

Diversity in Business Leadership

# Workshop Report

## Comprehensive Approaches to Building Business Diversity

10 December 2019

Al Jawaher Reception and Convention Centre, Sharjah, UAE





# Summary

The business case for diversity is a topic of great discussion both globally and regionally. In the last few years, regional companies have increasingly begun to understand the value that promoting and increasing diversity in the workplace has for improved business productivity. Businesses across the Gulf Region are taking progressive steps towards supporting women in their organisations, in line with global standards. However, much remains to be done to support women’s entry and retention in the regional economy, as women and organisations continue to report hurdles in the path towards representation in organisations across all economic sectors.

To this end, as part of the [Diversity in Business Leadership programme](#) (in collaboration with [NAMA Women Advancement Establishment](#)), the Pearl Initiative and NAMA Women Advancement Establishment held a workshop in Sharjah, United Arab Emirates, on December 10<sup>th</sup>.

This workshop was held as part of the prestigious Women Economic Empowerment Global Summit 2019 and saw **36 attendees** engaged in robust discussions on how women can be effectively supported in the workplace. It also witnessed the launch of the Key Findings of the 2019 *Women in the Economy: The Gulf Region Outlook* survey that was created and facilitated by Pearl Initiative, and launched in May 2019..

The goals of the workshop were to:

- Launch the Key Findings of the 2019 survey,
- Engage attendees in discussions related to the Key Findings and hear their thoughts on the same, and
- Propose potential solutions that regional organisations can implement to increase diversity within their offices and businesses.

## Key Information

**Number of Attendees:** 36 attendees

**Profile of Attendees:** Consultants, management experts, students, government officials, and entry-level to senior management professionals

## Facilitator



### **Zina Janabi**

*Middle East Director and Women in Business Leader*  
PwC

Zina is a Director with (PwC) and has over 15 years of experience in Business Development in a wide range of industries. Zina is currently the PwC Middle East Consulting Business Development Director. Zina is also a Leader of PwC Women in Business Initiative across the Middle East, utilising her Business Development, Legal and HR expertise to attract, develop and retain women in the Middle East. Zina is actively involved in many people-development initiatives including training, coaching and mentorship as part of PwC Middle East Public Sector Institute (MEPSI) business acceleration program.



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# Key Takeaways

The workshop began with an introduction by Yasmine Omari, Executive Director of the Pearl Initiative.

Ms. Omari thanked the audience for coming and introduced the Pearl Initiative and its mission to promote corporate governance in the region. to the audience. Noting that the organisation’s Diversity in Business Leadership programme had originally began in 2014, she made the business case for the programme and highlighted the necessity of increased efforts towards supporting women’s entry and retention in the regional economy.

Ms. Omari stated that, as part of the programme, a survey was launched earlier in the year to gather responses on the nature and extent of women’s experiences in the workplace across the Gulf Region. The workshop was intended to announce those results, and Ms. Omari introduced the overall trends from the survey results:

- Women value their careers tremendously and want to learn and grow on a personal level,
- Positive organisational culture and a supportive tone from the top bolstered women’s decisions to enter and remain in the workforce,
- The common factors that were hindering women’s workforce progression were
  - Gendered preconceptions of women’s roles,
  - Demanding work hours and conditions,
  - a lack of policies supporting women’s workplace advancement, and
- The top reasons for women leaving the workforce were
  - A lack of professional advancement opportunities,
  - A devaluation of work and effort, and
  - A lack of work-life balance.

Ms. Omari then introduced Ms. Zina Janabi as the facilitator for the workshop and welcomed her on stage.



Ms. Janabi introduced herself on stage and thanked the Pearl Initiative and NAMA for inviting her to lead the workshop. She noted that the workshop was meant to move the needle on gender diversity in the workplace from awareness to action.

Ms. Janabi demonstrated the difference between equality and equity, noting that applying the same solution for a variety of stakeholders (equality) is not the same as offering the same access and resources (equity). Beyond this, there needs to be a removal of barriers altogether to ensure fair access and freedoms to these varied stakeholders.



Diversity and inclusion follow the same principle, where all groups and individuals are given even access to opportunities and career progression. It is this approach that must be taken in understanding how women can be supported in the workforce.

Ms. Janabi then offered a review of diversity in the Middle East and globally - highlighting the case of Saudi Arabia, where women’s participation in the workforce rose as national unemployment dropped, and in the UAE, where it is estimated that having an equal number of men and women in the national workforce would increase the national GDP. Thus, it is essential to have women enter and remain in the workforce, because it ensures a healthier economy and social happiness as well.

She went on to discuss “**the MENA paradox**”, wherein women are three times less likely than men to seek employment, and twice as likely to not find work when they do – and these are qualified, educated women whose talents are not utilised. She also discussed the phenomenon of the **leaky pipeline**: only around 10% of CEOs in the MENA region are women, and the regional pay gap is presently around 40%.

## Key Findings

Ms. Janabi then introduced the Key Findings of the 2019 survey held by PI and NAMA titled *Women in the Economy: The Gulf Region Outlook*. Conducted in 5 Gulf Region countries and across 11 industry sectors, the survey was supplemented with one-on-one interviews and focus groups as well.

