



**Exploring the Impact of Perceptions of the Emiratization Initiative on the  
Engagement of Employees of UAE Nationality: A Case Study of an Oil and  
Gas Company in the UAE**

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## **Abstract**

An engaged workforce brings an organisation a range of positive benefits and may even constitute a sustainable competitive advantage. Therefore, understanding employee engagement and its antecedents is an important field of enquiry. This sequential mixed methods case study of an Emirati oil and gas company combines survey data with an interview study to address the question of employee engagement and its relation to the United Arab Emirates government's Emiratisation Initiative aimed at reducing the country's reliance on migrant labour.

The results of the survey found that employee engagement was correlated with age and education level with older employees and graduates reporting higher levels of engagement than younger employees and non-graduates. No significant predictive value was found for gender, length of service and job level. Positive perceptions of organisational support and training provision also predicted higher employee engagement. However, the relation between positive perceptions of the Emiratisation initiative and employee engagement was a negative one. Those engaged at an organisational level were less positive about the national level initiative.

Building on these results, the interview study revealed a range of findings on employee engagement on three levels, individual, organisational and national. Participants voiced the components that comprised their engagement including, support, training, public sector motivation and in the case of the initiative, national pride. Counterbalancing this there were some expressions of the unreadiness of the Emirati workforce including English language skills, and a desire for more direct support from the scheme.

This research contributes the first study of the relationship between Emiratisation and employee engagement. It is also the first to give voice to the employee perspective on these phenomena. It raises questions on the perceptions held of the sources of workplace support and whether a zero-sum effect exists whereby those feeling supported by their employer perceive less support from national policies such as the Emiratisation initiative.

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# **Chapter 1 : Introduction to the Research**

## **1.1 Introduction**

Countries as rich in resources as the UAE still need to base their economy on a productive workforce, maximising both participation and capacity. The rapid rate of growth of the UAE has left its economy lopsided in important regards, particularly its reliance on oil and gas extraction and on the lack of participation of Emirati nationals in non-governmental sectors of the economy. Its reliance on migrant labour, particularly in the private sector, and the reluctance of Emiratis to take up private sector employment has left the government of this Gulf state with major challenges. One policy response has been to aim to nationalise the workforce, a policy known as Emiratisation. Under this policy it is intended that more Emiratis take up employment in both public and private sectors, reducing reliance on migrant labour.

While the need to nationalise the workforce to reduce reliance on migrant labour is mainly associated with resource-rich countries of the Gulf, the need for a high productivity workforce is universal. Governments cannot indefinitely sustain a reliance on migrant labour if they hope to achieve socio-economic security, inclusion among its nationals and a resilience to external shocks (Elsharnouby et al., 2023). Many concepts and factors have been proposed in organisational and management literature as central to this aim. This thesis focuses on the concept of employee engagement. Employee engagement is defined as “the harnessing of organisation members’ selves to their work roles; in engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performances” (Khan, 1990, p. 694). This definition is particularly appropriate as it highlights the three forms of engagement – physical, cognitive (through thought/intellectually) and emotional. The author (Khan) is also the foremost pioneer of the development of the concept.

So, with Emiratisation and employee engagement as the two main concepts of interest, this research studies a series of relationships using a mixed methods case study of an Emirati oil and gas company. The rest of this chapter offers the reader an overview of the UAE, its economy and labour force before presenting the research aims, objectives and research questions.

### **1.2.1 Economy of the UAE**

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) is a federation of seven Emirates formed in 1971 following the end of British colonial rule. Rulers of the previously independent states agreed the establishment of a new sovereign state, to be known as the United Arab Emirates (The UAE National Archives, 2018). Before the discovery of oil in the 1950s, the economy relied heavily on trade, fishing, and the pearling industry (Taryam, 1986). The first commercial oil was discovered in the UAE in Abu Dhabi in 1958. More than 90% of oil and gas is located in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi, which is the largest Emirate, and the eponymous city serves as the capital (UAE Government, 2020).

Fuelled by oil and gas exports, the economy grew dramatically. GDP rose from AED 178 billion in 2001 to AED 960 billion by 2014 (Statistics Centre - Abu Dhabi (SCAD), 2022). More recently, economic growth has been hampered by first an oil price slump, and second, the Covid-19 pandemic. The oil price slump between mid-2014 and early 2016 gave fresh emphasis to the already long-standing goal of diversifying the economy away from its reliance on oil and gas exports (Stocker et al., 2018). Nevertheless, thirty percent of GDP and the vast majority of government revenues come from the oil and gas industry (International Trade Administration, 2022). As Figure 1-1 shows, after the 31.4% contributed by mining and quarrying (including oil and gas extraction), the wholesale and retail trade, construction and manufacturing are the next most significant sectors.

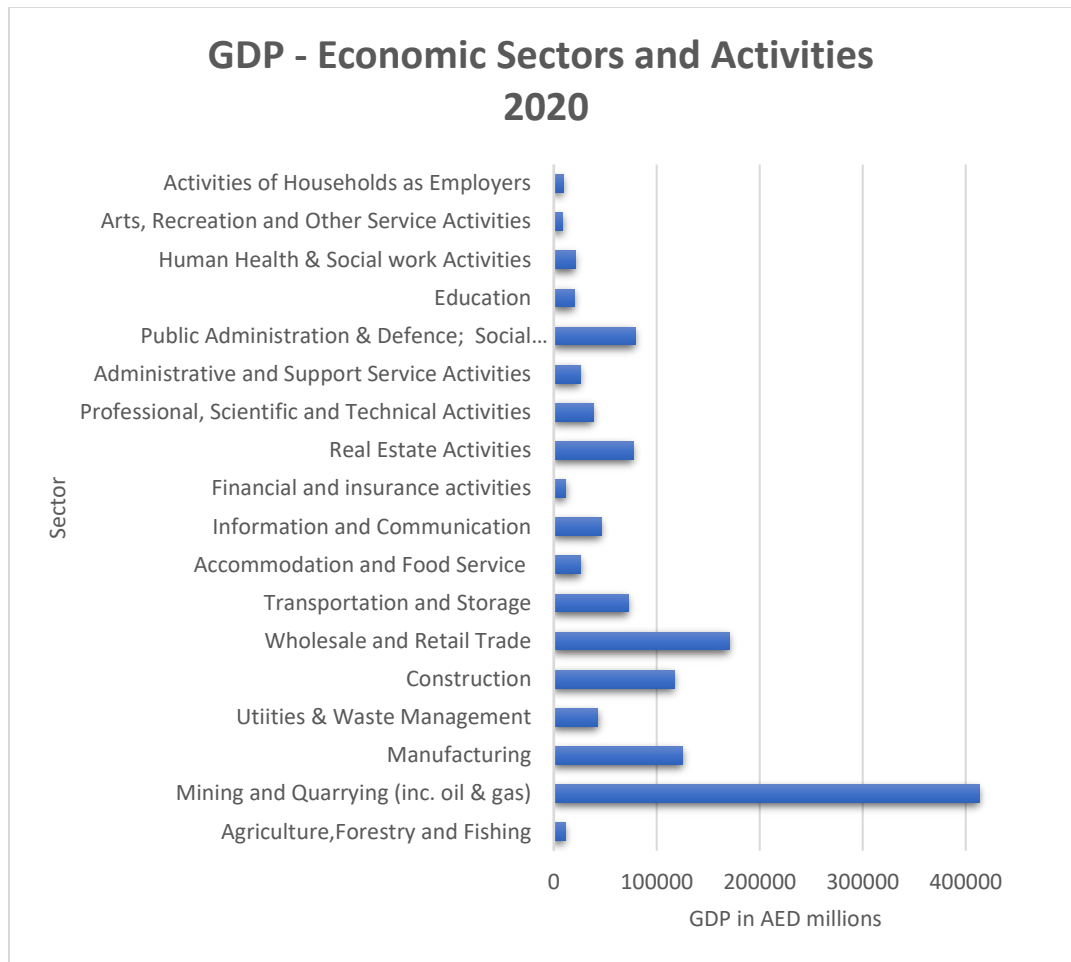


Figure 1-1: GDP contribution by sector in AED millions (2020)

Source: UAE Stat (2020)

After diversification, the need to balance the economy between public and private sectors, specifically the need for an increased role for the private sector is a major policy theme. The dominant player in the oil and gas sector is the government-owned Abu Dhabi National Oil Company (ADNOC). Wholly or partly government-owned companies also dominate in other sectors including banking, communications and real estate (Forbes Middle East, 2019). The Gulf countries have developed economies based on “paternalistic patron-client relationships and traditions” where lines are blurred between genuinely publicly owned enterprises and those owned by the private wealth of rulers (Mansour, 2018, p.66). Privatisation is seen as a way of encouraging entrepreneurship and becoming competitive in global markets. Furthermore, it is viewed as a means of achieving the long-term goal of a sustainable diversified economy as well as a means of

accessing the latest technology (Smith, 2021). Privatisation comes in various forms from large-scale public-private partnerships to the encouragement of entrepreneurial SMEs.

One significant hurdle to growing the role of the private sector in the UAE has been the reluctance of the Emirati population to embrace the employment opportunities it provides with Emiratis having a marked preference for the public sector. There are many reasons for this preference, such as higher wages (Forstenlechner et al., 2012), job security (Godwin, 2006) and fewer working hours (Al-Waqfi & Forstenlechner, 2012). One recent area of focus has been the equalisation of bank holidays between sectors. In March 2019, the government decreed equal entitlement between sectors as part of the strategy of increasing private sector employment among Emirati nationals (Ministry of Economy, 2022).

Hence the privatisation of the Emirati economy is closely linked to the third element of economic strategy – Emiratisation (EI). The EI is defined as,

A multi-level process through which dependency on the expatriate labour force is reduced and Nationals are prepared to take up jobs performed by expatriates. Such preparation entails enabling Nationals to perform their jobs equally as good if not better than expatriates in the shortest possible period (Abdelkarim, 2001, p.38).

More concisely, Yaghi and Yaghi (2014, p. 224) termed it a “statewide human resource nationalisation policy”.

As early as 1971 the need for a formal policy of supporting Emirati nationals into employment was confirmed with the establishment of the Ministry for Human Resources and Emiratisation. Federal Law No. 8 of 1980 prioritises the employment of locals and when Emirati employees cannot be found gives secondary priority to nationals of other Arab states (Articles 10 & 11) (Al Baqer & Faraj, n.d). In order to encourage the public and private sectors to implement the EI, the UAE government established a special department to develop the skills of UAE nationals and prepare them for the job market. The department also served as a recruitment agency offering a channel for UAE nationals and employers to reach out to each other.

The EI comprises government interventions in the employment market aimed at increasing the representation of Emirati nationals in the workforce, particularly the private sector workforce. The EI operates a carrot and stick approach to encourage companies to achieve them. There are fines

for non-achievement and access to incentives for those companies performing according to expectations on the recruitment and training of Emirati nationals (UAE Government, 2022). The initiative has its roots in the Labour Law of 1980 which codified the priority that should be given to Emirati nationals by all employers when recruiting (ILO, 2001).

Quotas enforced under the EI began with the banking sector in 1998 and progressed to insurance five years later. In 2008, all trading companies with more than fifty employees were affected. The teaching of Arabic within the education sector has been fully nationalised (Low, 2012). In addition to these mandates, a network of supporting organisations has been put in place to bring job-seeking Emiratis and employers together. The latest objectives are for employers to employ Emiratis for one out of fifty (2%) skilled jobs by January 2023, rising to five out of fifty (10%) by 2026. Banks and insurance companies have separate targets and free-zone employers are unaffected (Afridi & Angell, 2022). The package of measures includes promotion of economic diversification via the Emirates Development Bank, and government subsidy of Emiratis reward packages aimed at closing the cost gap between employing a national and employing an expatriate (KPMG, 2022).

Emiratisation has progressed much faster in the public sector than in the private sector. Emiratis required little convincing that employment in the public sector was advantageous and public sector organisations were far easier for the government to control. In the case of the private sector, many saw Emiratisation as unwelcome state intervention, an attempt to manipulate the labour market, even social engineering (Sarker and Rahman, 2020). Progress has been much slower and targets more modest for the private sector. As Sarker and Rahman (2020, p. 184) conclude, “The Emiratisation policy journey has shown some remarkable success in terms of accommodating the local human capital in government jobs; however, it remains perplexing in the private sector”. In summary, the UAE economy and government economic policy are dominated by three long-term goals: diversification, privatisation and Emiratisation. This research is concerned with the latter.

### **Demographics and labour force**

The UAE population has experienced rapid growth in recent decades as a growing economy has sucked in millions of migrant workers. In 1990, the population of the UAE stood at 1.8 million. Within thirty years, this had grown to nearly 10 million (see Figure 1-2). In 2020, just 12% of the total population of the UAE were Emirati nationals (UAE Stat, 2021).

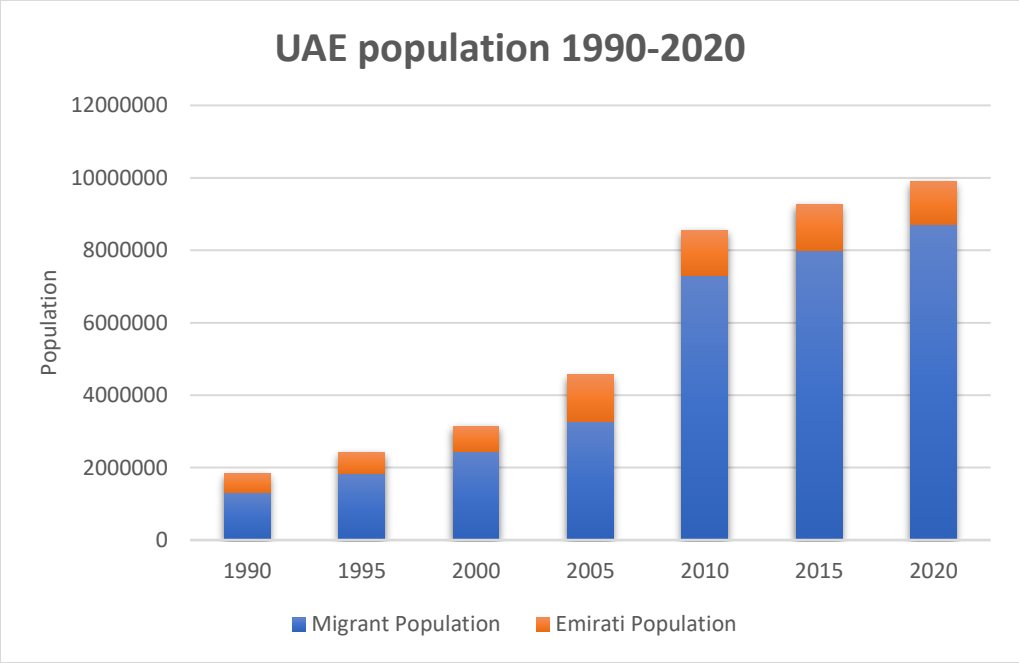


Figure 1-2: UAE Population 1990 to 2020

Source: UAE Stat, 2021

The migrant workforce has been drawn mainly from the emerging, low-wage economies of South Asia, Southeast Asia and Egypt (see Figure 1-3).

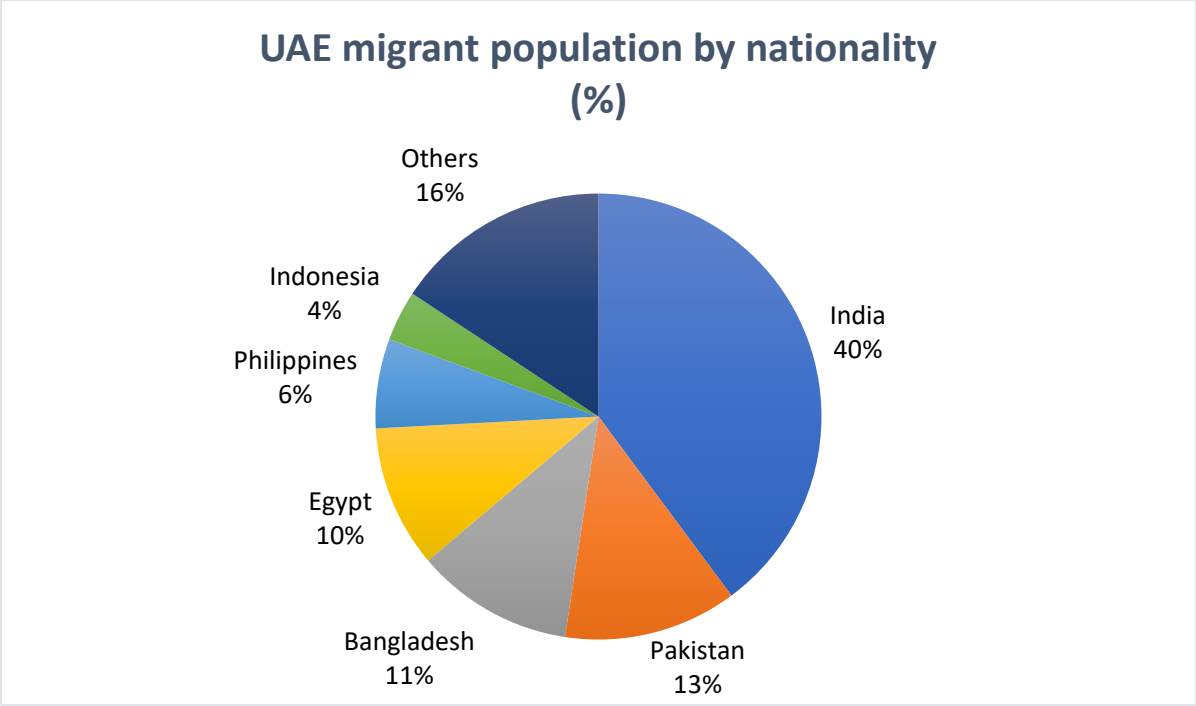


Figure 1-3: UAE migrant population by nationality

Source: Ministry of Economy (2022)

With the rapid economic development being matched by imported migrant, Emirati nationals were left a small minority in the country. However, Emiratis are even more underrepresented in the workforce than their numbers suggest. Unemployment is a particular concern among young, educated nationals (Sarker & Rahman, 2020). According to Marchon and Toledo (2014), the UAE labour market is highly segmented, and one of the reasons for the increased segmentation is the reliance on foreign employees (Al-Waqfi & Forstenlechner, 2014). As announced by the Federal Competitiveness and Statistics Authority (2019), in 2017, UAE nationals made up 8.5% and expatriates 91.5% of the labour market in the UAE. The main objective of the EI is increasing the employment rate of UAE nationals. However, Forstenlechner and Rutledge (2010) proposed that this initiative has led to labour market segmentation, as UAE nationals have now become concentrated in the public sector, while nearly 99% of the jobs in the private sector are staffed by foreign workers (Al-Waqfi & Forstenlechner, 2014).



For the private sector, the expectation among Emiratis of higher salaries and a range of employment benefits that they were used to receiving in public sector jobs has led private sector employers to employ these mainly cheaper migrant workers (Mansour, 2008). Construction, manufacturing and domestic service sectors are particularly reliant on migrant labour. As Figure 1-4 shows, the male-dominated construction sector was the single biggest employment sector. Other significant sectors are wholesale and retail, domestic service, manufacturing and public administration (inc. defence).

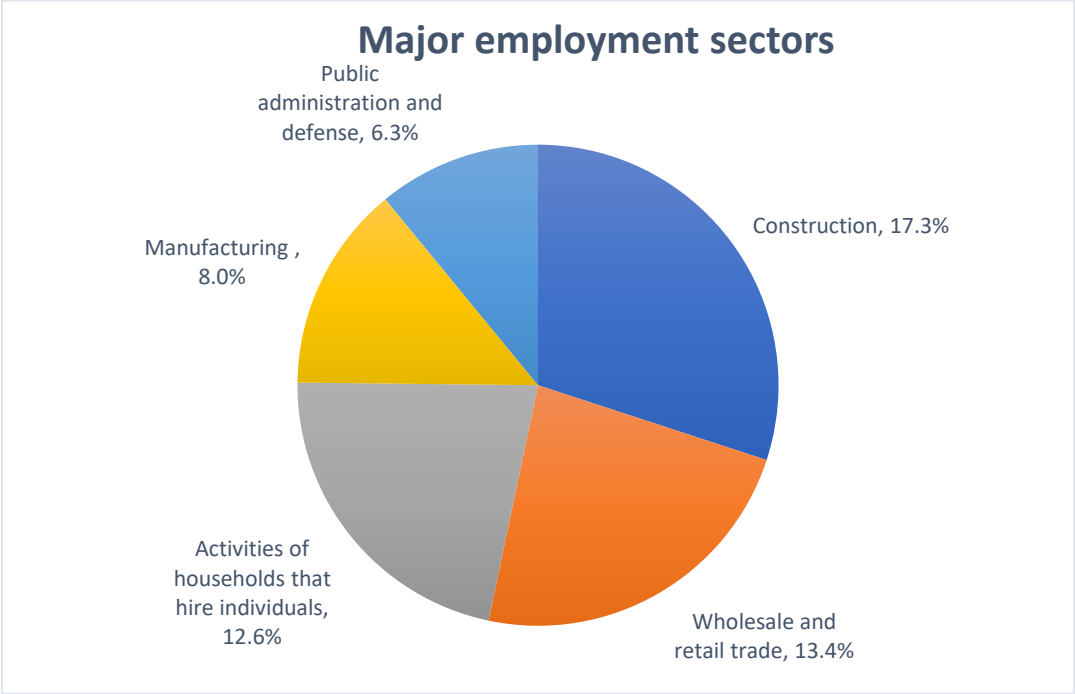


Figure 1-4: UAE major employment sectors in 2020

Source: Ministry of Economy (2022)

With the government not publishing recent formal unemployment data and young males required to do military service, the exact extent of the unemployment problem is not known. However, it is known to be an issue of contention among Emiratis.

### 1.3 Research Rationale

Employee engagement is considered one of the most critical factors for organisational performance. The main reason why employee engagement has become an important field of

research is that it is increasingly understood to bring organisations a range of positive outcomes. Studies have shown that engaged employees have a positive impact on organisational performance and found a positive correlation between employee engagement and customer satisfaction, profitability, productivity, employee safety, employee turnover (Harter et al., 2002) organisational commitment, intention to quit, and organisational citizenship behaviour (Saks, 2006). Despite the evidence produced for the benefits of employee engagement it is understood that only a minority of employees are in such a state. In India, Ahmed (2013) reported just 20%-30% of employees were fully engaged in their work.

Similarly, North American studies suggest that less than one in three workers are engaged (Harter et al., 2002, 2003; Saks, 2006; Wagner & Harter, 2006). Moreover, Czarnowsky (2008) reported that only one in five employees have any confidence that their manager is capable of engaging them. Mani and Mishra (2021, p.462) sum the problem up arguing that, “Despite the billions invested in engagement initiatives across industries, the engagement levels of the employees have not seen significant improvement over the years.”

Studies have also sought to identify antecedents of employee engagement. Perceived organisational support is positively related to employee work engagement (Eisenberger & Stinglhamber, 2011; Saks, 2006; Zacher & Winter, 2011). Psychological empowerment has also been found to have a significant positive association with employee engagement (Jose and Mampilly, 2014). Elsewhere, employee training has been identified as an important predictor of employee engagement (Gruman & Saks, 2001; Kahn, 2010). Other predictors include organisational culture, leadership behaviour, rewards and recognition and work-life balance (Kaur & Randhawa, 2020).

This research asks, what will happen to employee engagement when there is an external support framework (i.e., the EI) available to employees? Will this have an impact on employee engagement or not? If yes, will it be affected positively or negatively? With so many benefits flowing from an engaged workforce it is important to seek clarity on these questions. The present study is understood to be the first to pioneer this research direction and in giving voice to the employees themselves.

This extra support is applicable to UAE national employees in the company studied in common with all similar companies. Hence, this group of employees have a further layer of support beyond that offered by the organisation. There is a gap in the literature concerning such employees that the present study aims to fill by exploring the impact of perceptions of the EI on UAE National employees' engagement. This is the first time this relationship has been examined.

The case selected to help answer these questions is an Oil & Gas company in the UAE which is a government-owned company. It is appropriate to select a government-owned organisation for this study as Emiratisation has a longer and deeper influence on the public sector thus making it more likely employees will be able to reflect on the policy's impact on their employment. The researcher's position as a long-standing employee also facilitated access to the workforce.

## **1.4 Research Aim and objectives**

The aim of this study is:

To critically examine the relationship between the Perceived support from the Emiratisation Initiative and employee engagement levels among Emirati employees in an Oil & Gas company in the UAE, and to evaluate the impact of these perceptions on employee engagement.

This study has four objectives, which are:

1. To examine the significance of perceived organisational support, employee training and the perceived support from Emiratisation Initiative as predictors of employee engagement.
2. To identify factors that are perceived as important by UAE nationals in regard to their employment engagement.
3. To critically explore and evaluate the perspectives of UAE national employees on the Emiratisation Initiative (EI).
4. To provide recommendations to decisions makers and government leaders about supporting employee engagement.

## **1.5 Research questions**

The following research questions are set to help guide the enquiry. Each question refers to a potential predictor of employee engagement. The first two, perceived organisational support and employee training, have already been studied in a range of contexts and found to predict employee engagement. Hence, this study aims to confirm whether these variables are significant for the case being examined. The third question is novel as Emiratisation has yet to be studied for its effect on employee engagement.

RQ1. How is perceived organisational support related to the employee engagement of Emirati nationals?

RQ2. How is employee training related to the employee engagement of Emirati nationals?

RQ3. How does Emiratisation affect employee engagement among Emirati nationals?

RQ4. What can decisionmakers and government leaders do to improve employee engagement and the Emiratisation Initiative in this regard?

## **1.6 Research Methodology and Contribution**

This research is framed within the pragmatist research philosophy to gather data from UAE national employees in a company in the UAE in order to understand their mindset towards the perceived support they receive from the organisation and the EI, and how that support affects their level of work engagement. Also, this study aims to identify factors that UAE national employees consider important to their level of engagement at work. A survey questionnaire was administered first to get a clear picture of level of work engagement of UAE national employees in the company. Then, in a second phase, semi-structured interviews were conducted to gather the required qualitative data to achieve the aim of this research. The research methodology for this study is explained and justified in Chapter 3.

The nature of this research is exploratory because it is aiming to understand the mindset of UAE national employees toward the received support and how that is affecting their level of work engagement, based on their opinions, thoughts, and feelings. Quantitative data and qualitative data were collected to achieve the research aim. The data were gathered, for this study, using two

instruments which are a survey questionnaire and a semi-structured interview. The mixed-method approach helps to provide a deeper understanding and enables the researcher to triangulate the results. The first two research questions stated above are addressed through quantitative methods measuring the relationships between variables. The second two questions require the qualitative evaluation made possible by hearing the perceptions and interpretations of UAE employees. The triangulation of these methods helps provide detailed in-depth consideration of the research questions.

### **1.6.1 Contribution**

The government of the UAE has implemented the EI to support UAE nationals to find and retain suitable jobs and reduce the economy's reliance on migrant workers. Up to now, the EI has been studied from a range of perspectives and for different purposes. Barriers to successful implementation have been examined (Aljanahi, 2017; Modarress et al., 2013; Thompson and Wissink, 2016). Godwin (2006) and Pech (2009) studied the role of education in the Emiratisation of the workforce. Sectoral reviews have monitored implementation progress (Tee and Li, 2021; Rutledge, 2022) and there have also been case studies examining the response of individual organisations to the challenge of Emiratisation (Hani, 2021; Rees et al., 2007; Sarker & Rahman, 2020). The factors influencing recruitment decisions and the effect of Emiratisation on aspects of the recruitment process have also been studied (Alabdelkarim et al., 2014; Forstenlechner et al., 2014).

Commitment and job satisfaction are constructs related to employee engagement and there have been studies of these constructs conducted in the UAE (Alkhamiri, 1992; AlNajjar, 1999; Kitana & Vhebi, 2015). While Emiratisation is mentioned for contextual reasons in these studies, they are not studies of the effect of Emiratisation as a variable. Similarly, Al-Ali et al. (2008) examined the antecedents and barriers to the Emiratisation of UAE private sector organisations finding issues with attracting Emiratis away from the government sector but not specifically linking employee engagement with Emiratisation as the present study does.

Hence, despite this being such an important policy area, there is no study that has explored and identified the factors for UAE national employees' engagement and examined how the support granted to UAE national employees by the EI affects the level of work engagement. This study,

therefore, contributes to closing this gap and improving knowledge of the relationship between employee engagement and workforce nationalisation policies.

