Leadership & Advisory Consultant for Odgers Berndtson Middle East, based in Dubai. Prior to joining the Leadership & Advisory team, she had 6 years of experience working as an executive search professional with a proven record of sourcing candidates across various markets for roles in Canada, Africa, and the Middle East.

She is a PhD candidate in Industrial/Organisational Psychology with a research focus on talent acquisition and selection methods in the Middle East. More recently, she has been involved in designing technical competency success profiles used for executive assessments. Having lived in 3 different countries, she has been able to build relationships with people across various nationalities and enjoys learning about other cultures. Kavita holds an MA in Industrial/Organisational Psychology from Adler University and a BA in Psychology with a Minor in English Language from the University of British Columbia.

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- RQTU Verified Assessor – The British Psychological Society, Credential ID 750758.
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