She discussed the following findings with the audience:

<p><b>Factors hindering workplace progression</b></p>	<p>The top three reasons respondents believe are hindering workplace progression for women are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unconscious biases</li> <li>• Having children</li> <li>• Preconceptions of women’s roles and responsibilities</li> </ul>	<p>The top three workplace processes hindering women’s career progression were identified as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gendered preconceptions and stereotypes</li> <li>• Demanding work hours and conditions</li> <li>• A lack of policies supporting women’s advancement</li> </ul>	<p>Women reported the top three reasons for leaving the workplace as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A lack of professional advancement opportunities</li> <li>• A devaluation of work and effort</li> <li>• A lack of work–life balance</li> </ul>
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She also noted that the three factors that must be changed to ensure support for women in their respective organisations are:

1. Creating an organisational culture that supports women
2. Ensuring leadership is committed to women’s workforce engagement
3. Creating recruitment opportunities for women

It was also observed that a common theme across the survey’s responses was that a **positive tone from the top** was seen as essential for women’s career support and advancement.

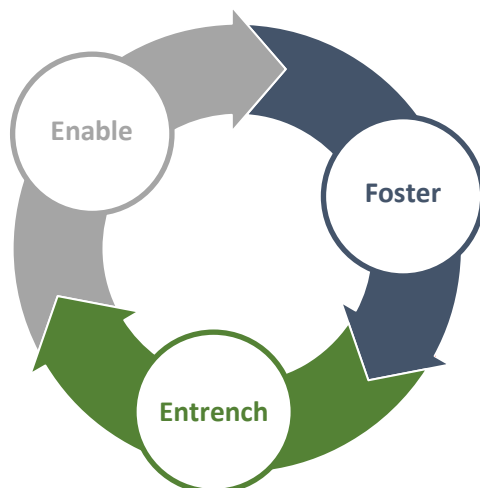
Other common themes necessary for women’s career support, as noted by respondents, were company culture and work-life balance.

Ms. Janabi also walked the audience through a few quotes from survey respondents and noted that women supporting other women was crucial in creating mentorship and/or sponsorship networks. She also stated that policies to support women should not only be created but also implemented by companies to truly support women in the workforce.



## Group Exercise

Ms. Janabi then discussed the structure of the recommendations in the upcoming Thought Leadership Report, to be published by Pearl Initiative, and asked the audience members to pick one of the three elements of the recommendations.



Workshop attendees were given fifteen (15) minutes to come up with recommendations.

Recommendations offered by the attendees were:

Recommendation	Explanation
Parental leave	<p>In countries outside the region, parental leave is normally shared between mothers and fathers, and if implemented here it would drive the idea that both genders are equally responsible for childcare.</p> <p>Companies also need to increase maternity leave from 45 days to more, as it takes more time to support with childcare when a newborn is involved.</p>
Trust	<p>Companies do not trust their employees to work from home and there is no real reason why this should be the case. It also means employees do not feel like they belong if the management does not trust them. If employees feel like they belong, they will work hard no matter where they are, and this will translate into positive outcomes.</p> <p>There is also technology that women can use to work from home in this day and age – if women who would prefer to work from home can do so, then more women would likely enter the workforce remotely.</p>
Data gathering	<p>How is data on women leaving the workforce recorded? There are stereotypes that women leave because they have families and want to spend time at home, but this can be about finding better jobs or starting their own businesses. If certain parties with specific agendas are recording this data, then it can be imperfect and biased.</p> <p>Having the right data recorded by companies can be used to change the company policies for the better.</p>
Leadership development	<p>Very few companies put aside money / resources to develop future leaders. Men tend to progress regardless of development training – there are more men in management roles globally.</p>



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	<p>Lots of entities push back against getting women on boards or management positions because they claim that women are not interested, do not have experience, or that there aren't enough women to fill those roles to begin with.</p> <p>Women should not have to be advocating for themselves either – men also need to step up and promote women and diversity in the workforce.</p>
Flexible working hours and policies	In many organisations, policies are rigid and uncompromising. By making them flexible, the workforce can be more productive.
Mentorship and sponsorship	When women employees see other women in business taking the lead, they will be inspired to do better and increase the scale of their ambitions.
Support for re-entry	When women do leave their careers, what drives them to come back? When women have a long gap on their resumes from when they leave the workforce, recruiters see weaknesses – but this is not the case. Women need to be assured that they can return to the workforce without penalty, and employers need to create a culture and narrative that will support women in coming back to work without shaming them for leaving.

With this, Ms. Janabi concluded the discussion, and Ms. Omari returned to conclude the workshop after thanking Ms. Janabi and NAMA for their support.







## Pearl Initiative

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## Acknowledgements

The Pearl Initiative would like to express its gratitude to the following organisations and individuals for their valuable input, time and engagement with this programme:

- Ms. Zina Janabi, PwC Middle East Director and Women in Business Leader
- The staff at PwC Dubai
- NAMA Women Advancement Establishment
- The planning committee for WEEGS 2019 and the staff at Sharjah Business Women Council

It is heartening to see the commitment and passion that is extended in the support and promotion of the business case for diversity in leadership.