## **1.6 Thesis Structure**

The thesis is organised into six chapters, after this introductory chapter, the thesis is organised as follows:

**Chapter Two** reviews the literature on the main variables in this study: the EI, employee engagement, perceived organisational support and employee training. The chapter also establishes the hypotheses to be tested and presents the conceptual model of the research.

**Chapter Three** presents the theoretical background to the methodology. Then, it discusses the philosophical underpinnings of the study, which includes ontology, epistemology, and research assumptions. It also explains the research approach and the research design then explains the steps taken to operationalise the research.

**Chapter Four** reports the quantitative data collected from the survey questionnaire showing the results of the statistical analysis. This includes both descriptive statistics and hypotheses testing analysis.

**Chapter Five** presents the findings of the qualitative analysis of the semi-structured interviews conducted in the second phase of the research.

**Chapter Six** synthesises the quantitative results and the qualitative findings in a discussion aimed at addressing the research questions.

**Chapter Seven** concludes the thesis and provides a summary of the work, the key findings. It concludes with a discussion of the limitations of the study and indicates areas for future research.

## **Chapter 2 : The Literature Review**

### **2.1 Introduction**

The purpose of this chapter is to review the existing body of literature on Emiratisation, employee engagement, perceived organisational support and employee training. By evaluating what is already known it will be possible to hypothesise the relationships between these variables. The chapter starts by setting out what has been written about the Emiratisation Initiative (EI) that has been implemented by the UAE government to support UAE nationals in the labour market by obliging organisations in both the public and private sectors to hire and retain UAE national employees. Following this, there is a comprehensive review of the approaches taken to the construct of employee engagement. This covers the main models proposed for understanding employee engagement and its antecedents. There are then sections for both perceived organisational support and employee training as these are two variables assumed to be significant in developing employee engagement. The chapter ends by presenting the hypotheses that this research will test together with a proposed model of the relationship between employee engagement and the EI.

### **2.2 The Emiratisation initiative**

Before reviewing the literature on the EI it is necessary to set out some limitations of such a review. As one of the UAE's main national policies there has been a significant amount of research conducted into its effect. Most of this research comprises descriptive reviews of EI policy development often using reviews and analysis of secondary data (e.g. Cyrill, 2015; Sarker & Rahman, 2020). Few have gathered primary data with a particular paucity of research from the employee perspective. No studies have been found which measured support for the EI among employees as a variable so no comparative analysis is available. Where Emiratisation has been measured it has been in terms of the proportion of national employees working at an organisation (Tee and Li, 2021).

It is unsurprising that the reliance on expatriate manpower as the Emirate came into being with an acute lack of its own human capital. By 1980, the literacy rate was just 6.4%, pupils spent less than four years in school and higher education was a rarity (Aljanahi, 2017). As oil revenues turbocharged the economy the private sector turned to non-Emirati manpower and skills to establish and grow their businesses. Lack of homegrown capacity was a phenomenon experienced widely among the newly established states of the post-colonial Global South.

Rutledge and Al-Kaabi (2023) adopted a survey-based approach to elicit the views of UAE nationals employed in the private sector on job satisfaction and intention to remain in post. The main finding was that stigma was still attached to private sector employment and a failure to secure a classic public sector role. This suggests that further government intervention is required to normalise private sector employment among nationals.

One source of opinion on the EI is outside of academic research but merits mention. Leading English language UAE news source Gulf News (2009) invited reader responses to the government's announcement of its intention to replace expatriate HR managers and secretaries with nationals. Empirical conclusions cannot be drawn, and the views represented were mainly expatriate's being an English language source. Nevertheless, a broad range of views are given both welcoming and cautious.

Government programmes aimed at the nationalisation of the labour force have become common in the Middle East, including in Saudi Arabia, Oman, Kuwait and the UAE (Rees et al., 2007). The speed of development of several sectors of economic activity in these countries (including oil and gas, banking, construction and tourism) were in no way matched by the capacity of the homegrown labour force either in numerical terms or in skills. For this reason, a liberal immigration policy saw a large migrant workforce drawn in, comprising both expertise from the developed world and manual labour from developing nations (Pech, 2009). The UAE is highlighted as the least successful country in the region in reducing its reliance on non-nationals in the workforce (Tee & Li, 2021).

Without either the cheap foreign manual labour or the costly foreign expertise, industries such as oil and gas would have been impossible to develop (Toledo, 2011). In just five years a 3.3 million population in 2005 grew to 8.19 million in 2010 (Al-Khoury, 2010). However, this import of labour left the UAE with a workforce in which Emiratis themselves played a relatively modest role. To



change this demographic imbalance, the government introduced the policy of Emiratisation. Another economic downside of a workforce that mostly comprises migrant labour is the amount of earnings that are sent home rather than being spent in the local economy. This hampers economic growth (Harry, 2007).

In addition to the economic imperative, there were compelling social and political reasons for Emiratisation (Al-Lamki, 1998). UAE-nationals were finding it difficult to secure suitable employment and when employed were experiencing competition from mostly better qualified and more experienced expats (Zeffane & Kemp, 2020). In a country of rapidly increasing wealth and increasing birth rates this situation was clearly unsustainable if political instability was to be avoided (Rees et al., 2007). The UAE government could not afford to go on employing all of its nationals in well paid jobs in the public sector, particularly when the oil price dropped reducing government incomes. This meant finding jobs for them in the private sector (Rees et al., 2007). Hence, the UAE government embarked upon what was essentially a social engineering project (Sarker & Rahman, 2020).

Emiratisation of the public sector has proceeded largely satisfactorily as nationals have always have a marked preference for the well-paid, secure and more socially valued roles in government jobs. However, the Emiratisation of the private sector where Emiratis faced longer hours, lower pay, and a job viewed less valuable in Emirati society. For employers, if they could find suitable Emirati workers then they faced the fact that it was effectively illegal to dismiss Emirati employees (Aljanahi, 2017).

While exercising full control over public sector recruitment, the UAE government faced a different proposition with the private sector. Many, if not most, large UAE-based private sector employers did not see native employees as good substitutes for expatriates, seeing the former as less productive (Marchon & Toledo, 2014). Relatedly, Harry (2007) pointed out that the recruitment of an expensive workforce on account of the quota system could affect the global competitiveness of the UAE's private sector; it will find difficulty in competing outside of the UAE due to the high cost of labour. Additionally, nationalisation policies have also been found to produce unintended consequences such as labour protection which can see unsuitable employees retained (Toledo, 2019) and even 'ghost' employees where a company has employees named on their payroll who may not even exist (Al-Riyami et al, 2015). Marchon and Toldeo (2014) labelled the quota-system

that came with Emiratisation as “a tax on labor” which “increases the cost of production and output price and decreases the industry’s production” (p.2269).

Several studies have reported that UAE nationals prefer working in the public sector (Al Ali, 2008; Al-Waqfi & Forstenlechner, 2012; Godwin, 2006). There are many reasons for this preference including higher wages (Forstenlechner et al., 2012), job security (Godwin, 2006) and fewer working hours (Al-Waqfi & Forstenlechner, 2012). Another reason for the segmentation is that employers in the private sector tended to hire employees of other nationalities because they are easier to fire (Forstenlechner et al., 2012). Additionally, many job profiles in the private sector are unacceptable in Emirati society (Baud & Mahgoub, 2001) on account of certain cultural restrictions in the UAE (e.g., cashier jobs in supermarkets).

In the face of Emiratis’ long-standing preference for public sector employment the government has launched a series of programmes to entice Emirati workers into the private sector and keep them there. Some jobs in the private sector have been localised by the MoHRE to promote Emiratisation. For example, in 2017, the MoHRE decided to assign data entry positions for Emirati citizens in all companies that employed over 1,000 workers. Construction companies that employed 500 or more workers had to hire at least one Emirati occupational health and safety officer. Also, there were initiatives launched to support Emirati employees such as the Teacher Assistant Programme, Creative Lab for Youth, the *Kafa’at* Programme and the Absher Initiative. In 2013, the government announced the Absher Initiative to provide a decent life for UAE citizens. The Absher Initiative aimed to find 20,000 jobs for UAE citizens in both the private and public sectors. It is supervised by the Ministry of Presidential Affairs and implemented by MoHRE (The National, 2013). Progress in changing perceptions of the private sector has been slow. Using a content analysis of business newspapers published in the UAE, Aljanahi (2017) identified the barriers to private sector Emiratisation according to this coverage. Findings pointed to skill standards, salary and benefits, and business hours as deterrent from taking up employment in the private sector. Also examining barriers, Thompson and Wissink (2016) argue that a range of socio-economic, political and cultural systemic constraints frustrate the policy. From the employers, side there is a reluctance to hire less skilled and less experienced nationals then pay them more highly than their expatriate hires. For Emirati nationals there is a reluctance to take up anything but the more senior roles in the private sector with routine occupations seen as below their status.

The extent to which societal sentiment towards job roles determines job preferences has been studied in the UEA context. The stigma attached to Emirati women participating in the workforce is well documented and has meant these women are restricted to a narrow choice of acceptable sectors (Marmenout & Lirio, 2013; Williams et al., 2013) Under its EI initiative, the UAE government has used education, legislation and incentives to encourage Emirati women to work in the private sector but these women have encountered both discrimination and cultural norms that discourage them (Farrel, 2008).

Additionally, in 2018, the MoHRE launched the 'Private Sector Youth Council', which had eighteen individual members working in the private sector under the umbrella of the Ministry to promote Emiratisation and improve UAE nationals' participation in the private sector. The council will provide a dialogue platform for the UAE's youth in private and semi-government entities, enabling them to express their opinions on rules and policies regulating private sector work and plans related to Emiratisation. The council will suggest initiatives and ideas to achieve its goals and will involve and represent the youth working in the private sector in local, regional and international conferences and training programmes (UAE Government, 2019). The MoHRE considered the council's members as ambassadors of the private sector, which will enable them to find creative and innovative solutions and launch initiatives to overcome the challenges facing the participation of Emiratis in the private sector job market, which the MoHRE thinks is full of promising opportunities. Subsequently, the UAE government also imposed a quota system on all private sector companies with more than 100 employees, whereby these companies need to recruit a specific number of Emiratis and assign certain jobs to UAE nationals only to ensure national employees' participation in the workforce (The UAE Government, 2019).

In 2017, further requirements were placed on larger private sector employers covering employees using the government's online services and in occupational health (UAE Government, 2022). More recent programs have focused on the training of nationals and simplifying the recruitment process including the provision of government-run recruitment websites (Human Resources Authority, 2022). Not all aspects of the initiative concern mandates aimed at employers. Incentives also play an important role such as a subsidised five-year government-paid contribution towards private sector employees' pensions (Oommen, 2022). On the other hand, those employers failing to meet the required (and increasing) quotas face rising levels of fines. The carrot and stick

approach to Emiratisation of the workforce reflects the desire not to burden businesses too heavily in a way that would make them uncompetitive.

Despite the in-built resistance, the UAE government has persisted with, and recently intensified their quest for more private sector jobs for Emiratis. While there is a lack of government-published aggregated data, Sarker and Rahman (2020) report that progress has remained very slow. Perhaps frustrated by this slow progress, in 2022, the government announced more details of their carrot and stick approach that, if achieved, would result in 10% of private sector payrolls being Emiratis (Ford et al., 2022).

As already stated, there is a limited amount of literature examining employee perceptions of workforce nationalisation in UAE. The present study, to the best of our knowledge is the first to collect primary data on (1) employee support for the EI and (2) the relationship between the EI and employee engagement. Cyrill (2015) drew on secondary data to examine the effect of workforce nationalisation on the Indian migrant workforce in the UAE. The main conclusion was that the EI was struggling to achieve its goals and that government mandate alone was insufficient to achieve the stated goals. The Indian migrant worker group was continuing to thrive despite EI.

Equity theory has been used to understand workplace perceptions of fairness. Ryan (2016) applied equity theory in his theoretical inquiry into the equity issues related to Emiratisation. Consistent with other literature he proposes that the inputs of long working hours, competitive work environment and higher skills requirement are not balanced by the perceived lower salary, shorter holidays, job insecurity, having a minority status in a multicultural work environment.

Literature searches were extended to other countries in the Gulf region that had deployed their own versions of the policy. Applying Herzberg's (1987) motivation-hygiene theory to workforce nationalisation in Qatar, Elsharnouby et al. (2023) conducted a qualitative study of jobseekers and their perceptions of the nationalisation policy and its aims. Their findings point to a widespread perception that the policy was aimed at replacing expatriate employees in senior positions in the public sector. They also found that a 'waithood' phenomenon was present whereby Qatari graduates would rather wait for a position in the public sector than take up a private sector role. Other findings pointed to reasonable working hours, job security and stability as crucial to job satisfaction and long-term engagement (Elsharnouby et al., 2023). Qatarization, and by inference

other workforce nationalisation programs in the Gulf region, may raise expectations of employment in the public sector and so reinforce the bias against the private sector.

A sample of private sector employers, teachers and students gave their views on Saudisation and other employment issues in the private sector in Baqadir et al. (2011). In summary, the private sector employers saw Saudi job seekers as lacking relevant skills and knowledge. The job seekers expected to go straight into managerial positions without building up relevant experience and that they expect to jump from job to job in response to offers of higher salary. Teachers emphasised a lack of interest among students in taking up the vocational education opportunities promoted within Saudisation policies.

A study of succession planning in the Saudi healthcare and the role Saudisation was intended to play used a sequential mixed methods approach similar to the one in the present study. Relevant findings included the theme that the policy was creating expectations of advancement to management positions that were not matched by technical skills and experiences. A perceived lack of quality in existing Saudi management was also a theme.

### **2.2.3 Africanisation and affirmative action**

Africanisation has some similarities to the workforce nationalisation policies of the Gulf Region. It has been described as “the process of transforming a colonial-type civil service into a national service” (Rees et al., 2007, p.34). Africanisation predates the initiatives in the Gulf as it was firmly underway by the 1960s (Adu, 1965). Its goals were to consolidate control of state administration in the hands of the new post-colonial political powers thus solidifying political independence, to lower costs and retain foreign currency, and to manage the country’s internal affairs without interference (Rees et al., 2007). Africanisation was almost entirely restricted to the public sector and left much of the private sector dominated by expatriates and foreign-based companies. Africanisation also played out in the field of education and knowledge production as a way of promoting African practices and beliefs (Sihlongonyane, 2020). In the Middle East, governments recognised the need to spread workforce nationalisation to the private sector (Al-Dosary, 2004).

In post-apartheid South Africa, the government was faced with reflecting the political transformation in the economy to meet the high expectations of the population. This required affirmative action of the kind applied in the United States since the 1960s. These policies received

overwhelming support from the majority black population who sought redress for the systemic and structural discrimination of the apartheid era (Andrews, 1999). In this sense, Africanisation and affirmative action were different to the workforce nationalisation of the Gulf region.

It has been a central dilemma of public policymaking to decide whether policies should be targeted to solve issues within specific communities or social groups or to adopt universal policies. In deciding this, policymakers have to consider the potential for conflict particularly where selective policies are based on ethnicity (Gomez & Prendas, 2012).

Government interventions in the labour market to favour a particular group within the workforce are not restricted to developing countries. While nationalisation of the workforce is most prominent in the Global South, a version of intervention in the labour market in a similar way is affirmative action which has been implemented in the United States and elsewhere (Randeree, 2012). Affirmative action programmes are a policy to support historically excluded groups by setting organisational goals to increase their representation (Konrad & Linnehan, 1999). Hideg and Ferris (2017) shown that affirmative action is an effective policy for enhancing diversity and equality in the workplace.

Affirmative action has been defined as a policy of favouring those in society who have been harmed by past or present discrimination or those who can bring the benefits of diversity (Sterba, 2009, p.33). It is viewed by proponents as an important part of promoting equality of opportunity. Affirmative action policies have been applied in the United States, Brazil, South Africa, Northern Ireland, Australia, India and Malaysia and elsewhere (Gomez & Premdas, 2012). Affirmative action is different in many ways to Emiratisation but the same in one important respect. It leads to interventions in the labour market to skew recruitment towards a particular group or groups. So, it is reasonable to consider the literature on affirmative action to look for evidence as to its effect on workplace outcomes such as employee engagement.

Despite extensive literature searches no evidence could be found on the direct relationship between affirmative action and employee engagement. However, the literature does suggest that the existence of such policies can lead to negative workplace outcomes including perceptions of a lack of fairness (Pierce, 2012), demotivation through poor implementation (Deslippe, 2012) and even conflict between beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries (Gomez & Premdas, 2012). Holzer and Neumark (1999) found that hires (women and minorities) made under affirmative action policies

had relatively lower educational or skill qualifications but that this did not translate to weaker job performance suggesting that employers do not pay a performance price for applying affirmative action policies.

In contrast, diversity and inclusivity in the workplace, which are stated goals of affirmative action are associated with positive outcomes. Job satisfaction and organisational commitment are positively related to perceptions of inclusivity (Barak, 1999). Relatedly, workplace diversity and inclusion are found to be positively related to employee engagement, a finding pertinent to the present study (Goswami & Kishor, 2018).

In summary, affirmative action has both differences and similarities to the workforce nationalisation programmes of the Gulf states. The literature indicates that poor implementation of either can lead to negative outcomes such as demotivation at an individual level. While workplace diversity and inclusivity are shown to be positive objectives, less clear is the relationship between these policies and positive outcomes such as motivation, job satisfaction and, most importantly here, employee engagement.

## **2.3 Employee Engagement**

### **2.3.1 Definition**

Schaufeli et al. (2002, p.74) define employee engagement as a “positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterised by vigor, dedication, and absorption”. Demerouti et al. (2010) put their emphasis on the benefits of employee engagement for both individuals and their employers by explicitly linking level of engagement to the way individuals accomplish their work and complete their tasks. However, for the purposes of this study, employee engagement is defined as “the harnessing of organisation members’ selves to their work roles; in engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performances” (Khan, 1990, p. 694). Khan, pioneer of the engagement concept, considered employees to be engaged when they employ themselves physically (e.g., moving around the office), cognitively (e.g., improving processes) and emotionally (e.g., understanding colleagues' feelings) during performing their job. That is, engaged employees focus on their roles at work whereas employees are disengaged when they disconnect themselves from their work roles and they become physically, cognitively or emotionally uninvolved in tasks at work. Self and role exist

in some dynamic, negotiable relations in which a person drives personal energies into their role behaviour. An individual becomes physically involved in their duties, whether alone or empathically connected to others in the service of the duties they carry out in a way that displays what they think and feel, their creativity, their beliefs and values, and their personal connections to others (Khan, 1990).

### **2.3.2 Antecedents**

An important component of the employee engagement literature is the work conducted on drivers and antecedents of the engaged state. Much of this work has focused on the psychological conditions required to become engaged in one's work. Individuals are understood to change their willingness to make the investment of engagement based on their assessment of the benefits, the meaningfulness, the safety, or the guarantees they perceive will result from them so doing (Crawford et al., 2013).

Wollard and Shuck (2011) identified no less than 42 antecedents in their structured review divided between individual and organisational antecedents. On the individual level, personality and the meaningfulness of the work are significant. At an organisation level the role of managers and management practices and manager self-efficacy are highlighted (Wollard & Shuck, 2011).

Psychological empowerment has also been found to have a significant positive association with employee engagement (Jose & Mampilly, 2014). Elsewhere, Employee training has also been identified as an important predictor of employee engagement (Gruman & Saks, 2001; Kahn, 2010). Other predictors include organisational culture, leadership behaviour, rewards and recognition and work-life balance (Kaur & Randhawa, 2020).

Another systematic review identified a range of antecedents associated with job design, particularly job resources (Bailey et al., 2017). Also common were studies which highlighted leadership and management practices, positive perceptions of leaders and organisations and positive psychological states. Perceived organisational support is positively related to employee work engagement (Eisenberger & Stinglhamber, 2011; Saks, 2006; Zacher & Winter, 2011). Relatedly, organisational interventions and activities such as training and support registered a positive but slightly weaker effect (Bailey et al., 2017). Employee training has been identified as an important predictor of employee engagement (Gruman and Saks, 2001; Kahn, 2010). These interventions lead to positive perceived organisational support which is also positively related to



employee work engagement (Eisenberger & Stinglhamber, 2011; Saks, 2006; Zacher & Winter, 2011). This finding is supported by AbuKhalifeh and Som (2013) who identify employee development as having the most influence. Li et al. (2022) posit that employers who promote a healthy work environment will benefit from improved levels of engagement among employees. Alam et al. (2022) found that reward management had the strongest predictive power, particularly the provision of intrinsic rewards. Ensuring a balance between job demands and job resources was also found to be significant. Controlling for age, they found that older employees reported higher levels of engagement.

Prior studies have also analysed employee engagement against a range of demographic variables with mixed results. Common variables are age (Douglas & Roberts, 2020; James et al., 2012; Meola, 2016; Sahni, 2021; Simadi, 2006; Towers Perrin, 2005), gender (Mendiratta, 2016; Sharma et al., 2017), educational attainment (Dhir & Shukla, 2018; Popli & Rizvi, 2016; Sharma et al., 2017), length of service (Hinzmann et al., 2019; Maslach & Leiter, 1997; Shukla et al. (2015), and seniority of roles (Bhana & Suknunan, 2021; Vigoda-Gadot et al., 2012). Overall, the lack of consensus among the studies suggests that employee engagement is highly context dependent and may respond to local factors such as trust in supervisor (Schneider et al., 2010), leadership styles (Wang and Hsieh, 2013; Zhang et al., 2014), organisational commitment (Kim et al., 2017), employee personality (Akhtar et al., 2015; Langelaan et al., 2006) as well as national culture (Farndale & Murrer, 2015).

Work environments of the Gulf region are commonly multicultural with local employees working alongside expatriates from around the world. This means that national culture is an important dimension to the study of employee engagement in these countries, including the UAE. Often using Hofstede's cultural dimensions (Hofstede, 2011) studies aim to establish the relationship between a particular dimension and levels of employee engagement. The results tend to be context dependent. A meta-analysis across 20 countries and cultures found that individualism was negatively related to employee engagement and that employees from individualist countries are less likely to perceive empowerment arising from a given set of leadership practices (Zheng & Tian, 2019).

Relatedly, due to the role of employees' cultural values and the effect of the individualism-collectivism orientation, Yan et al. (2021) suggest that managers could opt to recruit employees

with high collectivist tendencies to promote employee engagement as part of their efforts to develop collectivism in the workplace. In a collectivist society like the UAE this finding may be significant as it gives grounds to expect that Emirati nationals may bring these collectivist tendencies and engaged attitudes to the workplace. Collectivist societies are associated with family-supportive practices which in turn are positively related to higher employee engagement (Rofcanin et al., 2017). In contrast, in individualistic societies there has been a history of widespread employee cynicism and burnout which have led to weakly engaged workforces (Cartright & Holmes, 2006). Other analysis has pointed to a lack of trust in individualistic workplaces (Chughtai & Buckley, 2008).

From this brief overview of antecedents, it can be seen that diverse factors have to be in place to optimise the chances for both individual-level engagement and engagement across the whole workforce. Two of the best evidenced antecedents – perceived organisational support and employee training – are considered in more depth later in the chapter.

### **2.3.3 Outcomes**

Employee engagement has been associated with a wide range of organisationally positive outcomes which accounts for both the academic and the management interest in the construct. Harter et al. (2002) found positive correlation between employee engagement and customer satisfaction, profitability, productivity, employee safety and employee turnover. These relationships were subsequently confirmed by Christian and colleagues (2011). Salanova et al. (2005) found employee engagement to be positively related to employee performance and customer loyalty. Saks (2006) found that employee engagement was significantly positively related to job satisfaction, organisational commitment, and organisational citizenship behaviour, and negatively related to intention to quit. Richman (2006) reported that employee engagement is also linked to important organisational outcomes such as employee productivity and profit. A systematic review conducted by Bailey et al. (2017) found correlations between employee engagement and higher-level performance, in-role task performance, extra-role performance, morale, turnover intention, and organisational commitment. Job performance was found to be significantly predicted by employee engagement in a study of Ugandan nurses (Sendawula et al., 2018).

Company growth can be affected both positively and negatively by the level of engagement of its employees (Sharmila, 2013). Disengaged employees have negative impact on work and co-workers whereas having engaged employees can give a firm crucial competitive advantages like increased productivity, customer satisfaction, decreased employee turnover and deliver beyond expectations. Engaged employees support the organisation to achieve its business outcomes, therefore, employee engagement should be a continuous process of learning, improvement, measurement, and actions (Sharmila, 2013).

#### **2.3.4 Absence of engagement**

An opposing construct of 'job apathy' has been proposed to label the absence of engagement and describes "a state of diminished motivation and affect toward one's job" in which an individual has a low emotional attachment to their job (Schmidt et al., 2017, p.486). This can arise for many reasons, including a lack of interest in the job tasks, an individual's personality, being occupied with non-work aspects of life, or job-related stressors (Alarcon, 2011). Employees in a state of job apathy will exhibit employee withdrawal behaviours including absenteeism, lateness, not putting in the required effort and, ultimately, turnover (Schmidt et al., 2017). Employee 'burnout' is a related concept used to describe an employee experiencing "an erosion of engagement with the job" (Schaufeli et al., 2002, p.71). Both apathy and burnout produce negative outcomes for both the individual and organisation.

#### **2.3.5 Employee Engagement models**

With so many potential antecedents for employee engagement and the context dependency of which are most effective, the means by which an individual organisation achieves this engagement may vary greatly from the next. Nevertheless, with ample evidence for antecedents and outcomes available, there have been several notable attempts to develop a conceptual model for employee engagement.

#### **Kahn's three psychological conditions**

Kahn (1990) found that there are three psychological conditions that affect personal engagement (see Figure 2-1). These psychological conditions are meaningfulness (How meaningful is it for me to bring myself into this Performance?), safety (How safe is it to do so?) and availability (How available am I to do so?). Employees will be engaged in situations that give them psychological

meaningfulness, psychological safety and psychological availability. Personal engagement varies according to how employees perceive these psychological conditions.

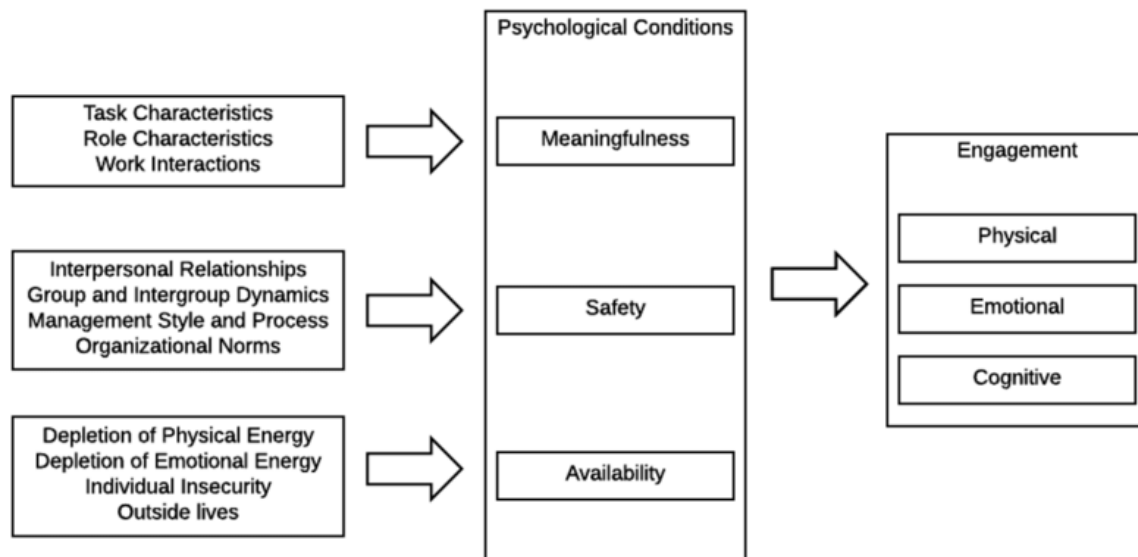


Figure 2-1: Kahn (1990) model of employee engagement

Source: Meskelis (2017, p. 29)

Regarding Kahn (1990) and his three questions, antecedents have been proposed for each. For the meaningfulness question, job challenge, which creates the opportunity for accomplishment, and mastery has been proposed (Cavanaugh et al., 2000). Furthermore, it has been posited that jobs that offer variety make encourage greater engagement than those which are more mundane (Humphrey et al., 2007). Variety as a driver of engagement has been further demonstrated in more recent empirical studies (Shantz et al., 2013). Thirdly, autonomy adds to meaningfulness by promoting a sense of ownership and control over work outcomes (Hackman & Oldham, 1980; Kahn, 1990). Autonomy has become the most studied antecedent of meaningfulness (Crawford et al., 2013). On the question of safety antecedents, transformational leadership has been proposed (Bass, 1997) as has workplace climate (Glick, 1985). The concept of social support, which is the perception than an organisation cares about their personal wellbeing, is also understood to play an important role (Eisenberger et al., 1986). Job security, the degree of certainty an individual can have about staying in their present organisations, is also viewed as significant (Sverke et al., 2002).

