

Training in the Middle East

Basic skills training in the Middle East is critical to bridging the gap between scholastic education and corporate needs for nationals. Without a proper foundation in basic skills, nationals may not be equipped with the knowledge, skills and techniques they need to succeed at entry level and mid-level management positions.

Basic Skills Training

Basics skills training includes such diverse topics as:

- English
- Basic mathematics
- Customer service
- Communication
- Leadership
- Sales
- Negotiation skills
- Business writing
- Telephone skills
- Problem solving
- Decision making
- Computer skills
- Diversity
- Business development
- Ethics
- Performance management
- Presentation skills
- Project management
- Productivity and quality

Basic skills training is important to the Middle East because:

- Trained nationals are critical to continued economic stability.
- There is a lack of nationals employed as mid-level managers and supervisors.
- Companies must meet quota requirements regardless of skills and qualifications.
- The Government has placed increased focus on promoting the education and success of its nationals.

Economic Stability

Most Middle Eastern economies are based on the oil and gas industry, but are now striving to create new economies that are not dependent on the non-renewable energies, including: hospitality, manufacturing, health, tourism and renewable energy. This creates a need for a new workforce that is trained on the new industries. Most of the new workforce looks to youth aged 15-24 upon which to build.

This youth workforce accounts for 60% of the booming Middle Eastern population, making training critical to the success of the emergence in new industries. Without a trained workforce, the new industries will not be able to lay a foundation for a long term economy. Currently, the youth population has some of the highest unemployment rates in the world, ranging between 13% and 24% for various locations, mostly due

to a lack of basic employment skills as well as a need for increased motivation to explore new industry offerings.

Investing in an expatriate workforce is only a temporary solution to building and sustaining the economies of the Middle East. This solution does not provide long term security. In order to ensure the continued stability and growth of the economies in the Middle East, basic skills training must be supplied to nationals to build a motivated, educated, long term work force that is continually reinvesting in its local economies.

Unbalanced Demographics

Throughout the Middle East, many organizations suffer from unbalanced national demographics within the hierarchy of their organization. Most organization's nationals are well represented at top-level executives and at bottom, entry level positions. This is due to the fact that many nationals have not received and do not continue to receive basic skills training and performance goals that support successful progression up the corporate ladder in the private sector. Many nationals look to fill government jobs that offer better salaries and benefits; however with the growing multitude of industries, the private sector needs to attract more nationals.

Recent reports state that over 58% of the entire working population in the Middle East is made up of expatriates. Bahrain reports over 51% of expatriates in its workforce. Oman and Saudi Arabia have higher national workforces, with expatriates constituting 30% and 27% of the workforce respectively. Additionally, in 2012 the Dubai Statistics Centre revealed the results of a recent survey that reported that over 56% of Emiratis were not in the workforce, with only 6.8% of the male workforce being Emiratis.

Quota Requirements

Many countries in the Middle East have enacted labor laws designed to encourage participation of nationals in non-governmental employment. For example, the countries of Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Qatar, Oman and the United Arab Emirates have all developed nationalization programs titled Kuwaitisation, Saudisation, Bahrainisation, Qatarisation, Omanitisation and Emiratisation respectively. Each program establishes requirements for industry-specific quotas for national employment. Failure to comply with and meet the established quotas can result in penalties and fines.

For example, the UAE has implemented and revised requirements for the employment of nationals within the private sector. The UAE's Ministry of Labour released Resolution 1187 of 2010 (MR 1187) which establishes a class system based on a private company's diversity and employment of Emiratis. The program provides incentives to companies who comply, including reduction of bank guarantee requirements for companies given a Class 1 status which requires a workforce with 20% professional employees, meeting established minimum wage requirements, and maintaining no less than 15% of its professional staff as Emirati employees. Companies who do not comply receive penalties and black points which can increase bank guarantee requirements.

In 2008, reports stated that over 95% of the workforce of private companies was filled by expatriates in Kuwait. To motivate the private sector to invest in Kuwaiti nationals for sustained economic growth and stability, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour issued new Kuwaitisation requirements for various industries. The law required private banks to fill 60% of their workforce with nationals, telecommunications companies to fill 56% of their workforce with nationals, marketing and investment firms to fill 40% of their workforce with nationals and the private oil and refinery industry to fill 30% of their workforce with nationals.

Government Incentives

Adding further focus to investment in the education of nationals in basic employment skills, many local governments have offered money and grants as well as created agencies devoted to improving the basic skills of entry level workers.

In its 2011-2013 Government Strategy, the UAE government listed a “First-Rate Education System” as one of its priorities with a focus on:

- Developing students’ skills, knowledge, and readiness for higher education.
- Promoting student retention, educational attainment, and values.
- Improving the quality of higher education and ensure accessibility.

Saudi Arabia has also demonstrated its commitment to training nationals with numerous programs, including its King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz Scholarship Program which will fund the education of over 120,000 Saudi Nationals in numerous programs.

Additionally, the governments of Bahrain, Oman and Qatar are all investing in the infrastructure of its education system to continue to build and motivate their national youth.