A national policy of retaining local employees and replacing expatriates may have a direct influence on this antecedent.

Turning to the third question, that of availability, a further set of antecedents can be found in the literature. Role overload, or excessive workload, is where a challenging workload goes too far and becomes a drag on engagement (Beehr et al., 1976). Work-role conflict such as receiving incompatible requests can also lower availability (Crawford et al., 2010). Psychological availability can also be negatively affected by family-work conflict where incompatibility arises between work demands and the needs of the family domain (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Saks (2006) proposed that even though Kahn (1990) revealed that psychological conditions affect engagement, his model does not explain the reason why employees respond to these psychological conditions with varying degrees of engagement. However, Social Exchange Theory (SET) can explain employee's engagement as SET argues that obligations are generated through a series of interactions between parties. Saks (2006) found that organisational support was a significant predictor of job engagement so that employees who have organisational support will have a high level of engagement.

### **Schaufeli's job resources (JD-R) model**

After Khan's pioneering work, the work of Schaufeli and colleagues is perhaps the most widely used employee engagement model. If Khan's work can be summarised as a 'needs satisfying approach' then Schaufeli's is a resource-based one. The model situates "work engagement as a psychological state that mediates the impact of job resources and personal resources on organisational outcomes" (Schaufeli and Bakker, 2010, p.20). The job resources are physical workplace resources in place to achieve work-related goals while the personal resources are traits such as optimism, self-efficacy, and self-esteem. As job demands increase the significance of job resources also increases. This approach also emphasises burnout as the antithesis of engagement and a potential outcome of increased job demands, as shown in Figure 2-2.

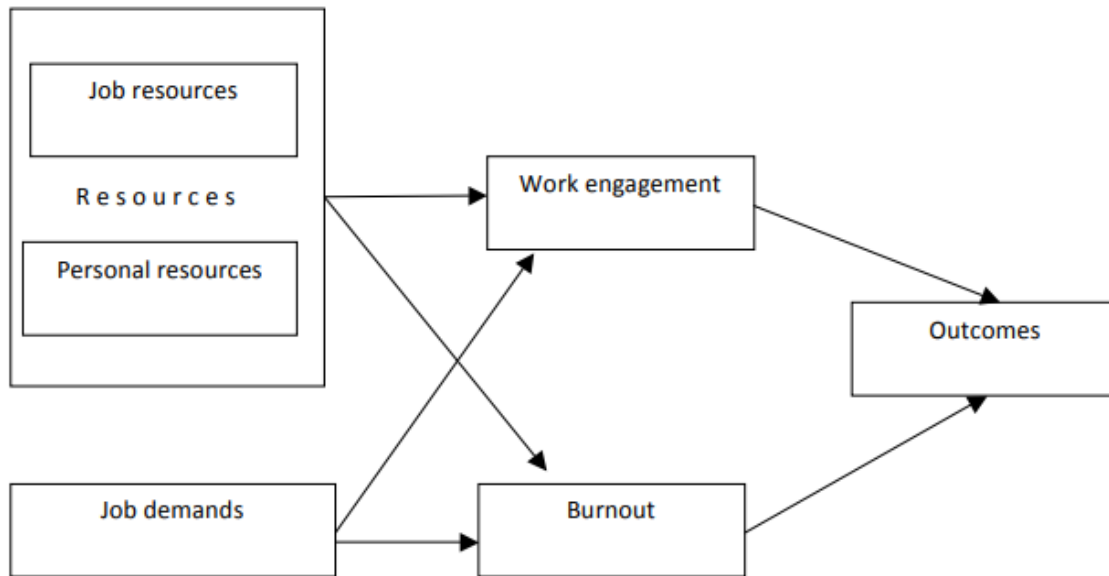


Figure 2-2: Schaufeli's Job resources model

Source: Schaufeli and Bakker (2010).

An individual and a workforce as a whole are at their most motivated and engaged when both job demands and resources are high and where resources are absent despite high demands then low motivation and burnout risk are likely to occur (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2010).

### **Service climate**

Salanova et al. (2005) examined the mediating role of service climate in the prediction of employee performance and customer loyalty and revealed that employee engagement is positively related to employee performance and customer loyalty. The authors also found that work engagement positively related to organisational resources and service climate (see Figure 2-3).

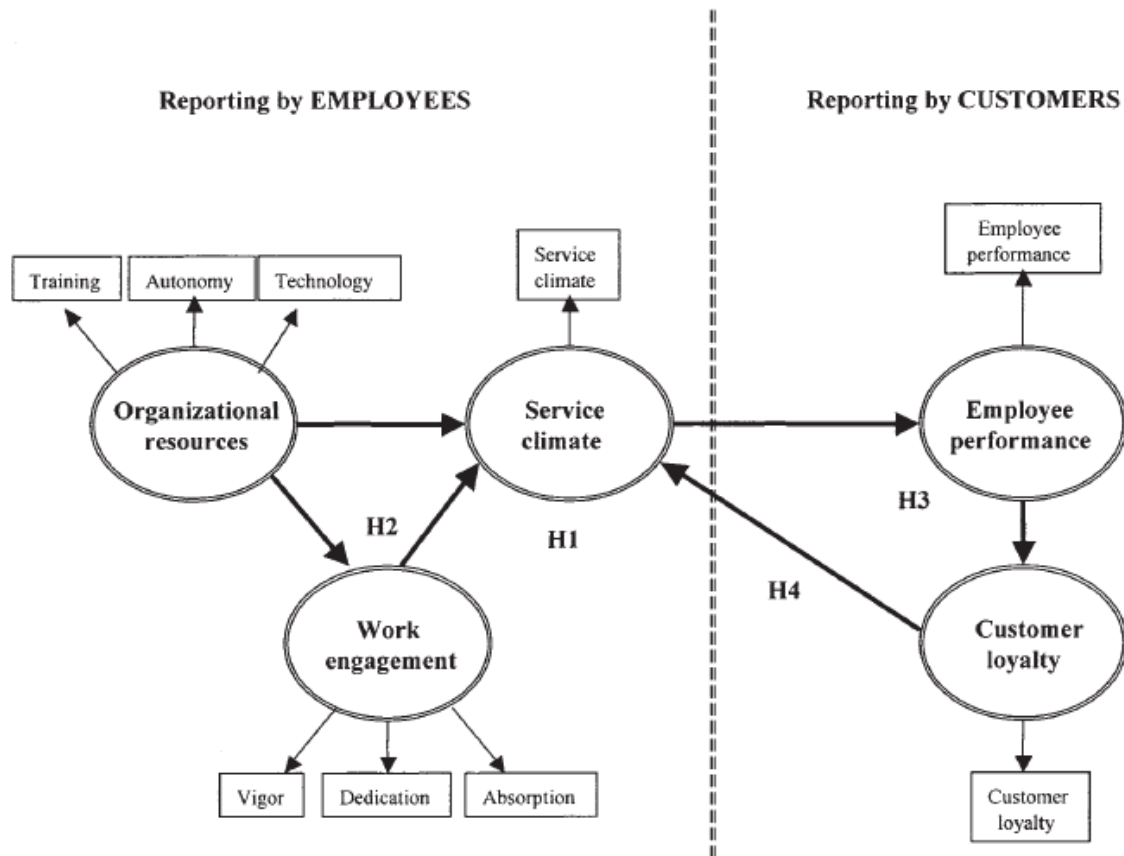


Figure 2-3: Salanova et al. (2005) research model

Source: Salanova et al. (2005, p. 1219)

In common with Schaufeli's work, provision of organisational resources places a leading role in creating work engagement in this model.

### The CARE framework

Mani and Mishra (2021) proposed the CARE framework (See Figure 2-4) mostly as a tool for (HR) practitioners seeking to develop employee engagement within their organisations. Following a systematic review of literature, they identify 15 levers as variables available to organisations which the authors assign to four groups (Context, Altruistic, Resonance, Enable). These novel constructs are intended to replace older labels for a renewed approach to employee engagement.

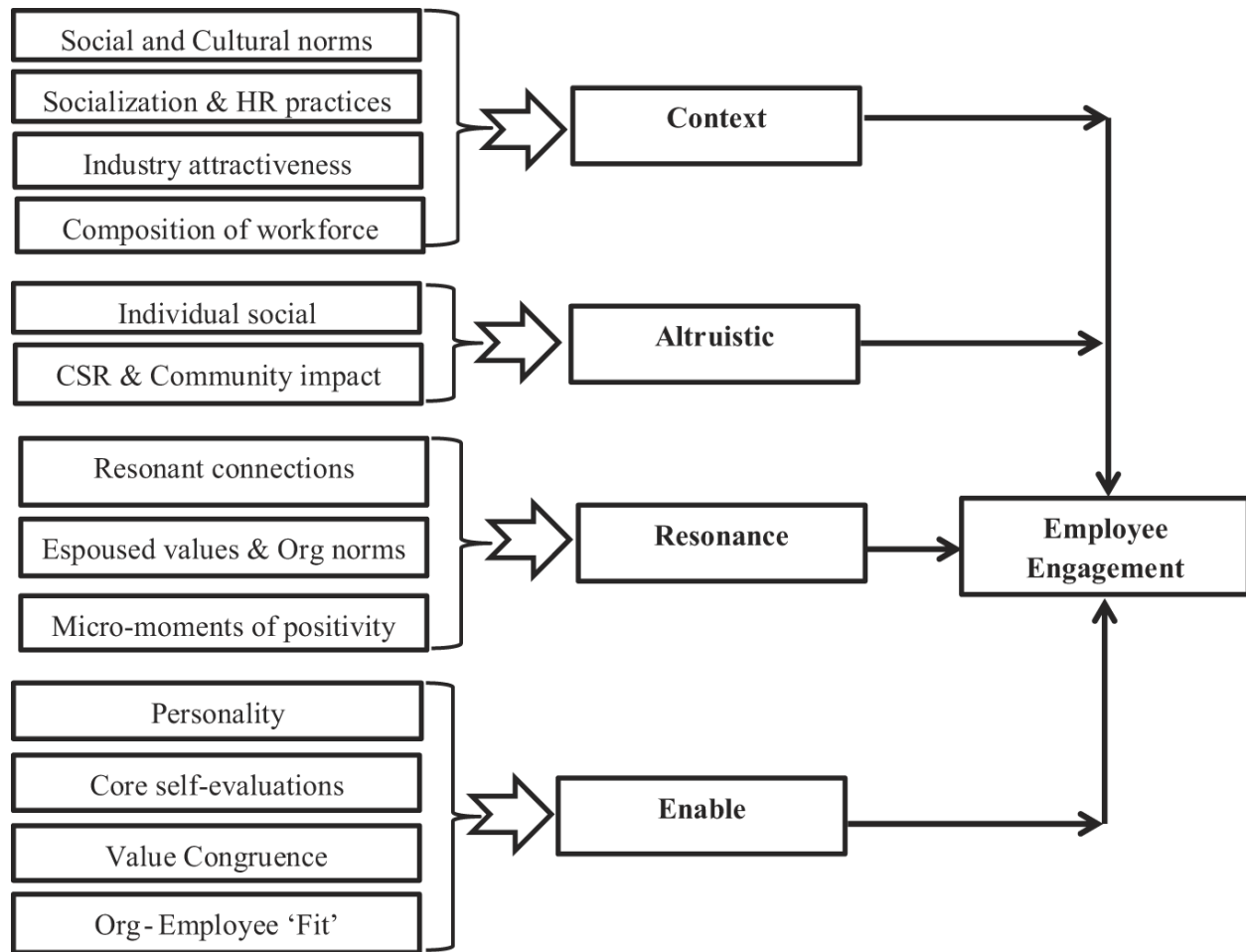


Figure 2-4: The CARE framework

Source: Mani and Mishra (2021)

Another dimension of Mani and Mishra’s work was on the generationally changing mix of employee engagement measures across time. They argue that as the needs of the workforce changes, so has the mix of measures deployed. For example, while Baby Boomers responded to predictability, monetary rewards, strong brands, social support, long term roles and enriching work, Gen Z employees are more likely to respond to socially conscious work, continuous learning, autonomy, instant gratification, and sabbaticals (Mani & Mishra, 2021). While an interesting addition to the literature, generational labelling like this is culture dependent and may not generalise well from one culture to another.



### **Consultancy firm models**

In addition to academic research, consultancy firms have adopted the construct of employee engagement and promoted its importance to company performance. The best-known model proposed by the consultancy industry is the Gallup Q. The product of decades of development this questionnaire is designed to be a survey instrument to be used as a management tool on which actions can be based (Harter et al., 2006). One noteworthy characteristic of the Gallup Q is the close similarity between the correlations with business unit performance for employee engagement and job satisfaction. As Schaufeli and Bakker (2010, p.16) explain, this means that Gallup's employee engagement concept is nearly identical with overall job satisfaction.

Another consulting organisation, Aon Hewitt, proposes the Aon Hewitt Employee Engagement Model (Aon Hewitt, 2015). Engagement is viewed as a result of six drivers: brand, leadership, performance, company practices, the basics and the work which combine to create the overall work experience. The model further proposes that employee engagement leads to three outcomes – 'say', 'stay', and 'strive'. Say: the employee speaks positively about the organisation to his/her colleague and customers. Stay: the employee has a desire to continue in the organisation. Strive: the employee motivated to do an extra job to produce more results (Aon Hewitt, 2015). The engagement outcomes lead in turn to a range of positive business outcomes under the headings: talent, operational, customer and financial.

The BlessingWhite organisation (also a consulting firm) developed the X-model of Employee Engagement (see Figure 2-5). This model is based on the assumption that engagement happens when maximum contribution to the organisation intersects with maximum satisfaction for the employee. Organisations seek the maximum contribution from each employee while individual employees seek their own unique formulation of satisfaction. A workforce comprises of individuals who are at one of five levels of engagement: the engaged, the almost engaged, Honeymooners and Hamsters (new employees and those working hard but wrongly focused), Crash and Burners (high performers but disillusioned) and the disengaged (BlessingWhite, 2011).

In sum, a range of conceptual models have been proposed based on the antecedents and outcomes of work engagement. In addition to academic models, the widely accepted view of engagement as an important predictor of performance on both an individual and organisational level has also attracted consultancy firms to add such models to their array of management tools.

## 2.4 Perceived organisational support

While the relationship between programmes to nationalise the workforce and employee engagement has not been empirically examined, the same cannot be said for perceived organisational support (POS) and engagement. Researchers, mainly using survey instruments, have examined this relationship and the strength of the effect of POS on employee engagement. This section summarises the evidence base starting with definitions.

Eisenberger et al. (1990, p.51), described POS as “a general perception concerning the extent to which the organisation values their (employees) contributions and cares about their well-being”. Krishnan and Mary (2012, p.1) POS as “an employee belief that the organisation cares for and values his or her contribution to the success of the organisation”. In general, employees regularly reflect on whether their organisations value them because being valued by the organisation brings benefits to employees such as pay, promotion, and resources required to better achieve assigned tasks effectively and to deal with stressful situations (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002).

Eisenberger et al. (1990) found a positive relationship of POS with job attendance and performance. Rhoades and Eisenberger (2002) highlighted three consequences of POS which are organisational commitment, job-related affect and job involvement. On the basis of the reciprocity norm, POS causes employees to feel an obligation to care about their organisation’s interests. Also, POS influences employees’ job satisfaction by meeting socio-emotional needs, increasing performance-reward expectancies, and signalling the availability of aid when needed. By enhancing employees’ perceived competence, POS may increase employees’ interest in their work.

Aube et al. (2007) examined the relationships between POS and three components of organisational commitment —affective, normative and continuance commitment. Their cross-sectional study of prison employees reported a positive and significant correlation between POS and affective and normative commitment. Further analysis found that locus of control and work autonomy moderated the relationship between POS and affective commitment. The authors conclude that organisations should promote POS to develop and maintain organisational commitment.

With the evidence of the strength of the effect of POS on desirable outcomes very mixed, Riggie et al. (2009) examined these effects of POS on four-employee outcomes associated with employee engagement —organisational commitment, job satisfaction, performance and intention to leave. After analysing the results of 167 studies containing 294 correlations, findings explicitly indicated that POS has a positive, strong effect on job satisfaction and organisational commitment and a moderate positive effect on employee performance and a strong, negative effect on intention to leave. POS has been shown to be positively related to employee work engagement (Eisenberger & Stinglhamber, 2011; Zacher & Winter, 2011).

Bahestifar and Zare (2013) found that POS affects employee attitudes toward the company. Gupta et al. (2016) found that POS positively affects work engagement among their sample of Indian nurses. Also, Kou (2012) concluded that POS will increase employees' commitment to the organisation which eventually increases their work engagement. Vegsund (2014) revealed that work engagement is strongly influenced by perceived organisational support and workload which means perceived organisational support can make employees more engaged while workload negatively influences work engagement. Dasgupta (2016) conducted research on nurses in a private hospital and found that work engagement was strongly positively influenced by perceived organisational support. Al-Omar et al. (2019) conducted a survey study of pharmacists, in Saudi Arabia, and found a significant relationship between pharmacists' POS and their engagement. The study used the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) and the Perceived Organisational Support Scale (POS) to measure the two variables.

Hasnida et al. (2019) examine the effect of POS on the work engagement of nurses, finding they were positively related. The higher the POS of a nurse, the higher their work engagement. Hasnida et al. (2019) also highlighted the role of the direct supervisor in generating positive perceptions of support. believed that management must be able to attend and be felt by nurses through the direct supervisors at work as a positive perceived of organisational support will increase work engagement. Hasnida et al., (2019) conclude that perceived organisational support affects employee's engagement because employees think that they will receive a reward for their effort and think management will pay attention to their wellbeing.

Chan (2019) identified the two main factors promoting POS as being the provision of support by the direct supervisor and the distribution of rewards. It was further found that POS positively correlates with employee retention. Perceived organisational support has a positive influence on employee performance and affective commitment. Furthermore, a positive relationship between POS and employee engagement is also reported (Nair & Islam, 2017).

Despite some debate over the strength of the effect (see Riggle et al., 2009) there is now a solid base of evidence that POS positively impacts employee engagement. Based on that, this study developed the research model and the first hypotheses of this study which will be discussed later in this chapter.

## **2.5 Employee Training**

Alongside POS, employee training is recognised as an important factor in promoting employee engagement. This section summarises the evidence on this relationship, again commencing with definitions.

According to Armstrong (2014, p.36) training is “the use of systematic and planned instruction activities to promote learning”. Training can be viewed as a means to develop a “fit” between individual capabilities and organisational needs (Sheehan et al., 2014) though for optimal engagement this training should include an element of exploratory learning which enables individuals to grow in ways which are not directly linked to their current role (Shipton et al., 2006).

Kahn (1990), the pioneering author on employee engagement, considered training crucial to providing employees with the resources that will make it possible for them to be fully engaged in their roles. Training is used to increase the skills and knowledge of employees in order to achieve their tasks effectively (Flippo, 1984). Employee training is essential to enhance job performance and considered critical for organisational success (Lee et al., 2010). The organisation needs to ensure its employees have the required technical skills and knowledge for the organisation to grow. Training is directed toward skill development, whether technical or soft skills such as communication skills and leadership (Delery & Doty 1996). Employees need to be kept updated with the latest technology to survive in competitive markets. While employee training can be costly

to the organisation, there is a positive relationship between employee training and improved job performance (Frayne & Geringer, 2000; Esteban-Lloret et al., 2018; Li et al., 2012).

Job resources are an important variable in leading conceptual models of employee engagement, as discussed earlier in this chapter. Bakker et al. (2008) concluded that job resources are important antecedents of employee engagement because these resources reduce the impact of job demands (i.e., workload) and supports employees to achieve their goal. Bakker and Demerouti (2008) also report that job resources such as employee training are positively related to employees' engagement. Employees will feel more secure when they have the required skills to handle their assigned tasks that will lower anxiety and increase feelings of availability which in turn will make them more engaged. Employee engagement can be influenced by training and development, therefore, in order to improve employee engagement, management and leaders need to intervene in the working environment of employees mainly through effective communication and strategic training and development (Kahn, 2010).

Memon et al. (2016) examined employee training as a predictor of employee engagement and the intentions of employees to quit, taking into consideration employees' actual satisfaction with that training and suggested that employee training is significantly positively related to employee engagement. As such, employee training is an important resource for increasing employee engagement. In addition, Ghanenia et al. (2015) investigated the effect of psychological training for forty-four managers on employee engagement. The results showed that the training provided to managers increased the engagement of employees.

The literature generally shows a positive relationship between employees' training and employee engagement. Training and development programs are seen as significant tools for enhancing employee engagement by providing employees with required skills, knowledge, and experiences. Employees who receive training and development opportunities are more likely to feel valued and supported by their organisation, which can lead to improved engagement.

## **2.6 Development of hypotheses**

The literature proposes many potential antecedents of employee engagement so for the present study choices had to be made as to which ones to include. To do this it was necessary to consider

the context. UAE National employees benefit from a two-fold support system, encompassing both organizational assistance and external support through the EI. This study selected perceived organisational support as a variable in order to examine the relationship between this internal source of support and the support offered externally through the EI. In so doing we could understand whether POS correlated positively or negatively or not at all with support for the EI.

The second variable under scrutiny in this study is employee training. This aspect has been chosen to gauge the impact of the skills acquired by employees on their overall engagement levels within the organization. By delving into these two critical variables, the research aims to contribute to existing understanding of already established antecedents of employee engagement and pioneer examination of a third as yet untested variable, support for the Emiratisation Initiative.

This study sets three hypotheses. As set out in this chapter POS and training are understood to have a positive relationship with employee engagement so the first two hypotheses are aimed at testing whether this relationship is present in the setting of the case selected for this present study. The third tests whether the EI has a moderating effect on the relationship between POS and employee engagement. Unlike the first two, this effect has not yet been examined in the literature meaning that this hypothesis cannot be based on firm assumptions.

Based on perceived organisational support theory (Eisenberger et al., 1986) which proposes that employees form a generalised perception concerning the extent to which the organisation values their contribution and care about their well-being and tend to perform better to reciprocate this perceived support from the organisation, I propose that perceived organisational support will increase UAE national's employee engagement at the case studied.

*Hypothesis 1: Perceived organisational support is positively related to UAE national employees' engagement.*

In order to achieve assigned tasks effectively, UAE national employees should be prepared and have the required technical skills and knowledge. Job resources such as technical skills and knowledge will help UAE national employees to be more engaged.

*Hypothesis 2: Employee training is positively related to UAE National employees' engagement.*

To overcome unemployment challenges facing national employees, the UAE government launched the Emiratisation initiative (EI). The EI aims to increase the number of Emiratis in the job market and its contribution to the economy. Its purpose is to employ national employees in a meaningful and efficient manner in the public and private sectors and support them after getting job by offering high salaries and giving them the priority in promotion (Alserhan et al., 2009). Therefore, this study proposes that the Emiratisation initiative support moderates the relationship between perceived organisational support and UAE National employees' engagement.

The decision to explore 'Perceived Emiratisation Initiative Support' as a moderator variable, rather than a dependent variable, is rooted in the existing literature on the positive relationship between perceived organizational support and employee engagement. According to numerous studies, increased levels of organizational support are associated with higher employee engagement, implying that as employees perceive more support from their organization, their engagement levels or outcomes associated with engagement tend to rise (Aube et al., 2007, Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002; Riggle et al., 2009).

In the case of UAE National employees, it is important to recognize the unique nature of their support structure. These employees benefit from a distinctive two-fold support system, which includes support from their organization as well as external support through the Emiratisation initiative. This dual support mechanism sets the stage for a nuanced relationship. By introducing 'Perceived Emiratisation Initiative Support' as a moderator variable, our research acknowledges that employees receive support from both sources, and the interaction between these sources of support may be critical in shaping their engagement levels. This decision is grounded in the understanding that employees in this context might perceive support regardless of its source. Hence, we hypothesize that the Emiratisation initiative's support, when combined with organizational support, may have a moderating effect on the relationship between perceived support and employee engagement. This approach allows us to explore the complex interplay between these two sources of support and their potential impact on employee engagement, offering a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics at play within this unique organizational setting.

*Hypothesis 3: The Emiratisation Initiative moderates the relationship between Perceived Organisational Support and UAE nationals' engagement.*

These hypothesised relationships lead to the model shown as Figure 2-5.

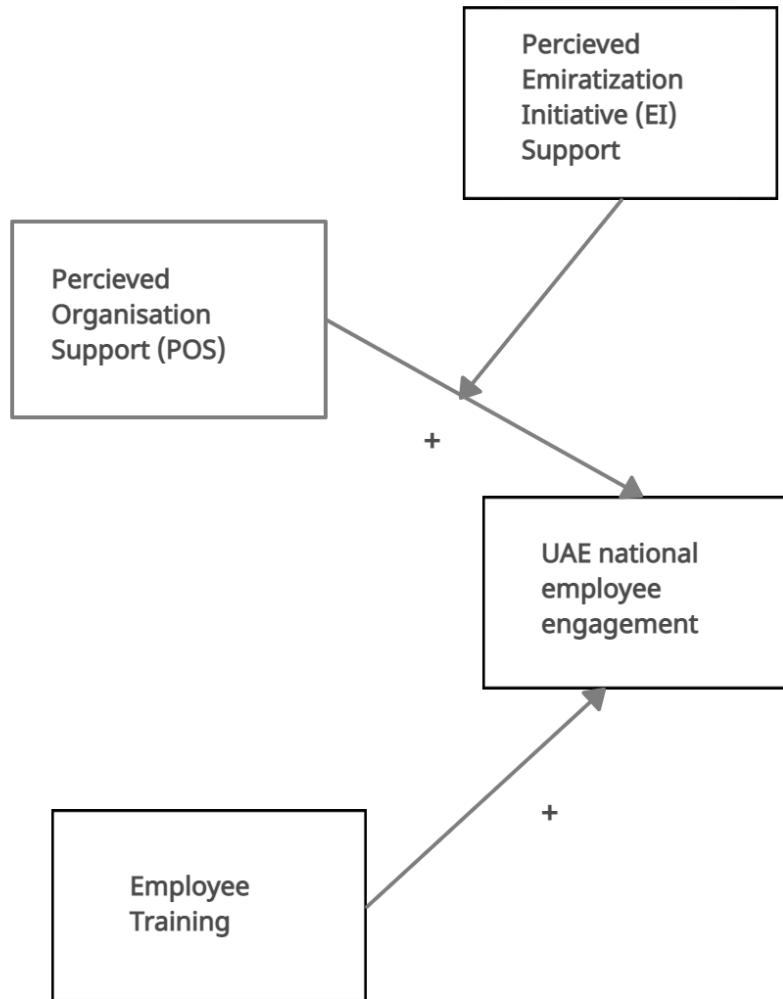


Figure 2-5: The Proposed Model

## 2.7 Summary

This chapter reviewed the literature on the variables and relationships of interest in the present study to establish the current knowledge base. Employee engagement is a major academic field and an equally important area of practice for management and HR professionals. Investigation and



measurement of antecedents of employee engagement and the development of models have also attracted research attention with several viable theories and models available. Organisational support and employee training are well represented as antecedents and justify their place in the proposed model.

The preparation of this review also presented challenges. Primarily, searches for studies collecting primary data from employees on issues related to workforce nationalisation yield rather meagre results. There appear to be no studies at all addressing the relationship between the ‘Perceived Emiratisation Initiative (EI) Support’ and ‘UAE National Employment Engagement’ and the same could be said if the scope is broadened to other workforce nationalisation policies of the Gulf Region. Even further afield there is a paucity of research of the employee’s perspective of Africanisation and Affirmative Action. While this emphasises the contribution of the present study it making conceptualisation challenging.

## **Chapter 3 : Methodology**

### **3.1 Introduction**

To critically examine the relationship between the Perceived support from the Emiratisation Initiative and employee engagement levels among Emirati employees in an Oil & Gas company in the UAE, and to evaluate the impact of these perceptions on employee engagement. In order to achieve this aim, four objectives were set, namely:

- To examine the significance of perceived organisational support, employee training and the Emiratisation Initiative as predictors of employee engagement.
- To identify factors that are perceived as important by UAE nationals in regard to their employment engagement.
- To critically explore and evaluate the perspectives of UAE national employees on the Emiratisation Initiative (EI).
- To provide recommendations to decisions makers and government leaders about supporting employee engagement.

This chapter discusses the research methodology used in this present study and the justifications behind the choice of the case study strategy. Subsequently, the research design and the differences between quantitative and qualitative approaches are presented. The chapter then moves on to the methods that have been used for collecting and analysing relevant data to achieve the aim and objectives of this research. Finally, there is a discussion on ethical considerations.

### **3.2 The philosophical underpinning of the study**

The purpose of this section is to make explicit the research paradigm that has influenced this study. Researchers need to understand the philosophical underpinning of a research study because it strongly influences all the researcher's choices and actions (Grix, 2010, Saunders et al., 2012). As stated by Blaikie (1993) ontological assumptions affect how the researcher views the world and what he or she conceives as real. Therefore, the researcher should explain philosophical assumptions before selecting the research methodology (Zou et al., 2014).

Epistemology is one of the core branches of philosophy (Grix, 2002). It is concerned with what constitutes acceptable knowledge in a given field of study (Saunders et al., 2012). Further, it is concerned with the question of what is or should be regarded as acceptable knowledge in a discipline (Bryman & Bell, 2015). There are several different approaches for the epistemological framework (Gray, 2009; Saunders et al., 2012; Bryman, 2012). These approaches have different viewpoints as to the reality and different approaches to data collection and analysis. This study is based on the pragmatist approach.

### **3.2.1 Applying a pragmatist approach to ontology and epistemology.**

Pragmatism is a philosophical approach that can be applied to both ontology and epistemology (Frankel Pratt, 2016). The pragmatist paradigm has emerged as an important approach to knowledge in recent decades. Ormerod (2006, p.892) posits that the roots of pragmatism are deep in history and defines it as a “philosophical doctrine that can be traced back to the academic skeptics of classical antiquity who denied the possibility of achieving authentic knowledge regarding the real truth and taught that we must make do with plausible information adequate to the needs of practice”.

The main principles of the pragmatist paradigm are its rejection of the distinction between theoretical judgement and practical judgement and its assumption that without practical consequences, theoretical concepts are worthless (Morgan, 2014). In contrast to the clear links that exist between interpretivism and qualitative methods and positivism and quantitative methods, the link between pragmatism and a particular research methodology is less explicit (Denzin, 2012). This arises from the paradigm’s flexibility (Frankel Pratt, 2016).

The study is targeted at UAE national employees who had different levels of seniority and years of service in the company. Therefore, they have different perceptions and understandings of engagement, organisational support, training and the EI. Adopting an objectivist approach in this study would require an acceptance that common perceptions and understandings exist and that they are independent of these employees. This would not be appropriate. Therefore, instead this study adopts a pragmatist approach.

The rise in the importance of pragmatism mirrors the increased interest in mixed methods research. Mixed method researchers turned increasingly to pragmatism for an epistemological grounding for their work in which they apply methods associated with both positivism and interpretivism, as

is the case in the present study. In doing so the dogmatic paradigms are rejected in pursuit of the most thorough understanding of a given phenomenon possible (Florczak, 2014). Hence, complementarity is a key principle of pragmatism. Furthermore, the pragmatist researcher recognises their own human subjectivity but asserts that this does not prevent them from conducting a research process objectively (Shannon-Baker, 2016).

In conclusion, pragmatism fits well with the mixed methods nature of the present study and the researcher's approach to knowledge as well as the desire to achieve the fullest possible understanding of the relationships between employee engagement, organisational support and training, and the EI.

### **3.2.3 Deductive and Inductive Research Approaches**

The choice between deductive approach and the inductive approach is based on the relationship between theory and research. The relationship between theory and research is either one with theory driving the research process in all its phases or theory as a product of the research process (Bryman & Bell, 2015). The sequence of the deductive and the inductive approaches can be depicted as a series of steps, as outlined in Figure 3-1.

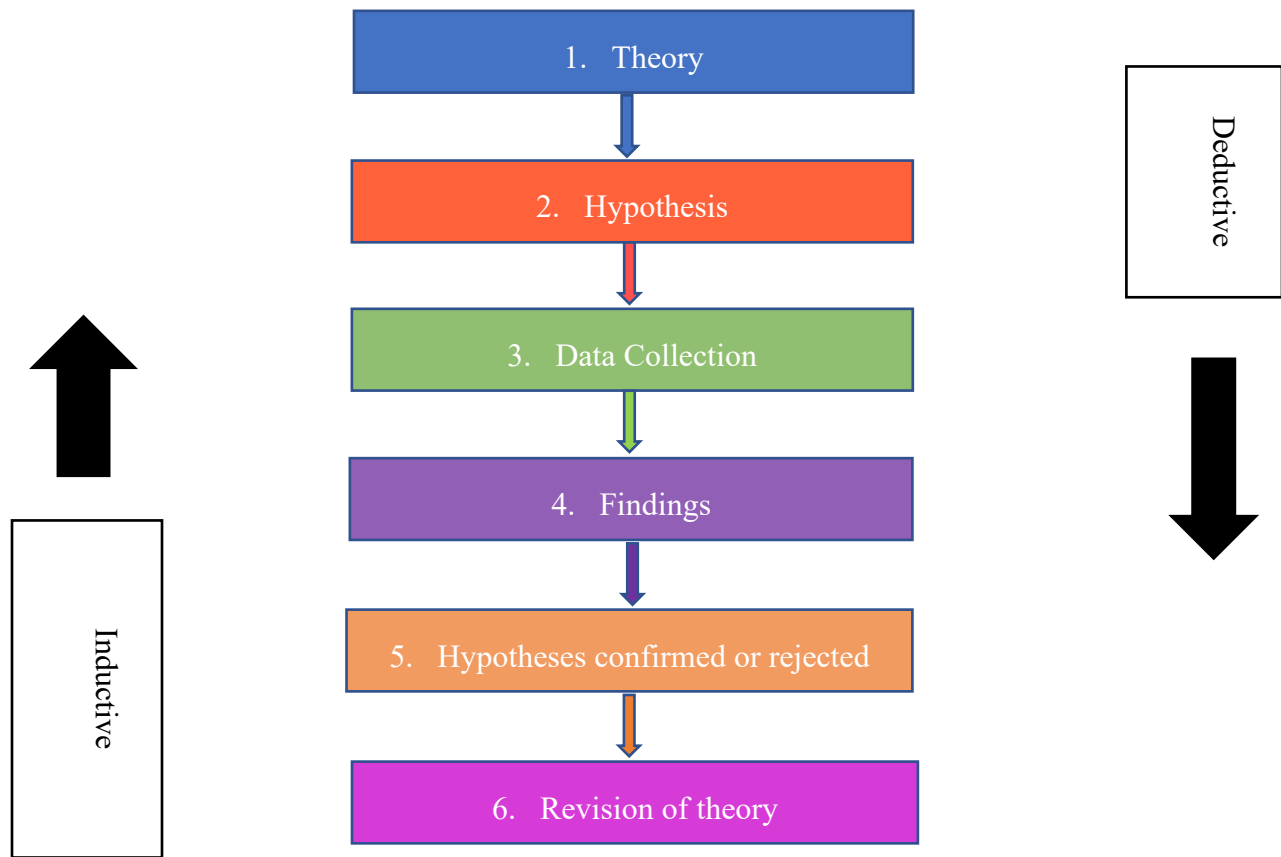


Figure 3-1: The process of deduction and induction

Source: Bryman & Bell (2015).

The deductive approach is defined as a research approach that involves the testing of a hypothesis by using a research strategy designed to perform this test (Saunders & Lewis, 2012). The deductive process starts with a theory and is followed by a hypothesis, which requires the researcher to decide how the data for this hypothesis will be collected. Then this is followed, after collection data, by findings and finally confirmation or rejection of the hypothesis.

The inductive approach is a research approach that leads to the development of theory as a result of analysing the collected data. If deduction is a top-down approach, then induction is a bottom-up approach. It moves from specific observations to development of theories (Saunders & Lewis,

2012). The findings are fed back to the theory in the induction approach so that it can be developed. Bryman and Bell (2015) state that theory is the outcome of research under the inductive approach.

This research is a sequential study in two phases. The first phase was a survey study using a questionnaire to examine a series of relationships between variables and in so doing test a set of three hypotheses. This was the deductive phase of the research. Secondly, a further phase collected interview data in order to address the research questions. This required an inductive approach.

### **3.3 Quantitative and Qualitative research methods**

There are two groups of methods widely used in research studies - quantitative and qualitative. In a qualitative approach, the researcher collects analyses and interprets data that cannot be easily quantified and numbered and goes beyond the obvious of constructs and variables that are not visible or measurable. The quantitative approach, on the other hand, seeks to express the data in terms of numbers and figures that are analysed with mathematical/ statistical methods to generalise the findings to the population at large. To fulfil the purpose of the present study, both qualitative and quantitative approaches were used.

The longstanding debate over the relative merits of quantitative and qualitative methods has given way to questions of appropriateness (Collis & Hussey, 2003). The choice of methods is understood to be driven by the particular research problem being investigated. In this sequential research design both methods were used.

#### **3.3.1 Quantitative methods**

The purpose of designing a quantitative study is to examine the relationships between the variables (Bryman & Bell, 2015). For the present study a survey questionnaire was administered to Emirati employees of the company to test the relationships between the variables of employee engagement, POS, training and the Emiratisation Initiative. The quantitative research method Emphasises quantification and often uses questionnaires for data collection which produces numerical data (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Quantitative research method is considered as a data condenser because it condenses data to see the big picture (Neuman, 2003). The obvious benefits of the quantitative method are that it requires limited contact with participants, therefore, the findings are reliable and objective (Blaikie, 2009). Also, the numerical form of the data makes comparison between

variables easier to do and data are Standardised (Hart, 1987). However, while this method is useful for gathering data from large groups of participants, the collected data lacks detail (Mrtek, 1996). A further drawback can arise through collecting data from large numbers of people allows greater confidence in accepting the reliability of the findings. Moreover, the result of investigation, in quantitative research, can be generalised beyond the limit of the research location (Bryman & Bell, 2015).

### 3.3.2 Qualitative methods

In the present study, qualitative method generates non-numerical data using a semi-structured interviewing format to obtain in-depth data (Wengraf, 2001). As described by Van Maanen (1983), the qualitative research method is an array of interpretative techniques which attempts to describe, decode, translate and deal with the meaning, not frequency, of phenomena that occur in the social world. Similarly, Chisnall (1986) defined it as diagnostic attempts to find out what may account for some behaviours and understanding of factors that impact decisions. It allows to explore meanings of individual experiences in order to develop a theory. Also, it allows the researcher to focus on a single phenomenon to explore the context (Creswell, 2003). Although the qualitative research method is the most appropriate method for theory development, it consumes large amount of time to analyse collected data (Flick, 2006).

Concepts in the qualitative method come in the form of themes not relationships as in the quantitative method (Robson, 1997). Neuman (2003) states that qualitative methods are best understood as data enhancers, enhancing data by revealing key aspects of the problem. Neuman (2003) explained the main differences between the two methods (see Table 3-1).

Table 3-1: Differences between the quantitative and qualitative methods.

Quantitative	Qualitative
Theory is causal	Theory is causal and non-causal
Theory is Deductive	Theory is Inductive or Deductive

Concepts are in the form of different variables	Concepts are in the form of themes
Data are in the form of numbers	Data are in the form of words

Source: Neuman (2003).

### 3.3.3 Mixed methods research

Mixed method research is the collection or analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data in a single study (Tashakkori & Teddi, 2003). The current study used this mixed method approach combining both quantitative and qualitative methods. Mixed methods allow researchers to address research questions that cannot be answered by one method alone and helps them to use all possible methods to answer the research question (Blaikie, 2009). The mixed method approach is used in this study to achieve the research objectives and collect meaningful enhanced data. The data is collected in two phases. The first phase collected data via a survey questionnaire of 166 respondents to measure the engagement of UAE national employee in the chosen company. Then, in the second phase, in-depth semi-structured face-to-face interviews were conducted to understand mindsets and factors that affect the engagement of UAE national employees in the company.

While much of the history of academic research has been accompanied by a debate between quantitative purists and qualitative purists, recent decades have seen a steady emergence of a third approach. Mixed methods involve the pragmatic application of both quantitative and qualitative methods, setting aside the purists view that these two paradigms are incompatible. A pragmatic approach to the advancement of knowledge prioritises the appropriateness of research techniques and methods (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004). The justification for using mixed methods is the belief that the research will benefit from the complementary strengths of quantitative and qualitative methods. Hence, in the present sequential mixed methods case study a quantitative survey is followed by qualitative interviews because that was adjudged to be the most effective way of addressing the research questions. It was anticipated that while the survey would identify and measure the relationships of interest, the how and the why of the phenomena would best be revealed through the spoken words of the study's interview participants.



### 3.4 The research design

A research design is an overall plan and procedure for conducting a study so that they will be able to answer a set of questions and get accurate study results (Yin, 2014). In other words, a research design is a plan that guides the researcher to achieve the research goal. There are two variables which influence the research design which are the aim of the research and the timeframe (Robson, 1997).

Selecting the right research approach is dependent on two criteria which are relevance and suitability (Achroyd & Hughes, 1992). In this research a case study method is used to achieve the research aim because this study attempts to answer a “why” question for which it is ideally suited (Yin, 1994). The case study method is “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident, and in which multiple sources of evidence are used” (Yin, 1994). A case study may focus on individuals or groups and at the same time collect data via different methods as secondary data or in-depth interviews (Berg, 1999). In this research the case study will focus on UAE national employees in an oil and gas company in the UAE.

Mixed methods research typically involves a sequential design (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). There are two main kinds of sequential design, explanatory and exploratory. The present study is an explanatory sequential design because it commences with the quantitative phase then uses the qualitative phase to help explain the results and account for outliers (Toyon, 2021).

Firstly, the quantitative method applied a questionnaire to test the relationship between three variables, (1) perceived organisational support (2) training and (3) support for the Emiratisation Initiative, and the level of UAE national employee engagement. When dealing with a large number of respondents, survey questionnaire is one of the approaches that can be useful. With questionnaires, the respondents are not in a hurry, as in the case of verbal interviews. Apart from this, questionnaires give the participants some degree of confidentiality, and as such, they can give their answers without fear of being reprimanded. Although questionnaires have these benefits, some respondents still could provide biased answers (Xie, 2019).

The majority of UAE nationals at the company, where this study takes place, have an email address, but some do not. Consequently, the survey questionnaire was dispersed by email to all

employees with an email address and by hand to all those who do not have one. The HR department provided the employees' email addresses after the required management, and ethical approvals were obtained. Before the questionnaire was sent out, the selected sample was provided with all the necessary information about the questionnaire, including the date by which it should be returned. Those with email addresses known to the researcher also received a reminder two weeks after the questionnaire was first sent.

Next, qualitative research methods were used, specifically in-depth interviews, to understand how national employees perceive the EI and its support and to understand essential engagement factors for UAE national employees. The unique feature of qualitative methods is that the findings do not rely on any numerical data. When carrying out a qualitative investigation, the focus is on descriptive elements such as people's feelings, conduct, and history. For instance, in the business context, some of the issues that were investigated included the effect of factors such as migration of customers, management approaches, political contexts, and cultural diversity to the running of an organisation (Perna, 2020).

The uniqueness of in-depth interviews is that they entail a direct conversation with the participants (Perna, 2020). The downside of this approach is that there is no collection of views from people interacting among themselves which can be achieved by focus group. However, in this study in-depth interviews are more suitable than focus groups because the topic is sensitive, and employees may not share what is in their mind in front of their colleagues. Therefore, in-depth interviews were selected which allowed the researcher to understand the mindset and probe certain points more thoroughly and in a confidential setting.

### **3.4.1 The case study approach**

As stated, a single case study was chosen as the most appropriate research design for addressing the research questions, aim and objectives. This is because from the rich picture that can emerge from an in-depth study of a single organisation new knowledge can be contributed. Case study research has its roots in disciplines such as sociology, anthropology, psychology and history (Simons, 2009). On the question of what a 'case' is, it has been defined as a presently existing unit of human activity located in the real world which can only be studied within its context from which it is inseparable (Gilham, 2000). It can be an individual person, a group, an organisation or a wider community. A single case or multiple cases can be the subject of a case study (Gilham, 2000).

The purpose of case study research has two main dimensions. One is to explore the peculiarities of a specific case in the form of an authentic anecdote. The second is the cautious transference of findings to a wider consideration of the phenomenon or problem of interest. In the present study the uniqueness of the case is recognised but its potential for generalisation is not wholly ignored. The question of generalisation is perhaps the main point of debate for the case study method. In response to this criticism case study researchers have adopted a range of responses from discounting generalisability as a legitimate criterion for assessing case studies (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) to nudging attention towards the slightly different measures of transferability, comparability (Chreim et al., 2007) or fittingness (Sarantakos, 2017). Clearly, large sample quantitative studies are more generalisable than case studies; however, this does not negate the usefulness of case studies for theoretical generalisation, for identifying non-conforming cases and, where properly justified, for empirical generalisation (e.g., Graebner, 2009).

Case study research is not inherently linked to any one or set of data collection methods but instead is associated with a holistic approach to reach thorough descriptions and explanations (Merriam, 1998). As with the present study, this can often lead to the use of a mixed methods approach which itself can add certain challenges to the research process in terms of sequencing the research process and balancing the importance given to different types of data (Yin, 2009).

The selection of the case study organization, a government-owned company, is underpinned by several key factors that render it an ideal choice for the research. Firstly, the organization's status as a government-owned entity aligns perfectly with the overarching theme of our study, which is centered around the Emiratization Initiative, a government initiative. This strategic alignment ensures that the organization adheres closely to the Emiratization guidelines and regulations, making it a natural and pertinent context in which to situate this study. Secondly, the organization boasts a substantial population of UAE National employees, who constitute our target participants for this study. This abundance of UAE National employees within the organization provides us with a sizeable and relevant sample for our research. Given that the Emiratization Initiative primarily focuses on increasing the participation of UAE Nationals in the workforce, studying an organization with a substantial number of UAE National employees allows us to gain deeper insights into the dynamics of this initiative and its impact on this specific demographic.

Furthermore, as an employee of this organisation, I possess a distinct advantage when it comes to data collection. My insider status within the organisation not only grants me access to the necessary resources and personnel for data collection but also provides me with an intimate understanding of the organizational culture, structure, and dynamics. This insider perspective enhances the depth and authenticity of the research findings, as it enables us to navigate the organization's intricacies effectively.

While the advantages are many, a researcher studying his or her employing organisation has to be highly conscious of certain risks. Researching your own organisation magnifies the challenges all organisational researchers face particularly when there is a qualitative-interpretive dimension to the research. The relationships between the researcher and researched will inevitably form part of the 'meaning' constructed during the research and in the preparation of the written report (Tietze, 2012). To minimise these risks, I avoided interviewing employees I worked closely with and as the organisation was sufficiently large the difference between me being the researcher and an outsider conducting the study was only marginal. My positionality within the research is considered in more detail in a subsequent section.

In conclusion, the choice of this government-owned organization as the case study for the present study is driven by its alignment with the Emiratization Initiative, the abundance of UAE National employees within its workforce, and the invaluable advantages stemming from my role as an employee. These factors collectively establish a compelling rationale for the selection of this organization as the ideal context within which to situate our study, ensuring the relevance, depth, and authenticity of our research findings.

Under the terms of my agreement with the human resources department of the case study organisation, I was permitted to undertake the research and have access to the employee email address list provided that the company was not explicitly identified in the written report of the research.

### **3.5 Sampling**

Sample size determination is the process of choosing the number of respondents in a statistical survey to be included in such a way they can represent the total population (Bryman & Bell, 2015).

The sample size is an essential aspect of any scientific research attempting to draw inferences from a survey about a population (Draper & Swift, 2011). As stated by Bryman and Bell (2015), a large sample cannot guarantee precision, but it decreases the sampling errors. Therefore, before deciding the size of sample, the researchers should know how much error he/she is prepared to tolerate.

In this research, the sample size is set to be approximately 150 persons for the questionnaire in the first phase of data collection. Allowing for non-responders it was assumed that 320 employees should receive the questionnaire. The sampling technique used is systematic random sampling where 320 UAE national employees in the company were selected randomly from a list provided by the company on an *n*th name basis. This *n*th name sampling technique is a systematic random form of sampling popular due to its simplicity (Bryman, 2008). From the full database of employees made available to the researcher every 8th name was selected to have a questionnaire sent to them. In the second phase of data collection, the interview phase, 15 persons were selected for interview from among the survey respondents. The sampling technique for the second phase can be described as quota sampling (Bryman, 2008) because care was taken to ensure participants of differing departments, educational attainment and lengths of service were included. When the questionnaire was distributed it included a note on further participation and asked recipients to indicate whether they would be interested in being interviewed at a later date.

The determination of the minimum recommended sample size for this study was based on two important factors: precision in measurement and the extent of variability within the population concerning key variables (De Vaus, 2002). On the basis of these considerations, I aimed for precision, seeking a 95% confidence level with a sampling error of 5%. In other words, I aimed to have 95% confidence that the results in the population would be the same as in the sample within a range of plus or minus 5%. To meet this precision requirement, a minimum sample size of 150 was calculated.

There is no real consensus on what constitutes a suitable interview sample size. At one end of the scale Cresswell (1998) suggests between 20 and 30 while at the other Morse (1994) sets a minimum at 6. Bertaux's (1981) minimum lies between these at 15. Whilst it was considered that conducting 15 interviews may yield a sufficient data corpus to address the research questions in depth based on the literature the exact number was not set *a priori*. Instead, interviews were carried out until data saturation was achieved, which occurred after 12 interviews, indicating that no new

themes or patterns were emerging (Miles et al., 2014). Following the attainment of data saturation, three additional interviews were conducted. However, it is noteworthy that these additional interviews did not yield any new insights or information as could be seen in the absence of new subthemes or useful memoing. At this point interviewing ceased.

### **3.6 Piloting the data collection**

Pilot studies are an essential part of quality research. A pilot study facilitates the pre-testing of research instruments (Baker, 1994) and can be applied to both quantitative and qualitative research methods (Van Teijlingen & Hundley, 2001). In addition to instrument testing, pilot studies act as a mechanism for acquiring essential information that informs decision making and verifies the research design (Nunes et al., 2010).

A pilot study was undertaken with a small sample of five participants to ensure the clarity and effectiveness of the questionnaire. The primary objective of this pilot study was to evaluate the comprehensibility of the questions and the overall flow of the questionnaire. As a result of this pilot study, a crucial modification was made to the questionnaire. Specifically, I introduced the first question: "Are you a UAE National employee?" This addition served a dual purpose. Firstly, it ensured that only UAE National employees, the specific target population of our study, would participate. Secondly, it acted as a safeguard to prevent the questionnaire from inadvertently reaching non-national employees, thus enhancing the accuracy and relevance of our data.

A separate pilot study was conducted for the semi-structured interview phase, involving two participants. This pilot study played a pivotal role in refining the interview process. It enabled me to make several important adjustments to the interview protocol, guided by the principles outlined in Bryman and Bell (2015). Specifically, the pilot study aided in rephrasing and clarifying certain questions, ensuring that they were more easily comprehensible to participants. Additionally, it helped me determine the optimal sequencing of questions, ensuring a logical and coherent flow during the interviews. Furthermore, the pilot study offered insights into the approximate length of time required for each interview session, preventing undue burden on participants. It also informed decisions about the interview format, ensuring that the interviews would be conducted in a manner that fostered open and candid discussions.

In summary, the pilot studies for both the questionnaire and semi-structured interviews were instrumental in refining the data collection instruments. They contributed to the clarity and effectiveness of the questionnaire and optimized the interview process by enhancing question clarity, sequencing, duration, and format. These adjustments were made to ensure that the data collection instruments were well-suited to capture the most accurate and valuable insights from our study participants.

### **3.7 Collecting the data**

Two types of data were collected for this research, secondary and primary. Secondary data is that which has already been collected and used in prior research and primary data is new data collected for the purpose of the current research (Saunders & Lewis, 2012).

#### **3.7.1 Secondary data**

Secondary data includes information that already exists and has been published by other researchers and usually consists of literature, books, reports, magazines, newspapers, websites (Exel & Graaf, 2005). It can also be found in government publications, business and technology journals, bank and company reports, statistics, historical documents, research articles, and business books. The secondary data necessary for this study were obtained from the following sources:

- Journal articles
- Annual reports of the case organisation
- Publications of governmental entities in the United Arab Emirates
- Other publications such as books.
- Doctoral Research Theses
- Websites for governmental entities in the United Arab Emirates

Assimilating the knowledge and information from these secondary sources enabled the researcher of the current study to develop a sufficient understanding of the research problem to identify what new knowledge was needed.

#### **3.7.2 Primary data**

In this research, the primary data was collected using a structured survey questionnaire and by conducting interviews.

### *3.7.2.1 Quantitative data collection*

The questionnaire was initially distributed to 320 employees of UAE nationality at the case organisation selected on an *n*th name basis. Most questionnaires were received by email; however, a printed version was made available for those employees who did not have an email address that was known to the company. The email contained information as to the purpose of the study and also communicated the voluntary and confidential nature of their contribution. For the printed questionnaires this information was included on a cover sheet. The deadline for returning the completed questionnaire was also included. A total of 166 completed questionnaires were received back giving a response rate of 51.9%.

### *3.7.2.1 Qualitative data collection*

The interview participants had originally been contacted for the purposes of the survey and had indicated their willingness to participate further. Those who had given such an indication were followed up and asked if they would be willing to be interviewed. This process continued until 15 employees confirmed their willingness to participate. These 15 were then contacted again to arrange convenient times for the interviews. Due to Covid pandemic restrictions all the interviews were conducted online using the video conferencing app Blackboard Collaborate which can be accessed via a web browser and so does not require the participant to download an app to participate. Permission was sought and received to record the online interviews to aid transcription. Before the commencement of the interviews, the purpose of the study was restated, and the voluntary and confidential nature of their contribution was restated. The researcher referred to an interview schedule to ensure that the intended topics were covered, and that appropriate main questions and follow-up questions were asked. However, the researcher also ensured that participants had the opportunity to elaborate on their statements and offer detailed replies.

## **3.8 Data analysis**

In a sequential research design like this one, the data from the first phase is analysed before the second phase data is collected. This is because the first phase results lay the foundation for the second phase by analysing the relationships of interest on a quantitative basis and focusing the researcher on interview questions which add the ‘why’ and ‘how’ dimensions. For example, the survey may produce results that demonstrate a positive relationship between perceived



organisational support and employee engagement but relies on the interviews to explain how and why this relationship exists.

### **3.8.1 Quantitative data analysis**

The responses to the questionnaire were collated in an Excel spreadsheet to facilitate easy import into a statistics application. Quantitative data analysis included general descriptive statistics, inferential statistics and hierarchical regression analysis.

After a series of five demographic questions, there were 15 items measuring employee engagement, perceived organisational support, support for the EI and employee training. Respondents indicated their response on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from ‘Strongly agree’ to ‘Strongly disagree’. The data were analysed using IBM SPSS software which is a sophisticated statistical application commonly used by researchers (Bryman & Bell, 2015). The output from the analysis comes in the form of tables, some of which are used to present the results in Chapter four.

### **3.8.2 Qualitative data analysis**

The qualitative data was analysed using the NVivo software application which organises qualitative data and facilitates the generation of codes, memos, themes and subthemes (Saunders & Lewis, 2012). After transcribing interviews, the researcher used thematic analysis following the 6-steps suggested by Braun and Clark (2022). Thematic analysis has been described as “a technique for categorizing and arranging data that involves assigning unique codes to each observation and quotation” (Toyon, 2021, p.257). Firstly, the researcher familiarised himself with the interview transcriptions by reading them multiple times. In the next step, initial codes were created as guidance on the main ideas presented in the texts. As well as these codes, memoing was used, involving the notating of words and phrases as ideas and reflections that could later be used when reporting the findings (Birks et al., 2008). Next, codes were combined into overarching themes that convey the messages or ideas with the data/content; themes were labelled and described. In the fourth stage the researcher looked at which of those themes is in line with the main aims of this study. Fifthly, themes were defined again, and subthemes were also labelled in support of the main theme. Finally, the researcher included and reported only the key themes and subthemes that are in direct relevance to the study. A total of five themes were kept and for each of these there were between three and five subthemes. The themes and subthemes are represented in Table 3-2.

Table 3-2: The themes and subthemes

<i>Themes</i>	<i>Sub-Themes</i>
<i>Theme 1: Roles &amp; Tasks</i>	Administrative, management and physical work: Challenging roles Beyond working hours
<i>Theme 2: Performance Appraisal:</i>	Autonomy and freedom in role Feedback Training, Development and Productivity: Organisational Support
<i>Theme 3: Motivation and Commitment</i>	A sense of Pride and Motivation Feeling Part of the team Reward and Appreciation Loyalty: if offered a job Entitlement and Security
<i>Theme 4: UAE-Employees</i>	Employees' motivation and contribution Advice and guidance: training UAE-nationals' are welcomed
<i>Theme 5: Emiratisation</i>	Clear Understanding Positive support and priority Suitability and Skills

The themes and subthemes together with the accompanying memos were then used in Chapter five to organise the report of the findings together with exemplary data fragments taken from the responses of interview participants.

### **3.9 Ethical considerations**

Research ethics are very crucial aspect of any research, and researchers must be aware of ethical responsibilities during the research process. It has implications for what and who can be researched and for how research can be conducted (Bryman & Bell, 2015). The term ethics refers to a standard of behaviour or conformity to a set of principles (Harris, 2001). Thus, research ethics governs the researcher's behaviour in relation to other people involved in the research (Saunders & Lewis, 2012).

Before beginning on this thesis, the researcher undertook both compulsory and optional ethical training courses provided by the University of Northampton for all research that involves human participants. The most vital ethical principal is that the researcher should not cause harm to

participants (Saunders & Lewis, 2012). Therefore, the researcher assured participants that their participation will not cause harm to them. Also, the researcher explained to them how the collected data will be used.

Saunders and Lewis (2012) Emphasise that revealing the identity of respondents does not just happen when reporting the data, but could also be during interviews, i.e., a respondent might come to know what the previous respondent said about a specific point. Therefore, the researcher assured that the participants' confidentiality and anonymity was maintained when collecting and reporting. Participants were informed that their participation was voluntary and that they had the right to refuse to participate, withdraw at any time or refuse to answer any question. The data collected was safeguarded in accordance with the Data Protection Act, 1998. Finally, the research ethics guidelines and considerations of the University of Northampton and the company where the study took place were observed and followed at all stages of the research.

### **3.9.1 Positionality and managing bias**

Reflexivity is the researcher's attempt to understand how the process of doing research shapes its outcomes (Hardy et al., 2001). Reflexivity involves a researcher questioning their own motivations for conducting the research and the origins of their interest in the research problem. A key dimension of this is reflection on the researcher's own positionality. Positionality is defined as "The recognition and declaration of one's own position in a piece of academic work" (Jafar, 2018, p.323). Positionality determines that two different researchers may, indeed are likely to interpret the same body of data in contrasting ways (Dean et al., 2017).

Positionality is an important concept for social researchers and its consideration forms part of the reflexivity a researcher needs to apply to their role in the research process (Berger, 2015). Scrutinising the researcher's position helps make the research understandable (Harding, 1987) thus making explanation of the researcher's position an important part of the reporting of a research study. I am a long-standing employee of the company selected as the case, with 15 years of service. My interest in the research problem mirrors the significance of employee engagement as a key performance indicator, one which management uses an external agency to measure and monitor annually. I have also been able to observe first hand engagement and disengagement among employees at the organisation. Furthermore, I am in a knowledgeable position regarding current organisational issues of which the EI was one. In practical terms, my position as a long-standing

employee of the company gave me access to gatekeepers who in turn gave me access to both survey respondents and interview participants. Without this access the research could not have taken place.

Considering positionality should go hand in hand with managing bias. Organisational research does not take place in a laboratory but rather in conditions of human subjectivity. Furthermore, the task of managing biases is made more complicated by the understanding that some biases are implicit, in other words, we are not even conscious of them (Berg, 2017). Awareness of implicit biases and responding to them with conscious efforts to counteract them through a thorough research process is an important task for a researcher. One of the main tools for managing bias is systematicity. Through being systematic in the collection, organisation, analysis and reporting of data, a researcher can go a long way to avoid personal bias (Bryman, 2012).

For example, as an employee of the case organisation I would have inevitably developed thoughts and assumptions regarding the level of engagement of co-workers I observe daily in the course of my work. It was necessary to set these pre-conceptions aside in the knowledge that my own experiences offered an incomplete picture and that through conducting a properly designed and implemented research study a far more reliable picture could be reached.

### **3.10 Summary**

This chapter discussed the philosophical assumptions such as ontology and epistemology, research approach, research design and research methods adopted by the researcher to achieve the research aim. This study adopted a pragmatism approach as an ontological position because UAE national employees in the company are supported by both the organisation and the EI in terms of training, promotions, terminations and salaries. Therefore, how UAE national employees perceive both forms of support could have an impact on their engagement as employees. Although this study mainly adopted an interpretivist approach, it employed positivism in the first phase, yielding quantitative data, as this is suitable to cover a wide range of the population. This measured the level of engagement of UAE national and examine the relationships among the variables. In the second part of the study, an interpretivist approach was employed because it fits well with the second part of the data collection, qualitative data, as it allows more in-depth understanding of social reality. Moreover, this study used a mixed methods incorporating inductive and deductive

approaches. The deductive approach allowed examination of the interrelationships between the two independent variables. The inductive approach allowed the investigation of UAE national employees' perception and how they perceived support from both the EI and the company. This study used a case study approach to achieve the research aim and mixed methods for data collection. The primary data were collected using a questionnaire and conducting interviews. The sample sizes were 166 respondents for the survey questionnaire and 15 participants for the interview phase. The chapter has also addressed the ethical issues raised by the research including the positionality of the researcher and the steps taken to avoid bias. The next two chapters present the results/findings of the two study phases starting with the survey study.

## Chapter 4 : Quantitative survey results

### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter reports the quantitative data generated from a questionnaire administered among 166 UAE participants, each employed at the case organisation. Following the study's aims, the results are centralised around four key variables: The Emiratisation Initiative, perceived organisational support, UAE nationals' employee engagement and employee training. Each of these variables was measured by a set of items and using a five-point Likert scale. It was hypothesised that: firstly, perceived organisational support is positively related to UAE national employee engagement (H1). Secondly, the Emiratisation Initiative moderates the relationship between perceived organisational support and UAE National Engagement (H2). Thirdly, that employee training is positively related to UAE nationals' employee engagement (H3). The model derived from these hypothesised relationships is shown as Figure 4-1. The model shows a representation of the relationships one would expect to see based on the empirical findings in the literature combined with the researcher's own assumptions.

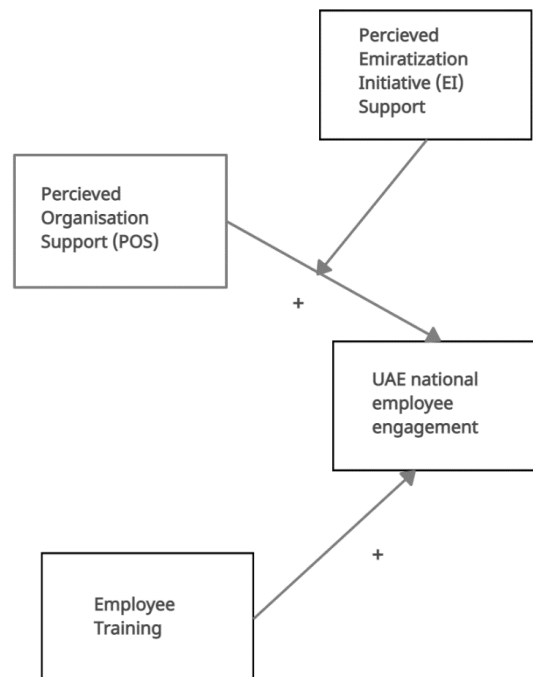


Figure 4-1: The Proposed Model

Although the model involves four key variables, the results also examine the role of demographic factors such as gender, age, education level, length of experience and job level. With that in mind the results will firstly report on general descriptive statistics about demographic variables, followed by further descriptive analysis of all four key variables (perceived organisational support, Emiratisation Initiative, UAE national employee engagement and employee training). This will be followed by analysis using Pearson's  $r$  correlation coefficient to examine the nature of the relationships between all variables. Finally, a hierarchical multiple linear regression will be conducted to test the main hypotheses.

## 4.2 General descriptive statistics

This section will be descriptive in its nature to examine the distribution of the results across all demographic variables and the main variables described above. This will allow a thorough understanding of the results and provide good background information before moving on to testing the hypotheses (inferential statistics).

### 4.2.1 Demographic Details

Participants were asked to include information about their gender, age, education level, and experience and job level. By examining frequencies (%), it was evident that a majority of the sample were *males* (58.4%,  $n = 97$ ) and 41.6% were *females* ( $n = 69$ ). As for their *age*, 44.6% ( $n = 74$ ) belonged to the 36-45 years category, followed by the 26-35 years category (31.9%,  $n = 53$ ) and the 18-25 years category (13.9%,  $n = 23$ ). Only 9.6% of the participants were older than 45 years of age ( $n = 16$ ). In terms of their *education* level, the majority of participants (59.6%,  $n = 99$ ) have a bachelor's degree or higher while the rest (40.4%,  $n = 67$ ) have lower education levels. See **Error! Reference source not found.**

Table 4-1: Demographic information, frequencies and percentages

Demographic information		Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	97	58.4
	Female	69	41.6
Age Groups	18-25 years	23	13.9
	26-35 years	53	31.9
	36-45 years	74	44.6
	>45 years	16	9.6
Education: Bachelor's degree	Yes	99	59.6
	No	67	40.4
Level of Experience	<5 years	24	14.5
	5-10 years	62	37.3
	11-15 years	44	26.5
	>15 years	36	21.7
Job Level/rank	Grade 10 or less	50	30.1
	Grade 11-15	69	41.6
	Team Leader	21	12.7
	Department Manager	18	10.8
	Vice President	8	4.8

Overall, great majority of the participants had at least 5 years of *experience* (85.5%). When looking at the different lengths of work experience, the majority had experience of between 5 to 10 years (37.3%, n = 62) followed by 26.5% who had experience between 11 and 15 years (n = 44) and 21.7% had experience of more than 15 years (n=36). Only 14.5% (n=4) had experience of less than 5 years. In terms of *job level*, the majority had job levels below grade 15 (71.7%). This was comprised of 41.6% who had Grade 11 to 15 (n = 69), 30.15 (n = 50) who had a job level of grade 10 or less. In addition, 12.7% were ranked as team leaders (n = 21), 10.8% as department managers (n = 18) and 4.8% were vice presidents (n = 8).

#### 4.2.2 Employee Engagement

This scale reflects how engaged employees are within their work. Overall, five items were asked to assess engagement as observed in **Error! Reference source not found.** Participants were asked to rate their agreement on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral 4 = agree and 5 = strongly agree). By arranging the items according to mean scores and frequency,



72.9% agreed or strongly agree that they are *proud* of their work (M = 3.77), while 62.1% agreed that they are enthusiastic about work and 57.9% feel absorbed when at work (M = 3.49). Moreover, 54.3% feel happy when working intensely (M = 3.40) and finally 59.1% feel energetic and capable when at work (M=3.39). It should be noted that although the results show positive engagement there is a high percentage of employees who had low engagement levels. For example, 31.3% reported that they do not feel energetic and capable when they are at work (i.e., disagreed with the statement).

Table 4-2: Employee Engagement, frequencies and percentages

		SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean	Std. Deviation
1- I feel energetic and capable when I am working.	n	3	49	16	77	21	3.39	1.094
	%	1.8	29.5	9.6	46.4	12.7		
2- I am enthusiastic about my work.	n	3	43	17	71	32	3.52	1.127
	%	1.8	25.9	10.2	42.8	19.3		
3- I am proud of my work. (R)	n	7	17	21	83	38	3.77	1.048
	%	4.2	10.2	12.7	50.0	22.9		
4- I feel happy when I am working intensely.	n	5	41	30	63	27	3.40	1.117
	%	3.0	24.7	18.1	38.0	16.3		
5- I get absorbed when I am working.	n	7	33	30	64	32	3.49	1.137
	%	4.2	19.9	18.1	38.6	19.3		

*SD: Strongly Disagree, D: Disagree, N: Neutral, A: Agree, SA: Strongly Agree*

### 4.2.3 Perceived Organisational Support

POS was examined using five items reflecting how supportive respondents perceived their organisation to be and how much they feel valued (see Table 4-3). It was agreed or strongly agreed by 76.1% of the participants that their organisation really cares about their wellbeing (M = 3.96) while 66.3% explain that managers appreciate the extra efforts made by them at work (M = 3.57). Furthermore, 53.6% explained that they would be transferred rather than laid off if their job was eliminated (M = 3.46). Also, 53.1% agreed that their organisation would not replace them by someone at a lower salary if the possibility arose (M = 3.37). Further, 40.9% agreed that managers would persuade them to stay should they want to quit (M = 3.19). It appears that there are many participants who also do not perceive their organisation to be supportive despite the slight positive

mean scores. For example, 28.3% explained that managers would not persuade them to stay if they decided to quit, while 23.5% explained that the organisation would replace them if they found a cheaper alternative.

Table 4-3: Perceived Organisational Support, frequencies, percentages, mean and standard deviation

		SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean	Std. Deviation
6- If my organisation could hire someone to replace me at a lower salary it would NOT do so. (R)	n	8	31	39	67	21	3.37	1.075
	%	4.8	18.7	23.5	40.4	12.7		
7- My manager appreciates any extra effort from me. (R)	n	6	27	23	87	23	3.57	1.035
	%	3.6	16.3	13.9	52.4	13.9		
8- My organisation really cares about my well-being.	n	6	10	22	75	53	3.96	1.011
	%	3.6	6.0	13.3	45.2	31.9		
9- If I decided to quit, my manager would try to persuade me to stay.	n	10	37	51	48	20	3.19	1.099
	%	6.0	22.3	30.7	28.9	12.0		
10- If my job were eliminated, my organisation would prefer transfer me to a new job rather than laying me off. (R)	n	5	22	50	70	19	3.46	.964
	%	3.0	13.3	30.1	42.2	11.4		

SD: Strongly Disagree, D: Disagree, N: Neutral, A: Agree, SA: Strongly Agree

#### 4.2.4 Emiratisation initiative

Two items reflected how participants perceived the EI, 75.9% of the participants agreed that they feel that the initiative supports them to secure their job at the organisation (M = 4.00) while 60.8% believe that the EI supports them to get promoted at their organisation (M = 3.65). Further, 22.3% do not feel the initiative will help them get promoted while, 13.88% do not think it would secure their jobs (**Error! Reference source not found.**).

Table 4-4: Emiratisation Initiative, frequencies, percentages, mean and standard deviation

		SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean	Std. Deviation
11- I feel that the Emiratisation Initiative supports me to secure my job in this organisation.	n	5	18	17	58	68	4.00	1.106
	%	3.0	10.8	10.2	34.9	41.0		
12- I feel that the Emiratisation Initiative supports me to get promoted in this organisation.	n	7	30	28	50	51	3.65	1.210
	%	4.2	18.1	16.9	30.1	30.7		

*SD: Strongly Disagree, D: Disagree, N: Neutral, A: Agree, SA: Strongly Agree*

#### 4.2.5 Employee Training

Employee training was assessed using three items reflecting the organisation’s support through training. Results show that 78.3% agreed that they usually attend training courses provided by the organisation as they feel it would improve their performance (M = 3.99). Also, 76.5% explained that their organisation provides them with the training they require to perform their job effectively (M = 3.88). However, 62.7% still feel that they need to improve their skills further to complete their tasks correctly (M = 3.63). Overall, it seems that there are positive opinions about training provision, but it should be noted that approximately 11% disagree across all three items. (See **Error! Reference source not found.**)

Table 4-5: Employee Training, frequencies (n), percentages (%), mean and standard deviation

		SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean	Std. Deviation
13- The organisation helps me to provide the training I require to handle my job effectively.	n	6	12	21	84	43	3.88	.996
	%	3.6	7.2	12.7	50.6	25.9		
14- I feel that I need to improve my skills to complete my tasks correctly.	n	3	19	40	79	25	3.63	.937
	%	1.8	11.4	24.1	47.6	15.1		
15- Usually I attend training courses that are provided by the organisation because I feel I would improve my performance at work.	n	3	15	18	75	55	3.99	.985
	%	1.8	9.0	10.8	45.2	33.1		

*SD: Strongly Disagree, D: Disagree, N: Neutral, A: Agree, SA: Strongly Agree*

#### 4.3 Inferential Statistics

This part of the results examines the nature of the relationships between all key variables. Before conducting such analysis, it should be noted that all four scales reported above were averages based on the items used. For example, Employee Engagement had five items, and hence overall engagement was the average of all five. All four scales were deemed reliable, having each reached a desirable Cronbach’s alpha reliability score (see Table 4-5 below), high scores of reliability indicate that all items are consistent with each other and hence we can have more confidence that they are measuring for the same thing. The Emiratisation initiative scale showed the highest

reliability ( $\alpha=0.896$ ) followed by employee engagement ( $\alpha=0.802$ ), organisational support ( $\alpha=0.721$ ) and finally employee training ( $\alpha=0.701$ ). According to George and Mallery (2003), reliability scores above 0.07 are deemed acceptable, good or excellent depending on how high they are: Excellent ( $0.9 \leq \alpha$ ), Good ( $0.8 \leq \alpha < 0.9$ ), Acceptable ( $0.7 \leq \alpha < 0.8$ ), Questionable ( $0.6 \leq \alpha < 0.7$ ), Poor ( $0.5 \leq \alpha < 0.6$ ) and Unacceptable ( $\alpha < 0.5$ ). Furthermore, when testing the distribution of results in each of these scales, all appeared normally distributed, where most of the results are centralised around the mean. Skewness and Kurtosis statistics fell between +1 and -1, which further illustrates normality in distribution.

### **4.3.1 Correlation analysis and descriptive information of overall variables**

#### *4.3.1.1 Pearson's r correlation coefficient*

Pearson's  $r$  correlation coefficient test was used to find how strong the relationship is between all key variables and demographic variables too. The correlation coefficient returns a value between -1 and 1, where: 1 indicates full positive and strong relations between two variables. This means that for every increase in one variable there is fixed positive increase in the other variable. A -1 reflects a full negative and strong correlation between two variables, where for every increase in one variable there is a fixed decrease in the other variable. A zero score reflects no relationship. In simple terms, the bigger the coefficient the stronger the correlation is. Saying that, the significance (probability,  $p$ ) level indicates whether or not the correlations coefficient is due to chance or due to the nature of the relationship. The  $p$  value is simply a number describing how likely it is that the data/results would have occurred by random chance (i.e. the null hypothesis is true). Significance level ranges between a  $p$ -value of 0 and 1. The smaller the  $p$  value the stronger the evidence that the null hypotheses should be rejected. Generally, a  $p$ -value of less than 0.05 (typically  $\leq 0.05$ ) reflects statistical significance (acceptance of hypotheses) whereby there is less than a 5% probability that the null hypothesis is correct (i.e. the results happened due to accident).

Pearson's  $r$  correlation coefficient (Table 4-6) shows the coefficient between employee engagement, perceived organisational support, Emiratisation initiative (average scores between 1-5), age (1=18-25; 2=26-35; 3=36-45; 4=>45), years of experience (1= <5 years; 2= 5-10 years; 3= 11-15 years; 4= >15 years) and job level (1= Grade 10 or less; 2= Grade 11-15; 3=Team Leader; 4=Department Manager; 5=Vice President).

Pearson's *r* correlation coefficient showed that there is a significant positive correlation between engagement and perceived organisational support ( $r = 0.274, p < 0.01$ ), a significant positive correlation with employee training ( $r = 0.328, p < 0.01$ ) and a negative correlation with the Emiratisation initiative ( $r = -0.185, p < 0.05$ ). This clearly indicates that those who feel engaged within their organisation are more likely to also feel supported too and feel positively toward training. However, it is clear that those who are highly engaged are less likely to agree with the Emiratisation initiative and what it has to offer.

Furthermore, Employee engagement level was also positively correlated with age ( $r = 0.273, p < 0.01$ ), years of experience ( $r = 0.210, p < 0.01$ ) and job level ( $r = 0.404, p < 0.01$ ). This simply reflects that those who are more senior in age and job level or experience are likely to be more engaged.

Perceived organisational support was positive and significantly correlated with employee training ( $r = 0.341, p < 0.01$ ) and the Emiratisation initiative ( $r = 0.267, p < 0.01$ ). This reflects that the more employees feel supported by their organisation the more they are supportive of the Emiratisation initiative and the more positive they feel about training. No significant correlation coefficients were found between perceived organisational support and demographic information ( $p > 0.05$ ).

Employee training was found to significantly and positively correlated with Emiratisation, showing that those who feel positive about training are also more supportive of the Emiratisation initiative ( $r = 0.267, p < 0.01$ ). No significant correlations were found with age, years of experience and job level. (See Table 4-6).

Table 4-6: Descriptive statistics, Cronbach's alpha ( $\alpha$ ) and Pearson's *r* correlation coefficient between variables

	Mean	Std.	A	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1.Engagement	3.51	.825	.802	1	.274**	.328**	-.185*	.273**	.210**	.404**
2.Support	3.50	.713	.721		1	.341**	.267**	-0.02	-0.031	0.046
3.Training	3.83	.707	.701			1	.267**	0.034	0.031	0.131
4.Emiratisation	3.82	1.103	.896				1	-0.077	0.009	0.024
5.Age	2.50	.851	-					1	.533**	.484**
6.Years of Experience	2.55	.988	-						1	.593**

7.Job Level	2.19	1.126	-	1
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#### 4.4 Hierarchical regression: Predicting Employee Engagement

Multiple Linear Hierarchical Regression is a way to show if variables of interest (independent variables) explain a significant amount of variance in the Dependent Variable (DV) after controlling or accounting for all other variables too. This is a method of model comparisons, applied to demonstrate which model best explains the DV. Using Hierarchical Regression, I build a number of regression models by adding a set of variables following each model. This would mean that the final model has the most independent variables (predictors). In this test the main interest is to determine whether newly added variables show a significant improvement in  $R^2$  (proportion of variance explained by the model in the DV). Also, this offers the chance to see if adding variables in each model resulted in significant improvement or change in the  $R^2$ .

This statistical test was deemed suitable to test the main hypotheses, especially hypothesis number 1. As a reminder, it was hypothesised that organisational support was associated with employee engagement and that the Emiratisation initiative moderates this relationship. Furthermore, it was hypothesised that training is also associated with employee engagement. To answer all these hypotheses, the following steps will be conducted to compare the models and see if the addition of the Emiratisation initiative will moderate/change the model in predicting employee engagement.

The dependent variable in this case is employee engagement, therefore:

**Model 1:** Baseline: Includes demographic variables only (gender, age, education level, years of experience and job level)

**Model 2:** demographic variables + perceived organisational support

**Model 3:** demographic variables + perceived organisational support + Training

**Model 4:** demographic variables + perceived organisational support + Training + Emiratisation initiative

#### 4.4.1 Models' Fitness and Variances Explained

In the first model, employee engagement was the outcome (dependent variable) while demographic variables were used as predictors. The model was found to be a significant fit of the data  $F(5,160) = 12.66$ ,  $p < 0.001$ . This means that predictors in the models significantly explain variances/changes in employee engagement. Overall, the model explains 28.4% of the variances in employee engagement ( $R^2 = 0.284$  adjusted  $R^2 = 0.261$ ).

In model 2 and by adding perceived organisational support, the model was also a significant fit for of the data  $F(5,159) = 14.55$ ,  $p < 0.001$  ( $R^2 = 0.354$  adjusted  $R^2 = 0.330$ ). The second model showed a significant improvement ( $p < 0.001$ ) in the  $R^2$ .

In model 3, and by adding the Emiratisation initiative the model was also significant  $F(5,158) = 14.56$ ,  $p < 0.001$  ( $R^2 = 0.392$  adjusted  $R^2 = 0.365$ ), and the  $R^2$  has significantly ( $P < 0.01$ ) improved. In the final model, the Emiratisation initiative was included to see if it changes/moderates the results. The model was also a significant fit for the data,  $F(5,157) = 15.57$ ,  $p < 0.001$ , and produced a significant change ( $p < 0.001$ ) to the  $R^2$  ( $R^2 = 0.442$  adjusted  $R^2 = 0.414$ ). (See Table 4-7).

Table 4-7: Model fitness measured through ANOVA (F) along with the significance result.

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	31.886	5	6.377	12.667	.000 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	80.550	160	.503		
	Total	112.436	165			
2	Regression	39.852	6	6.642	14.550	.000 <sup>c</sup>
	Residual	72.584	159	.457		
	Total	112.436	165			
3	Regression	44.091	7	6.299	14.562	.000 <sup>d</sup>
	Residual	68.345	158	.433		
	Total	112.436	165			
4	Regression	49.739	8	6.217	15.569	.000 <sup>e</sup>
	Residual	62.697	157	.399		
	Total	112.436	165			

a. Dependent Variable: Engagement

Overall, as explained above it was found that all four models were found to be significant, however it should be noted that the inclusion of a new variable in each stage, significantly improved the

predictive power of the model in general, that was reflected by the variances explained ( $R^2$ ) and the changes in the variances explained (

Table 4-8).

Table 4-8: Models' summary and variances explained.

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.533 <sup>a</sup>	.284	.261	.70953	.284	12.667	5	160	.000
2	.595 <sup>b</sup>	.354	.330	.67565	.071	17.451	1	159	.000
3	.626 <sup>c</sup>	.392	.365	.65769	.038	9.800	1	158	.002
4	.665 <sup>d</sup>	.442	.414	.63194	.050	14.141	1	157	.000

#### 4.4.2 Key outcomes

The first model, with demographic variables as predictors, showed that only Age ( $B = 0.174$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) and Education ( $B = -0.653$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) were significant predictors of level of engagement. This explains that those who are older are more likely to have better engagement level compared to younger ones, while those who have a bachelor's degree are also more likely to score higher on engagement compared to those with a qualification less than a bachelor's degree. Variables such as Gender ( $b = 0.002$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ), Years of Experience ( $B = -0.100$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ) and job level ( $B = 0.133$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ) were not found to be significant predictors.

The second model included Perceived Organisational Support as an addition to the previous model, which included the demographic variables. This model did show that age ( $B = 0.185$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) and Education ( $B = -0.669$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) were still significant. Perceived organisational support was also found significant ( $B = 0.310$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). This indicates that those who showed more perceived organisational support are more likely to show higher levels of engagement.



In Model 3, training was added to the model to see if it leads to any changes, when doing so there were no changes in age ( $B = 0.186, p < 0.05$ ) and education level ( $B = -0.658, p < 0.001$ ) as both were still significant predictors of engagement. However, the strength of perceived organisational support was reduced ( $B = 0.231, p < 0.01$ ). Training was found to be a significant predictor too ( $B = 0.244, p < 0.01$ ). This indicates that training, while controlling for demographic variables) reduced the predictive power of perceived organisational support.

In the final model, the Emiratisation initiative variable was added, Age ( $B = 0.147, p < 0.05$ ) education level ( $B = -0.527, p < 0.001$ ), perceived organisational support ( $B = 0.284, p < 0.001$ ), and Training ( $B = 0.304, p < 0.001$ ) were all significant predictors of levels of engagement. Emiratisation was also a significant predictor of engagement ( $B = -0.186, p < 0.001$ ), explaining that those who support or agree with the Emiratisation initiative are less likely to be engaged.

It was clear that by adding this variable the predictive power of both perceived organisational support and training has improved, indicating that Emiratisation moderates/improves the relationship between perceived organisational support and engagement level. These results are presented in Table 4-9.

Table 4-9: Regression coefficient predicting Engagement for four models.

Model		UnStandardised Coefficients		Standardised Coefficients		Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	
1	(Constant)	3.956	.355		11.152	.000
	Gender	.002	.113	.001	.016	.987
	Age	.174	.080	.179	2.171	.031
	Educational	-.653	.134	-.389	-4.890	.000
	Years of Experience	-.100	.074	-.120	-1.342	.181
	Job Level	.133	.071	.182	1.883	.061
	2	(Constant)	2.936	.417		7.045
Gender		-.038	.108	-.023	-.351	.726
Age		.185	.076	.190	2.422	.017
Educational Level		-.669	.127	-.399	-5.257	.000
Years of Experience		-.085	.071	-.102	-1.198	.233
Job Level?		.108	.068	.147	1.590	.114
Support		<b>.310</b>	.074	.268	4.177	.000
3	(Constant)	2.316	.452		5.129	.000
	Gender	-.056	.105	-.034	-.537	.592

	Age	.186	.074	.192	2.513	.013
	Educational Level	-.658	.124	-.392	-5.311	.000
	Years of Experience	-.079	.069	-.094	-1.138	.257
	Job Level	.088	.066	.120	1.326	.187
	Support	<b>.231</b>	.077	.200	3.012	.003
	Training	<b>.244</b>	.078	.209	3.130	.002
4	(Constant)	2.375	.434		5.471	.000
	Gender	-.037	.101	-.022	-.365	.716
	Age	.147	.072	.152	2.046	.042
	Educational Level	-.527	.124	-.314	-4.250	.000
	Years of Experience	-.059	.067	-.071	-.890	.375
	Job Level	.121	.064	.165	1.882	.062
	Support	<b>.284</b>	.075	.246	<b>3.787</b>	.000
	Training	<b>.304</b>	.076	.260	<b>3.972</b>	.000
	Emiratization	<b>-.186</b>	.049	-.249	<b>-3.760</b>	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Engagement

#### 4.4.3 Age and Education contribution

As per the regression analysis above it was clear that age and education have a significant predictive power toward employee engagement. Figure 4-2 illustrates group differences in mean scores between age groups and education level.

When considering the Emiratization initiative, it was clear that the highest scores were generated for those in the youngest age category (18-25,  $M = 4.50$ ) and the 26-35 category ( $M = 4.30$ ) and have those who have no bachelor's degree. The same two groups were also the lowest in their employee engagement level too. This indicates that variations in scores come mainly from the younger groups with no bachelor's degree. Hence when discussing the results, age and education should also be considered too.

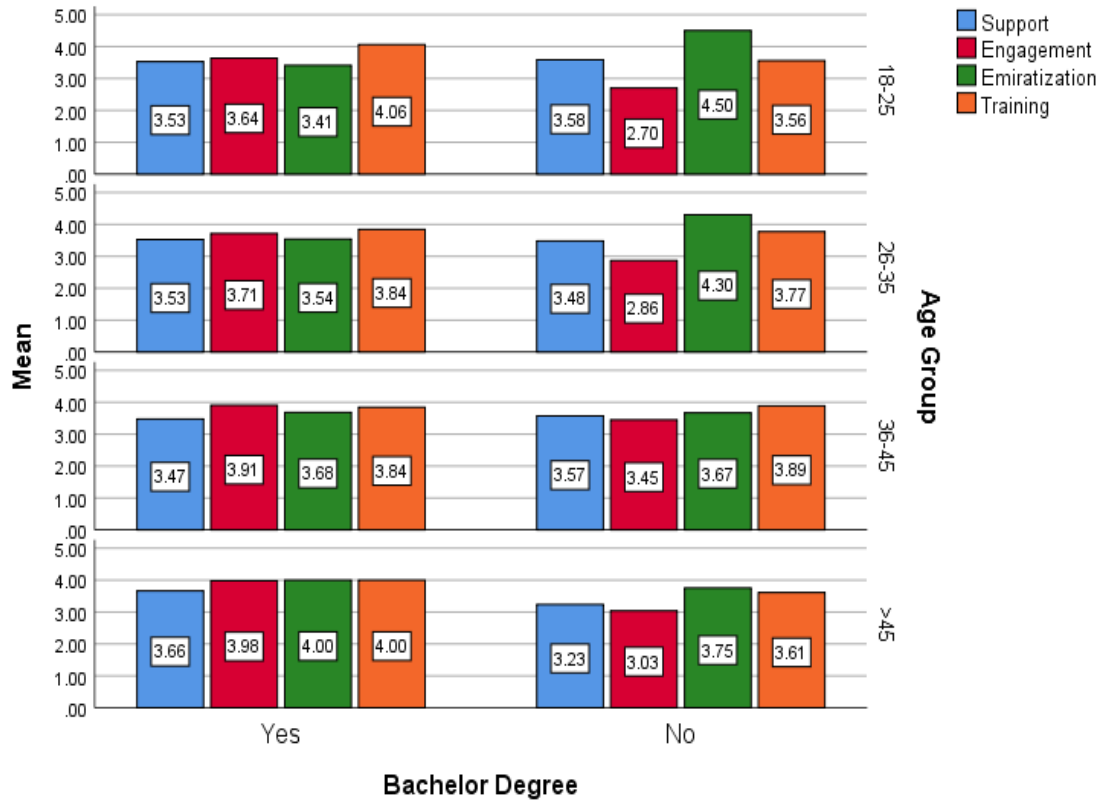


Figure 4-2: The average of perceived organisational support, employee engagement, Emiratisation and training based on age group and education level.

#### 4.5 Summary of key findings

The quantitative phase of this research aimed to examine the role of the Emiratisation initiative in moderating the relationship between perceived organisational support and employee engagement. It further examined the relationship between training and employee engagement. When considering these hypotheses, it was evident through Pearson's  $r$  correlation coefficient that all four variables had significant correlation with each other ( $P < 0.01$ ). Engagement was positively correlated with perceived organisational support and training; however, it had a negative correlation with Emiratisation. This shows that higher scores on perceived organisational support and training are correlated with higher levels of engagement. However higher scores on the Emiratisation initiative are associated with lower scores on engagement. In chapter six the possible reasons for this are discussed in depth.

After conducting Multiple Linear Hierarchical regression, it was evident that age and education level also are associated with engagement, those with a bachelor's degree participated in this project are more likely to show higher engagement and older participants are also more likely to be more engaged. This was consistent even when adding perceived organisational support and training as predictors. Again, these results are discussed in chapter six, after the qualitative findings have been presented. By adding the Emiratisation initiative in the final model (after demographic information, perceived organisational support and training) it was evident that the strength of the model significantly improved, and the relationship between perceived organisational support and engagement was enhanced. As a result, it could be argued that all three hypotheses, provided earlier, have been confirmed.

This chapter has presented the 'what' of the relationships of interest. This mixed methods research now moves on to the qualitative phase, which can help us understand the 'hows' and the 'whys' allowing for a comprehensive attempt to address the research questions. Hence the next chapter will present the findings of the interview study before a discussion chapter which synthesises both sets of findings.

## Chapter 5 : Qualitative Interview Findings

### 5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings of the qualitative analysis of the semi-structured interviews which were conducted with 15 UAE nationals. All participants from the case company and some of them occupied leader/management positions. Their work experience in the field ranged between 3 to almost 25 years (see Table 5-1). Overall, the main aim of this qualitative study is to explore UAE nationals' views on their current role, training, their productivity and commitment to work as well as general views on new UAE-recruits. Views on the Emiratization initiative were explored too. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, all interviews were conducted online, and all participants were assured of confidentiality and anonymity in the analysis and reporting process.

Table 5-1: Participants' Details

<i>Participant</i>	<i>Years of Experience</i>	<i>Role</i>
1	25 years	Inventory team leader
2	3	Cataloguing engineer
3	24	Team leader in purchasing department
4	8	Shipping coordinator
5	10	Senior buyer
6	14	Planner in maintenance department
7	15	Team leader in finance department
8	3	Health and Safety Assistant
9	22	Port operations manager
10	10	Quality Control
11	4	Senior specialist performance and strategy department
12	7	Expeditor
13	17	IT business solution manager
14	8	Senior internal auditor
15	18	Maintenance manager

Each theme will be elaborated and exemplified with quotes from participants. The following is the analysis of each of the themes separately.

## **5.2 Theme 1: Roles and Tasks**

Participants provided information about the nature of their roles and daily activities; this was essential to get an understanding of their overall tasks and the challenges as well as the opportunities they experienced. The majority are involved in administrative and management tasks, and they often view their roles as challenging, leading to extra work. They also explained that they perform their tasks with a degree of autonomy.

### **5.2.1 Administrative, management and physical work**

To establish some background information, participants were asked about the nature of their work and what is expected of them. All participants explained that “team management” is one of the main roles they have. However, it was clear that there are a lot of “administrative tasks” associated with their jobs, especially when communicating with “end-users”. One participant explained,

I can say 80% admin work and 20% physical work. For example, I need to check with our engineers in the workshop some spare parts details, or I need to see items to understand what is required. But if I have any questions for our engineers, I prefer to call instead of meeting face to face. (P6)

Others, although a minority, had more physically demanding jobs despite their administrative responsibilities. For example, one participant explained,

... although I manage all operations in the port, I do a lot of physical work too such as material handling operations which includes uploading and offloading materials from trucks to vessels by forklifts or cranes. Also, managing vessels’ movement as we have more than 100 vessels, but the port can’t allow them to come at the same time due to limited capacity of the port. (P9)

This participant’s role clearly included both a safety dimension and a major contribution to operational efficiency.

### **5.2.2 Challenging roles**

The general view of many of the participants is that their roles are perceived as challenging; however, they also explained that this is normal considering the nature of their role is a

predominately administrative and computer based. Furthermore, challenges come from within the organisation and from outside too, and it seems that the organisation suffers negatively as a result. This is best illustrated by P5,

... there is workload as we receive many requests from different department within the company, and the main problem for this workload is the lack of planning from the end-user. Sometimes we accept prices without negotiation because of high number of purchase requests that received from end-users. (P5)

Here P5 outlines an instance of workload pressures leading to sub-optimal outcomes for the company. Workload pressures may have a negative effect on perceived organisational support and employee engagement so is significant for this study.

Another participant indicated the feeling of being too consumed by work, to the degree that he loses a sense of time. He explained,

There is a huge demand. Sometimes I work for more than 8 hours without feeling that time has passed. We have, in the company, more than 150 vessels, all of these vessels could come at any time, however, we have resources to manage such demand successfully. Also, I have to meet with my employees, management, and different departments such as finance, IT and procurement department. (P9)

Workload seems the main challenge here, but it was also stated that communication “in English” is a challenge too. It was explained,

There is no high demand in this job, but the main challenge to is the English language. This job requires a lot of writing, and the language here is English, and my English language level is intermediate level. (P10)

Communication helps build trust and language barriers can inhibit quality communication which can lead to negative outcomes.

### **5.2.3 Beyond working hours**

Some participants seem to take work beyond their working hours, almost half of the participants explained that their day work does not stop once they leave work. For example, one participant explained,

I find myself answering emails beyond working hours (P6)

and another participant said that

... it is hard to separate work from home at the moment, because my work requires a lot of management and attention, and it is hard for me to switch off. (P4)

Although this shows participants' commitment to work, this also creates stress and unwanted pressure at home. One explained,

I wish I could leave my work at work at the end of my shift, I think my family suffers as a result, I could be absent minded. (P3)

Another participant indicated that taking work home is expected specially to prove that he is committed to work. He further explained,

I am motivated in my work, and I want to succeed, and it seems expected of me to go beyond my working hours to prove that even if the company doesn't expect you to do so. (P11)

These statements are significant because they could indicate the presence of or potential for burnout which is associated with disengagement and attendant negative behaviours and outcomes.

Others explained that their work stops when they leave work, this was the view of experienced or older participants. They seem to be able to draw the line between work and family life, and for one of them this was learnt over the years. The participant explained,

I am confident within my work, I have been doing it for a long time, and I think my family is more important than my job, when I leave work, that is when my family and personal life start. (P13)

Another participant explained that taking work home is not appreciated,

I used to work from home, I used to do a lot of hours, but I can't do it anymore due to family, but also, I feel that extra work from home is not really rewarded. (P15)

This comment suggests that while there may be a culture of unpaid overtime it is not mandatory and be influenced by personal circumstances.



#### 5.2.4 Autonomy and freedom in role

Participants were asked about their contributions to the company or the organisation they work for, and whether or not they have freedom in promoting new ideas. This is sometimes referred to as ‘employee voice’. Overall, there was a sense that the majority benefit from sharing their ideas within their team or across other teams. Mostly, such ideas are discussed or proposed in order to improve productivity or improve employees’ performance. It was clear that this was an expectation since many of the participants are in management/leadership positions. One participant gave an example stating what happens if he had a good idea,

I will immediately apply [my idea]. Of course, I will discuss it with my line manager first, but I’m sure he will support me. (P8)

Another added about having new idea for work,

I would gladly share it with them regardless if it requires any efforts from my side as I would feel proud if the idea was implemented and helped to improve the process. (P9)

Some participants explained that although they are free to make suggestions, they do not feel confident at times, as their ideas could be rejected. One explained how they used to make a lot of suggestions in the past, but now feel that sometimes these suggestions are not followed up with actions, meaning they are now less likely to share new ideas. One explained that he feels outdated in terms of his ideas, and that the new generation offers new and more exciting suggestions. He explained,

My ideas are old, and I leave it to the younger generation to suggest improvements and promote new ideas. Saying that, I feel that some good ideas are rejected at times for no obvious reasons. Ultimately it is higher management that takes decision. (P13)

Overall, among this group of employees there seemed to be a level of employee voice consistent with innovation but we cannot from this see if this is the case for more junior employees.

## 5.3 Theme 2: Performance Appraisal

Participants provided their opinions on performance appraisal and their communication with the organisation and management in general. In their responses, a number of key ideas emerged. Participants referred to the level of feedback they receive, training and development opportunities, organisational support and finally the impact of training on productivity levels. All those are interlinked as explained by one participant,

My performance and productivity are often encouraged by the feedback I receive from my managers who offer all of us great opportunities to further our skills by attending new training sessions.  
(P2)

### 5.3.1 Feedback

All participants reported that they receive regular feedback on their performance. Feedback seemed to be mainly face-to-face or via emails. All participants stated that the feedback is often related to their daily tasks and overall achievements within the organisation. They are often given instructions on how to improve and be more productive. One participant explained,

Feedback is there to learn and improve, so I am always keen to take and listen to feedback and show that I am committed and that I am progressing, it is also an opportunity to get guidance on how to get promoted. (P7)

Another added,

Feedback is done face-to-face, and sometimes I challenge them, and that is also acceptable to my manager, I feel at times I had to show them that I am working beyond my working hours, so I force them to acknowledge that in their feedback. But I am a challenging person at times, I defend my interests. (P14)

However, a number of participants explained that feedback is not always constructive or beneficial. One participant explained,

Feedback is a formality for me, I don't know if it means much for me as I don't see myself performing better, or achieving anything beyond what I am doing at the moment. Maybe this is because io

have been here for a long time and some of the feedback is the same and not really constructive. (P12)

Another added that he would rather not receive feedback because he feels that he has developed apathy due to the routine nature of the work,

...feedback doesn't offer anything new, so I don't really take anything from such feedback. (P13)

Overall, there seems to be a satisfactory level of feedback at the case organisation though the way the participants refer to it suggests that it is predominantly informal and between an employee and their line manager. Effective feedback is widely recognised as important for morale and forms an essential part of the communication taking place within an organisation. It is also therefore a conduit for the perceived organisational support that this study is examining.

### **5.3.2 Training, Development and Productivity**

Participants were asked whether or not they attend training. Training was generally viewed as a universal expectation. Training courses seem to range from basic computer skills to highly technical skills. Furthermore, some of the training is in-house whereas other training is either local in UAE or abroad. Technical training seems to be based abroad. One participant shared,

The company offers a lot of training opportunities, in the UAE and abroad, ranging from simple and basic computer skills to highly technical skills. (P6)

Another participant explained that training is a way to develop productivity and skill,

I make sure I have attended all training offered, they are not many, but this is a way for me to develop my skills and be more useful and productive. My managers see this as the best way to get promoted in the future. (P2)

These comments suggest that at least some training is optional and that, for this particular individual, instances of training do not come particularly regularly. It was also shared that training is not always about skills. One of the more senior participants (P1) explained that training and workshops also take into consideration the employee's life and wellbeing for example this participant explained that he received an invitation to attend a course about life after retirement.

Other participants seemed selective with their training, especially more experienced participants who feel that they do not need them or that they are not suitable for them anymore, or those who feel more secure in their jobs. This again confirms that attendance is optional. One participant stated,

There are a lot of training opportunities, but I am not sure they are relevant to me, I can't see how they will make me a better employee, I tried attending them in the past, but now I only attend compulsory training. (P7)

Another participant stated,

I am not too far from retirement; I am not that motivated anymore as a lot of the training is too technical for me. (P3)

There was general agreement that training is either self-nominated or compulsory. Although participants highlighted the relationship between training and development, productivity was not always elaborated. However, some participants were aware that training gave them the right skills to perform their jobs. For example, one stated,

The training course 'The 4 Essential Roles of Leadership' helped me a lot to improve my managerial skills such as how to build trust with your team. Also, it helped me to create vision, I mean clearly define where your team is going and how they are going to get there. (P7)

Another participant added,

Because my job requires a lot of presentations that I need to do to management. I tried to improve my presentation skills and attended a training course about Microsoft PowerPoint and presentation skills which helped me a lot in my job. (P11)

Training is one of the clearest examples of a supportive employer investing in its human resources. Training matches individual skills to organisational goals and is a key component of ensuring employee engagement.

### **5.3.3 Perceived Organisational Support**

This research does not consider organisational support but perceived organisational support. There may be appropriate ways of quantifying organisational support in an objective way but what is

important for this study is to evaluate the subjective perceptions of employees as they explain the degree to which they perceive support. Most of the participants conveyed that, irrespective of the organisation, they do feel supported in terms of their work. They feel that their employer is there to offer them help to perform and improve their productivity. As explained in the previous section, some participants feel that the support comes in the form of training courses. Some participants also explained that they receive support if they face challenges at work. One participant explained,

I have a good relationship with management, and I feel that they have always been there for me, at personal level when I had family challenges and in a work capacity. (P.12)

Another participant explained that the support is generally work related, and less support is received for personal challenges. He explained,

When you talk about productivity, lack of employees, or the need for technical skills my organisation is always there to support... however I would say that the support doesn't go beyond work-related issues... I know many who have life or health issues, and there was little support there, maybe because we don't complain. (P1)

Furthermore, a few of the participants felt that the support is limited to certain departments or some employees but not everyone. Although this was not explained as discrimination, one participant explained,

I don't feel supported at times, perhaps because my department isn't considered very big, and most of the support goes to the bigger departments. I have asked for extra for more employees in my department because we are overloaded with work, but no progress has been made. (P2)

Support is a very broad term and from the responses it can be concluded that it is something experienced individually which is why it is appropriate to consider it using an interpretivist approach and qualitative methods. Relieving pressure by providing adequate resources is one example of support, but so is simply being available to listen to an employee's personal issues. It is an individually constructed perception.

## **5.4 Theme 3: Motivation and Commitment**

Irrespective of their roles, it was evident that most of the participants are committed to their job, it was also evident that working for a government/public sector company is very important to UAE nationals for the security it offers, this is further explained through their loyalty to their employers. These jobs are rewarded well and are considered secure. This is the context in which the participants were asked about their motivation and commitment.

### **5.4.1 A sense of Pride and Motivation**

Most of the participants indicated feelings reflecting pride or being honoured when representing their organisation and within their role. For some participants their feeling of pride is also accompanied by motivation to perform their jobs. The majority seemed happy with their working environments and with their role in general. One of the participants explained,

... I am really proud of my role in the company, I am blessed, and it is the reason I am satisfied. (P8)

Another participant stated that the company they work for is prestigious and many people would wish to be in his position,

I am a young person and working in my organisation means a lot to me and my family. My father was particularly proud of me because he feels I was rewarded for my hard work. (P2)

Furthermore, it is viewed that working for governmental or public sector companies is particularly motivating for some individuals, as stated by a participant,

I have always preferred working in the public sector, it makes me feel proud that I serve my community, and perhaps many of the UAE nationals are motivated to work in government or public sectors. (P8)

Overall, the participants painted a picture of a motivated and committed workforce, though it should be remembered that participants were from supervisory/ management positions who may feel they were to some extent expected to give positive responses.

### **5.4.2 Feeling part of the team**

Participants elaborated on their feelings and sense of belonging within their workplace. It was clear that the majority felt part of their work community and part of the organisation they work in. Teamwork was highlighted as a key feature of their daily tasks, and that no one works in complete isolation. Teamwork seems to also be present across departments as well, and not just within the small team, as one participant explained,

We are all here as a team, I know many of the employees in this company, in different departments and in different positions. (P15)

Another participant added,

Teamwork and being part of a team is a major feature in our work, this is what we look for when recruiting individuals for work, they need to show us that they could work in a team, but for that to happen the company offers many opportunities for the employees, especially the new ones, to engage and open dialogue and conversations with others to promote collegiality. (P5)

Saying that, a couple of participants elaborated that their teamwork is tiring for them, although they encourage it. One stated,

I like teamwork and I feel part of the team, but sometimes I just feel I work better in isolation, especially that teamwork is exhausting to me, I would rather just come and do my job and leave. (P2)

This is also echoed by a second participant who shared,

... a lot of the employees, my age, have retired, and I am less connected to the younger generation, especially that many of whom don't speak my language.

Collaborative working is essential in the modern workplace and the participants comments suggested a high level of teamwork was present at the case organisation which would be conducive to employee engagement.

### **5.4.3 Reward and Appreciation**

Participants' appreciation of their work and employers is also shown through reward and appreciation. The overwhelming view is that the employer/company has a reward system, while

the majority feel that they feel appreciated from especially from higher management. Some participants elaborated that the company does offer a lot of perks and benefits, this was shown as a universal policy that is not based on work-related achievements. One participant explained,

The company offers gym membership with low price that allows you to exercise in 18 different gyms with very low prices that shows it cares about me. Also, it provides free medical check every six months or one year based on age for all employees and that shows it cares about the wellbeing of the employee. (P1)

In terms of work-related promotions and financial rewards, it was a mixed view, however the general view was that this is based on merit. One added that he was promoted and rewarded based on his efforts,

Since I joined the company, I've got many rewards and promotions. I joined the company as a fresh graduate as an accountant, then promoted to senior accountant and currently I'm team leader. I feel that my efforts are appreciated here in this company. (P.3)

This is an example of the kind of career development that undoubtedly helps maintain employee engagement though inevitably not all employees can follow a similar path. On the reward system, another participant opined,

The company has a clear financial reward system, this is very well communicated through HR, employees move through the grades system based on experience and commitment and work achievements, based on which an employee is rewarded with a promotion. (P4)

Another participant added,

I have worked very hard to get promoted, it is easy when you do your work properly and when you show your commitment to work. (P3)

In contrast, some participants highlighted that, although they enjoy their work, they feel that they have not be rewarded. One explained,

It is hard for me to get rewarded or promoted at work, I am already a manager, but I find it difficult to increase my salary, the reason is my own limited qualifications, and not my commitment. It seems like I am more expensive to promote compared to others who are



new and have more or higher qualifications. I think the reward system favours the younger and more Energised. (P10)

Another participant explained that locals are more expensive to promote and reward, hence it's easier or cheaper to give an expat more work and reward them accordingly. Overall, as would surely be the case at all organisations, perceptions of equitable treatment vary from one person to another. Each individual has their own personal story, their own path.

#### **5.4.4 Loyalty if offered a job**

To elaborate on their commitment to work or their role, participants were asked whether or not they would take a new job if it paid better. Overall, the answers were quite diplomatic as could be expected. The majority explained that they are fully committed to their current jobs and work. This further illustrated the sense of pride they have.

One participant stated,

I am very committed, and I would like to think I am very loyal to my work too, I haven't had a reason to leave, and I will only leave for a different job if I am not wanted here. (P1)

Another participant said,

I am earning enough money here, I am comfortable, and there is the chance for me to earn even more if I carry on the good work. (P9)

On the other hand, four participants explained that they are ambitious and that if a different and better offer comes along, they will take it. They also explained that change is sometimes necessary to re-energise and try new experiences. One explained,

I have done this job for a long time. I feel bored sometimes. Hence, if a more exciting opportunity comes, I will consider it, why not! I am all for new challenges and better pay. (P4)

Another participant holding an IT post added that he would only consider jobs in the private sector from big companies,

No, I would not accept unless if it in a big company like Apple, Amazon or Google as I want to improve my IT skills. (P13)

Interpreting the participants narratives, there was also a sense of loyalty to public companies. Some participants explained that they would never work in the private sector, although this seems to show their pride in their work, it also shows more loyalty toward companies that are created for the benefits or support of the UAE public, as one participant explained. Such sentiments are a problem for the UAE government in its Emiratisation efforts for the private sector where it is enforcing quotas and insisting that an increasing percentage of the workforce is Emirati.

#### **5.4.5 Entitlement and Security**

One of the key subthemes to emerge was that there was a subsection of the sample reflecting feelings of entitlement and security. This was particularly noticed among four participants who explained that working for the public sector or the government represented security. One explained,

As a UAE national, I feel that I have earned this job over the time that I have worked here even if I didn't have the right qualifications. (P11)

Another participant explained that he is comfortable in his work and that

UAE nationals are the right people for in the public sector because they are there to help and support their people. (P13)

The 'social contract' between the Emirati government and its people has always included an implicit understanding that Emirati citizens will be provided with secure jobs in the public sector. It is unsurprising, therefore, to see that a sense of entitlement has developed. Emiratisation could be viewed as a new iteration of this social contract.

### **5.5 Theme 4: UAE Employees**

As most of the participants occupy management positions, they were asked about their views on UAE nationals and their general motivation at work. It was evident that they all support UAE national employees and they welcome them in their departments. There seemed to be a preference

to work with UAE nationals. This suggests another reason for preferring the public sector, as private sector workforces tend to be far more multinational.

### **5.5.1 UAE nationals' motivation and contribution**

Participants were asked whether, or not, they view UAE nationals as being as motivated and productive at work as other employees. This was done to assess their contribution in comparison to non-nationals who are often viewed to be more committed and productive. This particular question drew a strong defence from some of the participants; however, others felt that UAE nationals take their job for granted.

This can be illustrated by a participant who shared that UAE nationals are mistakenly questioned for their productivity and contribution, stating,

This is wrong. Frankly, UAE National employees always contribute, they love their country and feel that they want to pay back to the country. Thus, I find them, if given responsibility, innovative. I mean they accused of negligence, but this is not true, and I have many examples in this company and outside. (P1)

It was also explained that younger UAE nationals tend to be more motivated and productive as they all tend to have better qualifications compared to older UAE nationals in the organisation, and they are more competitive. It was explained,

... young UAE nationals are educated these days, and it is not easy to get a secure job, and I see many of them motivated and competitive and want to do well. (P3)

Another participant explained that low contribution is not an issue among UAE nationals only but many other employees too, if they are not well supported, he explained,

In my opinion, it not just National employees, all employees will contribute if they are motivated, and will not if they are not motivated. (P6).

Furthermore, it was also explained that UAE nationals might not be as educated as other, and the low contribution is often explained by the lack of qualifications and education and not down to the nationality. He added,

I am pretty sure if the national employee is educated, he/she will succeed and do well ... there are some people who are careless and feel that this job is secured. Especially those who have been in the company for a long time and are just waiting to retire, most of whom don't have the right qualifications and were employed due to their nationality not qualification. (P15)

This was echoed by another participant who raised the issue of poor contribution among UAE nationals. He offered an example,

I faced one issue before with one employee who was low contributor because low attendance. He was either coming late or leaving early and if he is available, he will do nothing except minor things. However, there are a lot of national employees who are doing well. (P13)

To sum this up, it was explained by a participant that poor contributions by UAE nationals is often because,

... they don't have the skills required to do the task assigned to them or they don't expect any promotion in the future. (P5)

### **5.5.2 Advice and guidance: training**

Although, the commitment and contributions of UAE nationals seemed to have generated mixed views, participants were asked what type of training and advice they would give to new potential UAE recruits. It seems that the majority of those who answered this question felt that they need to get the basics right. The advice is generally and mainly around punctuality and attendance as well as basic communication skills and dedication. This is best summarised by this quote,

I teach him/her to apply basic knowledge that gained during the academic journey. And always to write down any new information on regular basis, and the most important thing is to understand our policy and procedures which will help a lot. Also, to adhere to time attendance and not to be afraid of mistakes. Also, not to be in hurry to get promoted and to be realistic as he/she needs to gain experience first. (P1)

Another participant focused on the technical side which is crucial to developing potential and to progress at work at a later stage. It was explained that,

... beyond the basics, it is imported that the UAE employee get relevant skills based on his/her job, for example in the purchasing department I would recommend taking course to improve negotiation skills. Thus, any course will help to do the job successfully and succeeded later on. (P3)

One of the participants felt that key issues such as working under pressure and time management are necessary for all new employees,

I would focus on some aspects such as work under pressure and crisis management because I think this will help him to handle workload easily. Also, time management training. In addition, technical courses that helps to achieve his or her duties. (P1)

### **5.5.3 UAE-nationals are welcomed**

Most public organisations employ some non-UAE nationals, hence it was important to explore whether or not there is a preference for recruiting UAE nationals over expatriates. The majority explained that they would prefer working with UAE nationals, however there was a caveat, many also explained that they are only interested in working with the right people and motivated employees. One participant commented,

UAE nationals who have the right attitudes, and the right skills and qualifications are very welcome, however anyone who is coming here to pass time is not welcomed, work is work and shouldn't be taken for granted. I would love to have more young but qualified and motivated UAE nationals, but unfortunately in my technical department it is hard to find them. (P8)

Another participant explained,

It is hard to decline a UAE national when they compete with a foreign worker, you always want to take local employees, in my opinion I think we should only prefer UAE employees when they merit their position and not because they are UAE nationals. (P10)

Undoubtedly, the public sector status of the case organisation is important context for interpreting these responses relating to motivation and commitment and attitudes towards Emiratis as employees. Emirati civil service jobs are mostly reserved for Emirati nationals. The case company is a commercially oriented public enterprise meaning there is a greater balance between nationals and non-nationals.

## 5.6 Theme 5: Emiratisation Initiative

In recent years, the UAE has applied the EI to improve employment opportunities among UAE citizens and to reduce the economy's reliance on foreign workers. Participants were asked about their views on this initiative. Participants voiced support for the initiative with which they were very familiar, although there were reservations on the quality of UAE nationals' skills and readiness of some jobs.

### 5.6.1 Clear understanding

Most participants were able to clearly explain the idea behind Emiratisation. They conveyed that the initiative was created to support UAE nationals to find good secure employment thus increasing the representation of Emiratis in the workplace at the expense of expatriates. One participant explained Emiratisation as,

An initiative from the government to find jobs for UAE nationals. The initiative has an office and website where any UAE national who is searching for job can apply and they will suggest jobs based on his qualifications. In my opinion, it's a very important initiative. (P12)

Another participant suggested that Emiratisation is a policy initiated by the government to upskill UAE nationals and to prepare them better for the job market. For example, they offer a training course to study the English language in the UK. This is only offered to UAE nationals to help them find suitable jobs on the international market in the UAE.

One participant explained that he would not have his job if he was not a UAE national, and that the EI is the reason he is employed,

In my case I don't think I can find a job with this salary easily. Also, I feel my current job is secured because I'm a national employee (I mean secured unless I did something big to get fired), and in my opinion, this feeling because of the Emiratisation initiative. (P3)

Cases such as these point to a strong attachment to the EI and an approval of government policy among direct beneficiaries.

### 5.6.2 Positive support and priority

Most participants expressed feelings of being proud of and fully supportive of the Emiratization initiative, many have quoted their own reasons behind this support. It was clear that this initiative has shown that the government priorities UAE nationals in the job market. It was stated,

I really like this initiative. It is a sign that the government supports us as nationals and wishes to help us in succeeding and meeting current job requirements. (P4)

The international nature of business in the UAE was also reflected on as a reason for participants' support for this initiative. One participant commented,

The current market and foreign investment mean that many companies would rely on their own employees recruited from abroad, and this makes us, UAE nationals disadvantaged, because of our skills perhaps or language barrier; it is easier for them to recruit expats. (P10)

This was echoed by another participant who explained that expats are prioritised in many jobs especially in IT and technical jobs but appealed that there is an increasing rate of unemployment among UAE young adults. He added,

I can see that expats are becoming a challenge for young UAE nationals, who are less experienced. Hence, I am very supportive of this idea as we need to improve UAE nationals' representation in leading companies. (P7)

Another participant acknowledged that his own sons are looking for jobs and that this initiative supports them,

I want the company and the government to support this initiative even more, because I have sons who are looking for employment. (P1).

Another participant talked about the country's identity in the job market along with the culture and values that need to be incorporated and feels that these are often compromised because of a lack of UAE representation in certain sectors. The participant explained,

I work with many expats, and they are wonderful employees, but sometimes I feel I work in a foreign country, and it is hard to engage with employees due to cultural and identity barriers, I would love to see more UAE nationals in my department. (P9)

### **5.6.3 Suitability and Skills**

It was acknowledged by some participants that it is not easy to fully implement Emiratisation, simply because many UAE nationals are not suitable or don't have the right skills to take certain jobs. Hence, it was communicated that Emiratisation should be implemented but also to keep in mind that it would not be successful in certain jobs.

One participant declared,

Of course, I support this initiative, but we need to keep in mind that we need to employ UAE nationals who are well trained and well skilled to take highly technical jobs, they shouldn't just walk into a job because they are UAE nationals, and element of competition must be applied. (P6)

Another stressed that Emiratisation should be a long-term objective,

... it should start by providing the best and most in demand skills to UAE nationals who are willing to learn and contribute to the market and our economy. (P4)

Another participant explained that UAE nationals would always prefer government jobs and hence the country would also need expatriates in some organisations.

It was acknowledged by one participant that Emiratisation should not be confused with favouritism and explained that the UAE nationals must earn their jobs. He further explained,

Emiratisation is there to teach, educate, motivate and upskill UAE nationals, and they must work hard to earn their places. (P12)

### **5.6.4 Emiratisation and promotion**

Promotion was mentioned few times when participants were explaining their views on the EI. It was expressed by few participants that this is a way for UAE nationals to gain promotions in their



jobs. When asked to explain further, it was stressed that UAE national are more expensive to employers. One participant explained,

There is an element of discrimination when it comes to promotions, I have noticed that certain companies would rather keep UAE national static in their roles rather than promoting them or adding to their workload, this is simply because UAE nationals are more expensive. It is easier for a manger to promote an expat and add to their role or daily tasks, this will not be very expensive but for UAE national this might cost the company much more. (P5)

Despite this remark, another participant acknowledged that promotions are a problem area because some employees do not merit promotion, and this participant gave an example about himself explaining that he understands that promotions are linked to certain criteria that he needs to meet and that his nationality should not be the reason for promotion. He elaborated,

I haven't got any promotion for long time, and that because I don't have a bachelor's degree as higher positions require the bachelor's degree as a mandatory requirement. I mean promotion as a higher position, but I got some salary increment before. I understand that I must earn my promotion. (P4)

He further explained that being a UAE national is not a skill and shouldn't be the main reason for promotion and the focus should be on helping UAE nationals get promoted in the right way, through training, work and dedication.

Hence, overall the Emiratisation initiative is seen positively as a national quest. There is a feeling of patriotic duty among employees benefiting from this policy. The main qualification is the potential issue of jobs being awarded to those who lack the skills and experience necessary to carry them out effectively.

## **5.7 Summary of findings**

The thematic analysis, through its coding process, identified five main themes each with their own set of subthemes. This was the basis on which this chapter was organised. The first theme reflected the researcher's aim to give the participant an opportunity to talk about the nature of their roles, their workloads and perceived autonomy. It was found that a typical range of views were held with satisfaction expressed but also the potential for high workload pressures and burnout. Another set

of subthemes were collected under the theme of performance appraisal. Participants described receiving feedback of a mostly informal kind and suggested a training framework was in place though much was voluntary. Perceptions of a supportive employer were widespread among participants. Under the theme Motivation and Commitment, a sense of pride was expressed arising partly through the organisations public sector status. As expected, the degree of perceived equity between contribution and reward was a personal one with each participant having their own story to tell. A high degree of loyalty was expressed and the social contract under which the government offers secure employment to nationals was apparent. A fourth theme focused on UAE nationals as employees with some indication that positive discrimination in favour of UAE nationals could lead to posts being filled by those with insufficient skills or experience. Some participants expressed a preference for working with other Emiratis and the issue of language was raised as a communication barrier. The final theme was the Emiratisation Initiative itself. Under this theme came participants understanding of the purpose of the EI which was shown to be clear and in line with government objectives. The support for the EI found among the participants was also overwhelmingly positive which would be good news for policymakers and those involved in implementation. The qualification relating to suitability of candidates, skill levels and the potential for unwarranted promotions was also significant.

The last two chapters have presented the results and findings of the two research phases – the survey study and then the interview study. In the following chapter these results/ findings are synthesised, interpreted and discussed both in the context of existing literature and in order to address the research questions, aims and objectives.

## **Chapter 6 : Discussion and evaluation**

### **6.1 Introduction**

The previous two chapters presented the results of the quantitative survey study and the qualitative interview study findings, respectively. The aim of this chapter is to synthesise, discuss and evaluate this research. It links the findings to the research questions, aim and objectives set in the introductory chapter. This will be realised within the context of the existing body of knowledge on the phenomenon of employee engagement and predictors of this engagement.

A discussion and evaluation of a piece of research is aimed at enabling a researcher to draw their conclusions (Evans et al., 2014). With the up-close detail of the results chapters done, this chapter requires the researcher to take a few steps back and evaluate the research as a whole by asking questions of the research (Evans et al., 2014). These questions are framed through critical thinking and interrogate both what the main findings are and their significance. It also goes on to consider the implications of the research at various levels.

In presenting this chapter a decision had to be taken as to how it would best be organised. There are many legitimate ways to organise a discussion chapter. In a mixed methods study such as this one, the challenge is to present the discussion in a way that gives equal weight to both qualitative and quantitative findings, and which synthesises these findings in a way which provides the most illumination of the phenomenon and relationships being studied. The phenomenon of employee engagement and the relationships between factors occur at three different levels: individual, organisational and country level. This division is therefore reflected in the chapter. Before this, however, the main results/findings are summarised.

### **6.2 Main findings of the research**

After evaluating, interpreting and synthesising the results of both the quantitative and qualitative studies the main findings of the research, are now summarised before being discussed in more depth.

The research studied the relationship between employee engagement and a range of demographic variables. Analysis of demographic data in Chapter Four revealed that age and education level

were significant predictors of engagement level. Older employees and employees who had graduated university were more engaged than younger non-graduates. The other variables recorded including gender, role seniority and length of service did not predict engagement in a significant way.

The survey asked two questions aimed at establishing whether or not the respondents had perceptions of support from Emiratisation Initiative, one regarding their current role and one on future promotions. Nearly three-quarters felt supported in their current role and six out of ten felt the initiative would help in seeking promotion. Interestingly, support for the Emiratisation initiative did not correlate with self-reported employee engagement. Instead, this support was associated with lower engagement. Hence, indicating that the initiative supported respondents in their current role and would help secure a future promotion was associated with a lower score on employee engagement.

The qualitative dimension of the research enabled the researcher to explore how employee engagement was experienced by participants. These Emirati employees expressed largely positive experiences of being valued by their employer and in return being both loyal and grateful for the organisational support and training they receive in addition to more extrinsic rewards.

Perceived organisational support and training provision were confirmed in this study as key components of an organisation's efforts to raise the level of engagement among their workforce. Those reporting a perception of being supported by their employer and those reporting receiving training for their roles were more engaged. Hence, employee engagement is more strongly associated with the actions of an employer than of a national governmental scheme.

These and other findings are now discussed further on three different levels, individual, organisational, and national.

### **6.3 Employee engagement at an individual level**

Employee engagement at an individual level was examined quantitatively in terms of the demographic characteristics and qualitatively in terms of the perceptions and interpretations individual participants had of their lived work experiences.

### 6.3.1 Age

Age was found to be a significant predictor of employee engagement. The survey results indicated that younger employees scored on average lower than those more senior. While employee engagement is mainly associated with higher individual performance based on greater job satisfaction, motivation and disinclination to leave, the interview study found that there was a perception that younger employees were better educated and more dynamic. With the increasing access to higher education in the UAE it is certainly true that more and more Emirati graduates are entering the labour market though high youth unemployment means they are having to be increasingly competitive. They not only compete amongst themselves but also with expats. Older participants spoke of younger colleagues taking the lead in putting forward new ideas fearing their own would be seen as out-of-date. Having found a suitable job these young Emirati employees can be more productive than older co-workers according to views expressed during the interview study.

Hence, with regards to age, the present study mostly aligns with the existing literature on employee engagement in that older employees scored more highly on our measure of engagement. Douglas and Roberts (2020) found that employees over fifty years old had higher levels of work engagement than those younger. This supported earlier studies which reported higher intellectual and emotional engagement among older employees who were motivated to contribute to the organisation's success (James et al., 2012; Towers Perrin, 2005). Some age-related employee engagement research uses samples with generational groups, with Millennials being of particular interest. Millennials (most often defined as those born between 1981 and 1996) would be between 25 and 40 years old at the time this present study was undertaken. This group is understood to have different motivating factors at work, present a challenge to managers whose employees are both Millennials and older generations (Meola, 2016). A Saudi study of private sector employees (n=408) noted only moderate employee engagement among Millennials and also noted a high turnover intention among this group (Sahni, 2021).

Where this present study diverges from the literature is in locating the possibility (in the interview study) that despite a lower level of engagement, younger employees can outperform older colleagues with their greater and more recent knowledge and their more competitive mindset. It

should be stated that this is an inference from the perceptions of interview participants and that job performance was not quantitatively measured.

Employers should consider that their younger employees may have a different mindset to their older colleagues. Their values may have a different hierarchy of sources than older generations (Simadi, 2006). They may more readily switch employers and be less adherent to the job-for-life concept that older generations may have viewed as the norm. In the quest to raise engagement among all employees this age effect needs to be considered by employers.

### **6.3.2 Educational level**

Next to age, education level was the second strongest predictor of employee engagement in this study. Those with higher educational attainment (i.e. possessing a bachelor's degree or above) reported higher levels of employee engagement in the survey. The interview study found that the difference between expatriates and local staff in performance terms was perceived to be one of education. Given equal qualifications, it was felt that nationals could match expatriates in performance terms in their roles. As the expansion of higher education in the UAE has been relatively recent.

The positive correlation between education level and employee engagement is in line with Sharma et al. (2017) who had a similar finding. Popli and Rizvi (2016) compared graduates with post-graduates and found graduates scored more highly on employee engagement than their more qualified post-graduate co-workers. In contrast, subsamples holding Bachelor's, Master's and Doctoral degrees were compared by Dhir and Shukla (2018) with no significant difference found.

Higher Education has expanded rapidly and consistently in the UAE in recent times and so therefore has the educational capital of the workforce (Jackson & Jackson, 2020). Hence, younger employees are disproportionately likely to have benefited from a university education. The government is part way through its National Strategy for Higher Education 2030 aimed at matching the country's human resources with the future needs of the economy (UAE Government, 2021). Older employees would not have had the same opportunities to attend university as younger ones or as expatriates from countries with large tertiary education sectors.

### **6.3.3 Gender**

The gender variable was found not to be a significant predictor of employee engagement based on the survey. For this reason, it was not further investigated in the interview study. Establishing a clear evidence base for the relationship between employee engagement and gender is not easy with the full range of findings to be found in the existing literature. Reissová et al. (2017) found no significant difference in engagement between the genders but did find that female employees were more loyal and male more independent of their employer. Shukla et al. (2015) did find a major gender difference in employee engagement in favour of female employees, but this was in a single case study of an Indian internet company with all the qualifications to generalisability that such a study has. In the same country Sharma et al. (2017) found that male employees in the IT sector exhibited greater engagement. Other evidence suggests the possibility of a gender effect because men and women are motivated by different things with men more interested in extrinsic rewards while women are more motivated by intrinsic factors such as the ability to self-direct (Mendiratta, 2016).

The implication from the present single case study is that gender may not have a significant role to play in employee engagement, certainly when compared to age and education meaning employers should approach both genders similarly when aiming to increase engagement. More broadly, the contradictory findings in the literature may suggest that for the gender variable levels of engagement may be highly context dependent.

### **6.3.4 Experience**

The experience variable represented length of service at current employer. Like gender it was not found to be a significant predictor of employee engagement. With age being a significant predictor and younger employees having lower engagement scores it may have been expected that the results for experience would have been similar as on average older employees would have longer experience. On the other hand, the construct of burnout (Maslach & Leiter, 1997) would suggest that at least some longer service employees would experience periods of disengagement.

A large-scale engagement survey conducted in the Czech Republic found that recently hired employees scored 27% more highly than longer established employees and that those with greater service were less interested in recognition and rewards (Hinzmann et al., 2019). Further analysis suggests that this trend for reducing engagement is driven by increased cynicism regarding

promotion possibilities, management and leadership. Conversely, newer employees may feel the need to approach such surveys more positively. Conversely, no tenure effect was found by Shukla et al. (2015) among a sample of IT industry employees in India.

### **6.3.5 Job level**

Survey results indicated that job level was not a significant predictor of level of employee engagement. The interview study suggested that it is common for employees to view their roles as challenging and having a heavy workload but that this is considered normal. The workload is generated both within the organisation and by third parties. There were indications that these high levels of workload may have negative operational effects such as failing to negotiate best prices with suppliers. This heavy workload also causes employees to lose track of time as they are so absorbed. After high workload, language emerged as the secondary challenge with the main organisational language being English.

Bhana and Suknunan (2021) reported significantly varying levels of engagement according to job level in a higher education context. However, the relationship was not strictly linear suggesting that specific job roles may have lower engagement, perhaps through higher stress levels or other factors. Vigoda-Gadot et al. (2012) found engagement to be higher among employees holding management positions in their Israeli study which also compared public with private sector employees and found that public sector employees exhibited higher levels of engagement. Hence, the current study differs from at least of the earlier research in not finding job level significant.

### **6.3.6 Experiencing engagement**

In addition to an individual's demographic characteristics, there are also unique perceptions and interpretations related to employee engagement that were explored during the interview study. Overall, a sense of positivity and satisfaction emerged from the interviews. Employees often used the terms "pride" and "honour" when discussing their working life and job roles. They were proud to be employed in the capacity they were, and they were honoured to have the support of their employer. The fact that the organisation was state owned supported this sense of pride as it felt they were making a contribution to the community. These expressions of pride may be significant in terms of employee engagement as pride in working for an organisation has been identified as a significant driver of engagement.



Most, but not all, participants elucidated their sense of belonging to a team and their satisfaction derived from collaborative working. Separately, employees were conscious of the rewards offered by the company, including those beyond salary. However, not all employees perceived an equitable exchange between themselves and their employer. Favouring both younger employees and expat employees were mentioned in this regard. This addresses the research question of how perceptions of organisational support relate to the employee engagement of Emirati nationals. It highlights that while aggregated levels of engagement may be satisfactory, at an individual levels, there may be factors causing perceptions of inequity.

Participants discussed various engagement tools mostly positively. They felt able to give voice to their ideas for improvements and they felt they were given appropriate feedback. They received regular performance appraisal, and this was mostly felt to be appropriate. Attitudes to reward were mixed as could be expected. Some interview participants felt adequately rewarded while others made comments revealing a sense of inequity.

Loyalty and likelihood of leaving are commonly used as a component of engagement. Participants voiced loyalty to their employer though some would move on if a 'blue chip' employer approached them. A preference for the public sector was also expressed. This desire for public sector employment is a common theme throughout the Middle East as such jobs are perceived as more secure and attracting greater benefits than the private sector (Shayah & Sun, 2019). The private sector typically involves working longer hours including unpaid overtime, lower salaries and less favourable benefits. This partly explains why surveys have shown that less than one in six young Emiratis have a preference for private sector employment (Khamis, 2017). This represents a challenge for governments aiming to diversify their economies through the private sector.

The interview study also reported perceptions that suggested the presence of public sector motivation (PSM) among the workforce. This PSM is a construct describing the intrinsic reward felt by working in a publicly owned organisation (French & Emerson, 2014). The public sector preference has also been linked to risk aversity, with these jobs associated with greater security (Dong, 2017).

The qualitative study of engagement is an emerging field. Typically, such research investigates the lived experiences of employees through interviews though some studies also include an organisations secondary data and internal documentation. Recent examples include Adisa et al.

(2021), Canavesi and Minelli (2021), Obuobisa-Darko and Domfeh (2019) and Vermooten et al. (2020). As each individual experiences and interprets their work experience differently it is not straightforward to transfer such interpretations into definitive findings. Individuals' personalities function differently in creating and maintaining engagement (Shuck et al., 2011). Nevertheless, thorough thematic analysis, particularly in a mixed methods study, can triangulate upon illuminating experiences which point to the existence of a wider phenomenon, some of which have been proposed in this section.

## **6.4 Organisational support and training for employee engagement**

After considering the findings of the present research at an individual level the discussion now moves on to those findings more readily categorised as relating to the organisational level. More specifically, the role of organisational support and training in raising levels of employee engagement. Two of the research questions asked how these factors were related to employee engagement.

### **6.4.1 Perceived organisational support**

Perceived organisational support is “an employee belief that the organisation cares for and values his or her contribution to the success of the organisation” (Krishnan & Mary, 2012, p.1). As hypothesised, perceived organisational support and training were found to be positively correlated. In the survey, organisational support was represented by a set of items on (1) the organisation caring about the individual's wellbeing, (2) recognition of individual effort, (3) their perception of security if their job was eliminated, (4) their view on whether the organisation would seek to replace them of a cheaper alternative were available; and (5) whether, should they resign, the organisation would strive to retain them. Aggregated these items represented ‘perceived organisational support’ in this study. The survey reported that those respondents indicating more perceived organisational support were more likely to show higher levels of engagement.

The qualitative interview study added further understanding to the survey results. Participants perceived training and skill development as an important component of the support they received from the organisation. Differing experiences were voiced on whether the support was provided on an individual wellbeing level, a job performance level or both.

The relationship between perceived organisational support and employee engagement is well supported in the literature to which the present study adds (Al-Omar et al., 2019; Eisenberger & Stinglhamber, 2011; Zacher & Winter, 2011). While the question was not directly asked in the present study, there is evidence that one of the most important sources of this support is the direct supervisor (Hasnida et al., 2019). On the other hand, workload may act negatively in terms of perceived organisational support. The interview participants raised workload in the context of job performance and personal wellbeing. Vegund (2014) found perceived excessive workload negatively affected engagement and the present study aligns with this finding.

The positive outcomes that flow from perceived organisational support have been well covered in the literature. An overall perception of organisational support may be based on several distinct sources of support including colleagues (Rousseau et al., 2009) supervisors (Eisenburgher et al., 2002) and leadership (Englebrecht & Samuel, 2019). Organisational support theory (OST) has emerged as an explanatory framework aimed at understanding how perceived organisational support (POS) can lead to an increased sense of obligation to help the organisation towards its goals. This manifests itself in improved performance, lower stress and reduced turnover/ sickness absence (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002; Shore & Shore, 1995). In the interview study, participants spoke regularly working beyond their formal hours which may be deemed more acceptable by those who perceive they are supported by their employer.

Using the concept of psychological capital, Bonaiuto et al. (2022) argue that this capital (comprising the psychological states of resilience, confidence, hope and optimism) can be developed through organisational support. These positive psychological states can generate job satisfaction and improve job performance (Luthans et al., 2004). Of specific relevance here is that perceived organisational support has an important role to play in work engagement (Bonaiuto et al., 2022).

Several sources influence the perceived organisational support including organisational culture, leaders and immediate supervisors. To this, in the UAE the government and its policies including the Emiratisation Initiative can be added to these sources. To have the maximum effect the sources need to be aligned and each contributing to the building of positive perceptions of support. Organisations need to understand the role of positive psychology at the individual level and the role of the organisation in creating a work environment which promotes this. The present study

contributes to the literature on perceived organisational support and employee engagement by providing mixed methods evidence for the relationship between the two.

#### **6.4.2 Organisational training provision**

The critical nature of training provision for organisational success is well understood (Lee & Lee, 2010). In the present study, in the minds of the interview participants, training was viewed as a practical manifestation of organisational support, specifically for support in their job role. The survey study confirmed a large majority (78.3%) of respondents participated in training courses provided by their organisation and a similar number (three-quarters) felt they received the training needed to perform their roles effectively. A smaller number, though still a majority, understood that they need to improve their skills further to complete their tasks correctly.

While 78.3% would seem like a high level of participation, the remaining ~20% is a significant part of the workforce reporting not normally participating in company-organised training. Superficially, there seems to be a contradiction in the results here although with one item framed as talking about the present and the other about future improvement it is perhaps understandable that nearly two-thirds asserted that future improvement could be forthcoming with further training. Furthermore, the survey study revealed a significant positive correlation for employee engagement with employee training, as hypothesised. Put simply, well trained employees are likely to be more engaged.

Probing more deeply into the training factor in the interview study, the participants explained that training was both in house and externally run and can be in-country or abroad. It was also divided between compulsory and self-nominated. In some cases, participants identified instances where they had identified an area for self-development and sought out a suitable training course which had the desired results for them.

In the present study, the relationship between training and job performance was understood (though not elucidated by all) and the link between training and overall employee wellbeing was also identified. Staff training is a key component of achieving improved performance (Dutton & Kleiner, 2015). Literature has shown that training and development as a formal part of HRM practices is a significant predictor of employee engagement (Jafri, 2013). Conversely, lack of training and career development opportunities are associated with low levels of engagement and higher turnover (Wushe & Shenje, 2019). Training develops the fit between the individual and the

job role (Sheehan et al., 2014) but can also address the general wellbeing of the individual (Shipton et al., 2006) both of which are positive for employee engagement. This study confirms that employees who are well trained feel more valued by their organisation and in return become more engaged.

Based on the findings of the present study, organisations can assume that training provision makes a significant contribution to employee engagement and is recognised by employees as a manifestation of organisational support. A further implication related to the significant minority who fell outside the engagement effect of training either through non-attendance or through a failure to link training to support. The survey identified this and some of the voiced perceptions in the interview study confirmed it.

Those responsible for implementing the Emiratisation initiative understand the vital role of training in achieving its goals. A training ecosystem has been developed to help address the perceptions and stereotypes of Emiratis as inferior employees held by some in positions responsible for recruitment (Al-Ali, 2008) and by expatriates (Al-Waqfi & Forstenlechner, 2010). This ecosystem encourages large private sector employers such as banks, retailers and industrials to establish their own training programmes often in conjunction with publicly funded schemes (KPMG, 2022).

## **6.5 Impact of perceptions of the Emiratisation Initiative on employee engagement**

The third level of evaluation of the present study is at the national level. This is justified as a disengaged workforce can impair productivity across the economy and result in fiscal loss (Kelleher, 2011). It is further justified because the Emiratisation Initiative investigated in this research is a national policy with country-level objectives.

The survey included two items which invited respondents to indicate whether they felt (a) that the Emiratisation Initiative helps them to secure their job and (b) helps them to get promoted at their current employer. The result was positive in both cases. In particular, more than three quarters of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the initiative helped them secure their job. A smaller

majority (~60%) felt that the initiative supports them to get promoted at their current organisation. This represents a widespread acceptance that the initiative is achieving its main aims.

Nevertheless, as the Emiratisation Initiative aims to increase employment opportunities for UAE nationals and requires employers to meet quotas of those recruited and retained, the minority of UAE nationals who did not feel supported by the policy is equally, if not more noteworthy. Nearly a quarter of respondents (~22%) did not perceive that the policy helped secure their employment despite this being one of its key aims.

Turning to the relationship between the initiative and employee engagement. Statistical analysis found that those who recorded positive perceptions of the Emiratisation Initiative in the survey are less likely to be engaged as employees. At first glance, this represents one of the most interesting and perhaps counterintuitive results from the survey. However, those reporting being more fully engaged in their work are also more likely to hold positive perception on their organisation's support and training which by leave them less in need of external sources of support. This leads in turn to the possibility that sources of engagement are part of a zero-sum 'cake' where perceiving support coming from one source reduces the amount available to attribute to another source.

The interview study shed further light on attitudes toward the UAE government's Emiratisation Initiative. None of the participants expressed blanket negativity towards the policy; however, some gave only qualified support. Most, however, supported the initiative and expressed pride in the policy and its objectives.

Participants understood the main aims of the policy as being to encourage Emiratis into the workforce and employers to employ UAE nationals thus reducing dependence on non-UEA employees. Practical measures such as facilitating job searching and skill development were also recognised. Expressions of feeling personally supported by the policy also emerged from the interviews as did the feeling that supporting the initiative was a patriotic thing to do. Participants felt that the initiative particularly protected younger less experienced Emirati jobseekers who may have the qualifications but lacked experience.

Among the qualifications were that Emirati job seekers should be properly qualified for the roles they are appointed to not simply hired because of their nationality. The initiative needs to go hand in hand with the upskilling of the Emirati workforce, it was stated. Also, with job markets being

international for some sectors it was recognised that there would still be competition from expats and that firms may just continue recruiting non-Emiratis as they have done in the past. Relatedly, it was suggested that the initiative would be more successful in some sectors than others. As well as recruitment barriers, there were promotion barriers mentioned by the participants including lack of requisite qualifications and the fact that Emiratis were more expensive to recruit and promote than expats.

Some of the statements made by participants suggest the continuing presence of stereotypes among Emiratis, as highlighted in earlier studies by Al-Ali (2008) and Al-Waqfi and Forstenlechner (2010). In particular, there remains a perception that expatriates are both better qualified and more experienced than Emirati counterparts. A generational gap was also perceived with younger Emiratis seen as more educated, more individualist and more in tune with the latest technologies and trends. Furthermore, Emiratis are viewed by private sector employers as lacking the motivation to innovate and act in an entrepreneurial way as required in the private sector (Tee & Li, 2021).

The interview study showed that participants were conscious of the potential downsides of the initiative and the literature has identified labour protection leading to unsuitable employees being retained (Toledo, 2019) skill mismatch (Sarker & Rahman, 2020), and the phenomenon of ‘ghost’ employees where a company has employees on their payroll who never do any work and who may not even exist (Al-Riyami et al., 2015). Perceptions voiced confirmed Al-Ali (2008) who found that a lack of preparedness among UAE nationals was a possible barrier to Emiratisation.

Marchon and Toldeo (2014) empirically analysed the quota system and found it to be effectively a tax on jobs and an interference in the job market. When Al-Waqfi and Forstenlechner (2014) surveyed managers and HRM professionals about improvements to Emiratisation policies they highlighted restricting work visa renewals for foreign workers suggesting that at the time they felt the government was not being strict enough in enforcing its policy.

Despite the areas for improvement highlighted in this and other studies there are firm grounds for declaring the Emiratisation initiative a success, in particular at the professional and managerial level (Rees et al., 2007), despite several quantitative targets being missed.

Overall, the study presented a more positive outlook on the Emiratisation Initiative from UAE citizens than that reported by Al-Waqfi and Forstenlechner (2010) more than a decade earlier.

Comparisons between the studies should, however, be treated with caution as they had different research designs and asked different questions. Nevertheless, there may be an indication that the effectiveness of the initiative, first launched in 1998, may have improved over time according to the perceptions of Emirati nationals.

The interview study revealed some indications of a preference among participants to work alongside other Emiratis. On the one hand this is understandable as communication may be easier and there is less room for cultural misunderstandings. However, as expatriates are likely to feature in the UAE's labour force for the foreseeable future, it is important that both employers and the government do not allow division and discriminatory practices develop in the workplace.

Emiratisation has been the subject of research studies addressing a range of related research problems. These have included the perceptions of recruiters on potential Emirati employees (Al-Ali, 2008), stereotypes of Emiratis as employees (Al-Waqfi & Forstenlechner, 2010), barriers to employing Emiratis in the private sector (Forstenlechner et al., 2012; Aljanahi, 2017), coaching to promote inclusion (Watlal et al., 2017), and the impact of the initiative on job descriptions (Alabdelkarim et al., 2014).

This study, in line with prior research, confirms that a tension exists between the views and expectations of Emirati nationals and labour market dynamics. Current Emirati employees look for a more rigorous implementation of the initiative while employers seek the flexibility to deploy optimised human resources, including where necessary, expatriates. Any measures which enhance the perceived job security of Emiratis should satisfy one of Khan's (1990) three criteria, that of safety. More perceived security should mean higher levels of engagement.

## **6.7 Summary**

Discussing the findings of a research study requires both creative and critical thinking and that interpretation may include some speculation (Evans et al., 2014). It was notable that many items on the survey appeared to suggest a substantial majority of respondents expressing positive perceptions about training, organisational support, in the order of three-quarters of the total with the remaining minority not sharing this positivity. Looking into the demographic data it could be concluded that younger employees with lower educational attainment and shorter length of service



are less likely to or perhaps have yet to become engaged employees. We could also say yet to be absorbed into the organisation. It could also be that investment in training and support by the employer is slanted against this subsample. If so, this is something for the employer in this case study and other employers to reflect on. Interestingly, the interview study revealed the perception that younger employees tend to be better qualified and more competitive than more senior colleagues. We should therefore be cautious in assuming that employees not engaged in the terms of this study are less productive or ambitious.

The findings on age in the present study are of particular interest. While younger employees showed lower engagement scores, they had the highest scores in positivity towards the Emiratisation Initiative. One plausible interpretation of these survey results could be that more recently recruited employees could perceive that their employment support (particularly getting and keeping their job) can be attributed to the initiative more than to the organisation they work for and that this effect reduces in influence the longer the employee is with their employer. Similarly, those with higher educational attainment could perceive their employment and subsequent performance as more independent of the organisation. These interpretations would need to be tested in further research. Another tentative explanation could be based on the longstanding perception that in Middle Eastern organisations, promotion and salary grade advancement is based more on seniority in terms of length of service than it is on job performance (Dajani and Zaki, 2015; Vance, 2006).

Returning to the hypotheses set for the current study, it was hypothesised that (1) Perceived organisational support is positively related to UAE National employees' engagement; (2) the Emiratisation Initiative moderates the relationship between Perceived Organisational Support and UAE National Engagement; and (3) that the Emiratisation Initiative moderates the relationship between Perceived Organisational Support and UAE National Engagement. These hypotheses were analytically tested in chapter four. The analysis showed that each of the hypotheses were supported.

Finally, we can refer to the model proposed in chapter two and reproduced as Table 6-1.

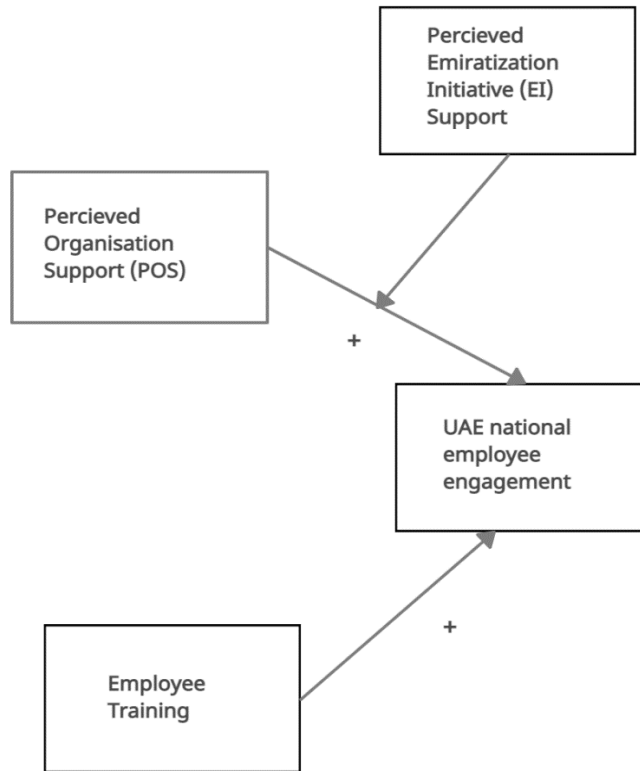


Table 6-1: The model applied in this research

The model reflects the hypotheses with both perceived organisational support and employee training positively related to employee engagement with these relationships being moderated by the Emiratisation Initiative.

In the final chapter, the main conclusions of the study are presented along with what are proposed to be the contributions made and implications arising from the work. The chapter then turns to recommendations for employers, policymakers and researchers working in this field.

## **Chapter 7 : Conclusions**

### **7.1 Introduction**

Employers around the world have invested heavily in initiatives to improve employee engagement as it is increasingly viewed as a route to sustainable competitive advantage. Elements of this competitive advantage include higher productivity and lower turnover (Vance, 2006). Despite this, engagement levels remain low in many contexts (Czarnowsky, 2008; Saks, 2006; Wagner and Harter, 2006). In contrast to this global phenomenon, the nationalisation of the workforce is very much a regional issue faced by countries in the Gulf region including the United Arab Emirates. The research reported in this thesis has sought to understand the relationship between these two important phenomena in the context of the UAE.

Employee engagement is widely understood to offer benefits at an individual, organisational and national level (Biswas & Bhatnagar, 2013). Past studies suggest that higher employee engagement leads to higher level of citizenship behaviour, higher productivity, more satisfied employees and overall enhanced performance (Bakker & Albrecht, 2018). It is no surprise that employee engagement has been studied in a wide range of national and cultural contexts including Spain and Greece (Schaufeli et al., 2002), Japan (Shimazu & Schaufeli, 2009), India (Anitha, 2014), Britain (Adisa et al., 2021), Italy, (Canavesi & Minelli, 2021) and Egypt (Dajani & Zaki, 2015), to name just a few. Employee engagement is nothing less than a more effective way of managing human capital so research efforts to understand the concept more fully are highly justified (Albrecht, 2010b).

Similarly, the nationalisation of the workforces in the Gulf region is a major priority for governments who would otherwise risk economic and political instability. Reliance on imported labour could only ever have been a temporary solution. Building capacity among their own nationals has been a central plank of economic policy among GCC member countries and these efforts are ongoing.

This thesis has reported on research aimed at examining the two phenomenon, employee engagement and nationalisation of the workforce, in our case Emiratisation. To do so the researcher

used a mixed methods design in the belief that this was the most appropriate design for revealing new understanding. This chapter sets out the main conclusions of the study before proposing the contributions it has made to this field of study and its implications for stakeholders. After this, recommendations are made for organisations, policymakers and for researchers working in this field or considering doing so.

## **7.2 Main conclusions**

The research reported in this thesis examined a series of demographic variables to understand their relationship with employee engagement. Analysis showed that age and education were predictors of engagement, but gender, experience (length of service), and job level were not. Hence, in this case, older employees and employees with higher educational attainment reported higher levels of employee engagement.

The study also gave voice to the perceptions of participants on their experiences of employee engagement. Employees expressed their pride and even honour of being employed in their role and in the support they perceived receiving from their employer. This pride also gave rise to a sense of belonging to a team and as their employer was in the government sector a sense of contributing to the community. Among these mostly positive perceptions were a range of attitudes to the equity or otherwise of their own personal extrinsic rewards. The well-known preference for public over private sector employment also found voice.

The research also found evidence for the importance of perceived organisational support and organisational training provision as predictors of employee engagement. Employees who judge that their employer supported and valued them both in their job role and in their personal wellbeing were more highly engaged. Likewise, training led to greater employee engagement. We can conclude that organisations aiming to raise the level of employee engagement, individually and across the organisation as a whole should take a broad and proactive approach to support and training with the requisite reporting and monitoring.

The relationship of greatest interest in this research was that between employee engagement and the labour force nationalisation initiative labelled Emiratisation. Our finding that a clear majority of Emiratis responding to the survey felt supported in their current roles and future promotions by

the initiative is at face value positive for the initiative's implementers. However, a significant minority have not assumed such a sense of being supported by the policy which is also a significant finding. Exploring deeper in the interview study support for the initiative was not unquestioning and several qualifications and points of improvement were highlighted.

On the relationship between the initiative and employee engagement a particularly interesting finding emerged. Those who recorded positive perceptions of the Emiratisation Initiative in the survey were less likely to be engaged as employees as measured in the survey. The most plausible interpretation of this result is that the more an employee feels that their organisation supports them and trains them the less significant they feel the contribution of the initiative is as a source of support. Those less engaged in their employment and the organisation providing it, the more likely they are to see this external policy initiative as relevant and supportive. In this sense we can see an individual employee evaluating their own employment and external supportive factors and apportioning a finite amount of recognition or acknowledgement among these sources of support. Those strongly engaged with their organisation will have less available to assign to the Emiratisation Initiative.

## **7.3 Contributions and Implications of the research**

### **7.3.1 Understanding employee engagement**

The present research contributes an addition to the knowledge of employee engagement and specifically its relationship with perceived organisational support and perceived employee training. The research strongly indicates that the route to an engaged workforce lies through developing perceptions of organisational support with training as an important component of this endeavour. In this regard, the study is in line with a broad range of literature from different contexts.

The research also contributed to the evidence base on the relationship between employee engagement and various demographic factors. Employee engagement was found to be statistically significantly correlated to age and education level (expressed as graduate and non-graduate) with older employees and those who had graduated reporting more engagement than others. Job level, gender, and length of service showed no correlation.

### **7.3.3 Conceptualising the EI —EE relationship**

Despite the prominence and strategic importance of workforce nationalisation in the Gulf region, the present study is understood to be the first to examine the relationship between employee engagement and Emiratisation or indeed any example of workforce nationalisation. While opening a new field of enquiry is valuable it does present challenges when seeking to conceptualise the EI-EE relationship.

The link between EI and EE, in conceptual terms, appears to be that there is greater support for EI among those less engaged by their employing organisation. There could be a number of reasons for this. One prominent aspect of the EI is in the recruitment of Emiratis where it plays an active role in locating, publicising and filling vacancies. Less engaged employees may be more likely to leave an organisation and so would have a greater likelihood of availing themselves of these services. In contrast, engaged employees may be less likely to give consideration to these support services feeling that they have no need for them. The EI is more relevant to Emiratis contemplating changing employers than to those settled in their current employment. The EI may also have a greater effect on unemployed Emiratis including new graduates and those deferring entering employment until the right public sector job at a sufficiently high level of seniority becomes available (the so-called waithood phenomenon (Elsharnouby et al. (2023))).

An alternative but perhaps overlapping conceptualisation of the relationship between EI and EE is that the external support from the EI flows in to fill gaps in support – real or perceived – normally filled by the employing organisations. Longer serving employees and graduates are potentially less likely to have such a gap to fill. At the case organisation an Emirati employee is likely to already feel very secure in their current role and typically would anticipate future promotions as their service extended.

There is a third line of reasoning that could be applied to the finding that there is a negative relationship between employee engagement and support for the EI. This arises from the degree of relevance of the EI to the case organisation and proposes that the level of support for the EI is highly context dependent. Overall, the finding that support for the Emiratisation initiative is related to lower engagement may indicate that in the absence of an engaged relationship with their employing organisation individuals may see support coming from external sources.

As an exploratory study of the EI and its relationship to EE in the absence of prior literature, these explanations represent early attempts at conceptualisation that would require further research to develop. Hence, the research contributes to understanding of the phenomenon of labour force nationalisation, a phenomenon of particular importance to the Gulf region where governments seek to rebalance their economies.

### **7.3.2 Contributions to practice**

While the case study research design brings with it cautions on generalisability the study nevertheless suggests novel findings that both raise implications for both management and policymakers and that deserve further investigation. In the conduct of this research, it became starkly apparent how little research had been done that considered workforce nationalisation from the perspectives of employees. No studies could be found which gave voice to employees in the UAE in the context of EI research, meaning this present research is the first.

This study contributes to practice-based knowledge by raising the prospect that within organisations in the UAE and the wider Gulf region there are groups of employees with greatly differing levels of support for workforce nationalisation and with differing levels of employee engagement. Management can use this knowledge to promote engagement through raising perceived organisational support and through employee training. Moreover, the study found that employee engagement is more strongly associated with the actions of an employer than of a national governmental scheme. This means that organisations should not rely on external sources of support to increase levels of engagement among their employees.

For reasons that require further research investigation, employees supportive of the nationalisation of the workforce policy are not on average those most engaged in their employment. Therefore, the power and the tools to engage a workforce are more likely found at the organisational level than at a national level.

This research has provided the basis on which recommendations can be made for organisations aiming to maximise the engagement among their workforce and for the government in its implementation of the Emiratisation Initiative. After a consideration of the limitations of this study, these recommendations are presented.

## 7.4 Limitations of the study

Only Emirati nationals were included in the sample. While this was purposive it does mean that the sample was not a reflection of the present workforce of the UAE which comprises just ~7.5% nationals (UAE Vision 2021). Furthermore, the study was implemented at a publicly owned organisation. There is a considerable difference between public and private sectors in the UAE. The former is dominated by Emirati employees with the latter relying almost entirely on expatriates (ILO, n.d.).

Third, the study is based on data collected in a single culture (UAE). Aspects of this culture could affect the findings. For example, Hofstede found the culture of the Gulf region to be characterised by collectivism and high-power distance (Hofstede, 2011) which may inform the way respondents and participants respond to questions. Multinational cross-cultural work environments so as those that are so common in the Gulf region may also have their own dynamics which influence a whole range of attitudes (At-Twajri & Al-Muhaiza, 1996). Multicultural data could provide much more reliable findings about differences in employee engagement between public and private sectors.

The sample could have been divided into subsamples according to which division or department of the organisation a respondent worked in. It is entirely plausible that some departments have more engaged employees than others perhaps attributable to leadership styles (Khuong & Yen, 2014) or training budgets or many other factors. Likewise, the Emiratisation initiative may be working more effectively for some job roles than others.

Only a limited number of independent variables were included in the quantitative study, more could have been added to identify further predictors of employee engagement. These could have included trust in supervisor, organisational trust, extrinsic/intrinsic motivations, perceived autonomy, innovative behaviours, leadership styles, occupational self-efficacy, and many others could be added.

Individuals interpret the experience of engagement in different ways, according to their own personalities. Unlike the demographic data collected, personal characteristics do not feature as variables in this research. Relatedly, like any other, the interview study was limited by the incomplete knowledge of those taking part. Participants give their individual subjective interpretations of their experiences to produce partial knowledge. This restriction is increasingly



reduced the more participants there are (Cohen et al., 2007). By using a mixed methods design this limitation is further mitigated.

A mixed methods sequential case study design raises issues of generalisability to other contexts. Some have questioned the suitability of this design in developing either theory or knowledge (Mintzberg, 2005). Others have suggested that when considering generalisability, a “fittingness” test should be cautiously applied (Sarantakos, 2017) meaning one should assess the fit between the original context and the new. The current study may have relevance to other UAE organisations and some utility when considering other Gulf countries and their workforce nationalisation programmes but that may be the full extent of any fit.

## **7.5 Recommendations**

### **7.5.1 Recommendations for organisations**

Organisations have understood for some time the benefits of having an engaged workforce. The greater motivation, reduced intention to leave, improved organisational citizenship behaviours all point towards enhanced performance. In a competitive environment, having a well-engaged workforce can provide a sustainable competitive advantage.

Based on the present research employing organisations can be reassured that the measures they take to support their staff and build a perception of this support will translate into greater engagement. This support can be divided into two types. Firstly, that which is aimed at supporting the individual in their job role; for example, through training, coaching and feedback. Secondly, that which is designed to support the employee beyond their work role, and which contributes to their overall wellbeing. Perceiving that one’s employer is authentically interested in how the person is feeling strongly supports an overall perception of organisational support as does giving a sense of security and being valued.

By way of qualification, this study’s findings also suggest that certain groups have less developed employee engagement, these being employees with shorter lengths of service and those who are non-graduates. To achieve the known organisational benefits of employee engagement, management should adopt practices and policies which target these employees to accelerate their engagement. These should be policies related to training and organisational support as both these have been shown to be positively related to engagement in the present study. Moving from a

perception of ‘next-in-the queue’ promotions to one in which younger talented individuals can achieve promotion ahead of normal time should also be considered. A fast-track scheme like this could increase engagement among the very people the organisation most wants to develop.

Organisations should not assume they are achieving engagement by implementing policies which appear to have this as a goal. Instead, periodic measurement using robust methodology should be used to assess both the starting point and ongoing progress. This could be conducted by a third-party research agency.

With organisations likely to find their workforce divides into three groups: fully engaged, partially engaged and not engaged, they need to adopt appropriate responses to each. As well as measuring the overall levels of engagement across the organisation, line managers should be trained to recognise the indicator of engagement deficits. This may manifest itself as sickness absence, lateness, withdrawal from team collaboration, unwillingness to take responsibility, lack of interest in training and an overall negative attitude.

Employers have a great deal to gain from engaging new staff and staff at lower levels. Engaged employees are important organisational assets and converting those unengaged to partly engaged to fully engaged should be a top priority human resource management objective.

Often new staff come with greater technology skills having grown up with these technologies. These new entrants to the workforce are likely to be more technologically savvy than older colleagues and engaging these employees may be particularly beneficial (Wadhwa, 2012). One recommended way of achieving this engagement is by giving them the opportunity to share their ideas and knowledge (Purcell, 2013). This process is sometimes referred to as ‘employee voice’ which the UK’s Chartered Institute of Personnel Development (CIPD) defines as “the means by which people communicate their views to their employer and influence matters that affect them at work.” (CIPD, 2021, para.1). In a high-power distance culture (Hofstede, 2011) such as those of the Gulf region, this may require more deliberate and consistent application.

### **7.5.2 Recommendations for policymakers**

The finding that support for the Emiratisation Initiative correlates with lower engagement looks at first sight as a disappointing result for promoters of the policy. However, this may be a mistaken reaction. The present study does not offer empirical evidence to explain this finding, so a measure

of interpretation is required. As previously mentioned, where the perception of support is not attributed to the employing organisation it may instead be assigned to the initiative. This follows the logic that individuals have a finite amount of support perception to distribute. A further possible explanation is that a disengaged employee may be more likely to be interested in the job market beyond his/her current employment and knows that the job market may be tilted in their favour when competing for jobs with expatriates thanks to the initiative.

With the possibility raised by the findings of this research that the Emiratisation Initiative may not be a tool to raise the level of employee engagement across the economy, the government may need to look elsewhere if it wants to achieve greater engagement. This research suggests that interventions on training, perhaps through supporting financially those organisations enhancing their training provision. Reviewing the current structure of in-work qualifications and vocational training may also be beneficial.

Delving in more detail at the findings, policymakers may also wish to consider some of the perceptions voiced in the interview study. More concrete assistance during the job seeking process was requested which could take the form of a website holding a database of job vacancies. Further provision of skill development opportunities would also be welcomed based on this research. Clearly, for Emiratisation to be ultimately successful, a general upskilling of the local population is required. Further, Emiratis high salary expectations and lower qualifications/ experience were seen as obstacles to overcome. A medium to long-term objective of closing this gap should form part of the government's strategy.

Patience may be required from policymakers as nationalisation of the workforce policies inevitably include mandatory responses for employers which may hinder their activities in the labour market and could threaten their access to core competencies unless and until these competencies are readily available among local workers. Periods of adjustment of significant length may be required to ensure that these employers, some operating in global markets, are not greatly disadvantaged.

### **7.5.3 Further research**

This research examined employee engagement at a government sector organisation in the oil and gas sector in the UAE. Of particular interest was the relationship between employee engagement and the ongoing localisation of the labour force in the UAE. As the first study in this field of enquiry it has opened the door to several threads of future research.

This study was not designed to empirically establish the causation of the lack of effect on employee engagement from support for the Emiratisation Initiative. Researchers may wish to pursue this particular question further to establish causation that can only be speculated on here.

Further independent variables could be added to the research design to add additional clarity to the understanding of the relationship between Emiratisation and employee engagement and the antecedents of engagement in general. Trust, for example, has shown to be a valuable construct for those researching organisational citizenship, motivation and job satisfaction.

This single case study mixed methods design could be applied to other organisations. A study in a fully private sector organisation in the UAE could generate interesting findings and comparisons. Researchers interested in the effects of Emiratisation on both UAE national and expatriate employees may be able to uncover any negative effects the initiative is having on the engagement levels among the imported labour force.

## **7.6 Final thoughts**

The transition of Gulf region economies from oil and gas reliant and migrant labour dependent into diversified, modernised economies driven by a home-grown workforce is a huge undertaking but a necessary one. Workforce nationalisation has already provided fertile ground for researchers and will continue to do so in the future.

In this study, the result that support for the Emiratisation Initiative was related to lower self-reported employee engagement is intriguing whereas that indicating organisational support and training were associated with higher engagement was confidently hypothesised and confirmed.

In terms of performance and positive outcomes, the source of engagement is less important than the level of engagement. A strong majority of respondents reported support for the Emiratisation Initiative, but the support was tilted toward less engaged employees. Support for the initiative was not a predictor of higher engagement. As tentatively offered, individuals receiving both broadly-defined support and employer-provided training are less likely to look to the national policy for its source of engagement. Hence, while the finding may at first appear a setback for those implementing the national policy it does not necessarily reflect negatively on it. On the basis of

this research, this question and others related to the nature of employee engagement of nationals during a process of nationalisation of the workforce certainly deserves further research.

A last thought for what I may have done differently. Employee engagement research has included a wide range of variables and constructs and no single study can apply them all. There may have been variables like trust in supervisor or leadership style which would have offered further illumination. A larger sample and one divided into departments/ functions may also have added depth to the research. It is easy to imagine a department with a manager who has a democratic or coaching style may develop higher levels of engagement than one who practices an authoritarian or autocratic approach.

For Emirati researchers the study of employee engagement and of the nationalisation of the workforce will continue to be both important and justified for many years to come.

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## Appendices

### The Questionnaire:

#### 1) Gender:

- Male
- Female

#### 2) Age:

- 18-25
- 26-35
- 36-45
- Above 45

#### 3) Educational Level: Do you have a bachelor's degree or higher?

- Yes
- No

#### 4) Years of Experience in this organisation?

- 1-5 Years
- 6-10 Years
- 11-15 Years
- More than 15 Years

#### 5) What is your Job Level?

- Vice President (VP)
- Department Manager
- Team Leader
- Grade 11-14
- Grade 10 or less

#	Questions	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	I feel energetic and capable when I'm working?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2	I'm enthusiastic about my work.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3	My work inspires me.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4	I feel happy when I am working intensely.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5	I get carried away when I am working.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6	If my organisation could hire someone to replace me at a lower salary it would do so.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7	My manager fails to appreciate any extra effort from me.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8	My organisation really cares about my well-being.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9	If I decided to quit, my manager would try to persuade me to stay.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10	If my job were eliminated, my organisation would prefer to lay me off rather than transfer me to a new job.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11	I feel that Emiratisation Initiative support me to secure my job in this organisation.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
12	I feel that Emiratisation Initiative support me to get promoted in this organisation.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
13	The organisation helps me to provide the training I require to handle my job effectively.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
14	I feel that I need to improve my skills to complete my tasks correctly.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

<b>15</b>	Usually, I attend training courses that provided by the organisation because I feel I would improve my performance at work.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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### Interview Questions

#	Questions
1	How long have you worked here? What did you do before this job?
2	What is your daily work like?
2	Tell me how you plan, prioritise and start your daily work?
3	What do you like most about being a (the position/role) here, and why?
4	What do you dislike most about being a (the position/role) here, and why?
5	How challenging do you find your role and its demands?
6	Do you feel the company care about your health and safety? Could you please give me an example to explain it?
7	For what behaviours/achievements are you rewarded here, and what are those rewards?
8	Do you receive feedback on your performance at work regularly? How and in what form? If yes, how could this feedback help you at work?
9	What would you do if you were offered another job somewhere else? If it is in the private sector? Why?
10	How free are you to perform the role as you wish, at your own pace and style?
11	In case that you have an idea that could improve a process within your responsibility, what would you do? I mean would you immediately try to apply the idea, ignore it or what?
12	What is your relationship to the management, personally and professionally?
13	Do you have any suggestions for your company to make you happy with your work?
14	Do you feel proud to work for this organisation? In this position? Why?
15	Give me an example of a co-worker who works harder than everyone else.
16	What is the best time during the working hours that you have more energy? What do you prefer to do during this time?
17	When was the last time you felt energised at work?



18	What was the most recent difficult task you performed at work?
19	After working hours, does your job require you to do something usually? Do you keep thinking of work, such as thinking about improving processes?
20	What would you do if you need something from a colleague within your department? I mean would you go to his office, call him/her or send an email?
21	Could you please recall Two different situations in which you felt: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Attentive and absorbed at your work.</li> <li>○ Uninvolved and distracted at your work.</li> </ul>
22	Do you prefer to be connected with other teams in different departments so you can assist them or ask for assistance? Why? Example?
23	In case you have an idea that could help other team within the company, would you contact them to explain it even though that requires efforts from your side? Why? Have you got any examples?
24	Do you feel motivated to go beyond your formal job responsibilities? Why?
25	Is there anything that you want to add or stress that might help me understand the influences on when you do and do not feel involved or uninvolved here?
26	Some people think UAE National employees in this company have low contributions, involvement and productivity. What is your opinion about this issue?
27	When a new employee, young UAE national, joins your team, what are the most important things you try to teach him/ her? Why?
28	Based on your experience and knowledge, what types of training or skill development is generally needed for UAE National employees in order to improve their involvement and contribution to the success of the organisation?
29	When was the last training course you attended? How did you get enrolled in this training course?
30	Tell me about a training course you attended and helped you in your job? How did it help you?
31	What do you know about the Emiratisation initiative? What does it mean to you?
32	Assuming that the Emiratisation initiative does not exist, do you think that would make a difference to you or your current job? If yes, how do you think you or your job would be affected?