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# Appendix 1

## Social Media Campaign

A comprehensive social media campaign was rolled out for two months by the Pearl Initiative on our social media accounts in both English and Arabic. Here is a selection of our posts:




### Comprehensive Approaches to Building Business Diversity

Workshop

Join us at the Women's Economic Empowerment Global Summit for insightful discussions and activities on the concerns that affect women in the workforce across the Gulf Region, and the solutions that can be implemented to support women's career and economic advancement.

**Registration is free, and seats are limited - register today!**

**Date:** 10 December 2019  
**Time:** 12:30 PM to 02:00 PM  
**Location:** Side Hall, Al Jawaher Reception and Convention Centre, Sharjah




### Comprehensive Approaches to Building Business Diversity

Workshop

**LAST CHANCE TO REGISTER!**

Join us at the Women's Economic Empowerment Global Summit for a workshop on supporting women in the workforce to support their career and economic advancement.

Topics that will be discussed will include:

- The latest findings on women's experiences in the regional workforce,
- Contemporary factors that impact women at work, and
- The strategic solutions that can be implemented by organisations to support women at all career stages.

**Date:**  
10 December 2019  
**Time:**  
2:30 PM to 02:00 PM  
**Location:**  
Side Hall, Al Jawaher Reception and Convention Centre, Sharjah




### منهجيات شمولية لتعزيز التنوع في بيئة العمل

ورشة عمل

يطيب لنا دعوتكم لحضور القمة العالمية للتعليم الاقتصادي للمرأة والمشاركة في النشاطات التفاعلية والتحديات المعقدة حول التحديات التي تواجه المرأة في القوى العاملة بمنطقة الخليج، والحلول المتوفرة لدعم المسيرة المهنية والتقدم الاقتصادي للمرأة.

**التسجيل مجاني والمقاعد محدودة - سارعوا بالتسجيل!**

**التاريخ:** 10 ديسمبر 2019  
**الزمن:** من الساعة 12:30 ظهرا إلى الساعة 2:00 مساءً  
**المكان:** القاعة الجانبية، مركز الجواهر للمناسبات والمؤتمرات، الشارقة.




### منهجيات شمولية لتعزيز التنوع في بيئة العمل

ورشة عمل

**آخر فرصة للتسجيل!**

يطيب لنا دعوتكم لحضور القمة العالمية للتعليم الاقتصادي للمرأة والمشاركة في ورشة عمل حول سبل دعم المسيرة المهنية والتقدم الاقتصادي للمرأة.

تتضمن المواضيع المطروحة للنقاش:

- آخر المستجدات في مجال التجربة النسوية في قو العمل بالمنطقة.
- التحديات التي تواجه المرأة في بيئة العمل.
- الحلول الاستراتيجية المتوفرة للمؤسسات لدعم المرأة العاملة في مختلف المراحل المهنية.

**التاريخ:** 10 ديسمبر 2019  
**الزمن:** من الساعة 12:30 ظهرا إلى الساعة 2:00 مساءً  
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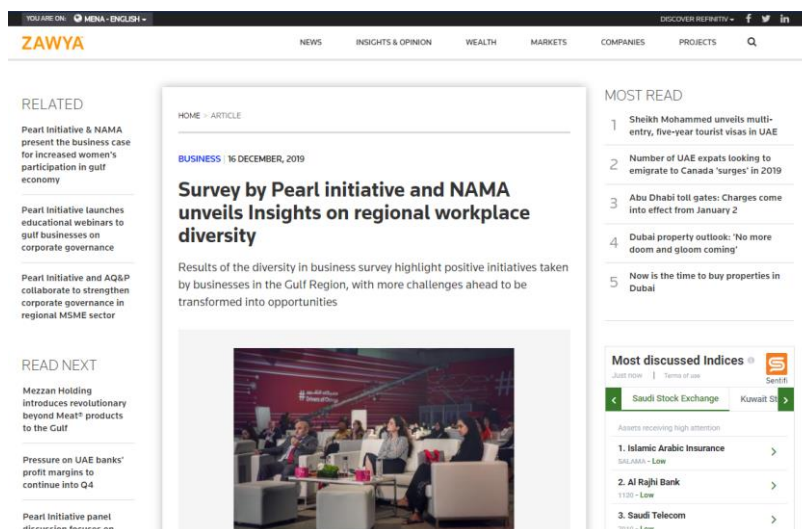
## Appendix 2

### Press Releases



[“Businesses in Gulf empowering women in all economic sectors,” The Gulf Today, 16 December 2019](#)

- [Link here](#)



[“Survey by Pearl Initiative and NAMA unveils insights on regional workplace diversity,” Zawya, 16 December 2019](#)



## Pearl Initiative

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# Appendix 3

## Pearl Initiative Programme Team



**Yasmine Omari**

*Executive Director*

[yomari@pearlinitiative.org](mailto:yomari@pearlinitiative.org)

An expert in governance for family firms, Yasmine joined the Pearl Initiative as Head of Programmes, and became Executive Director in 2019. She has experience in the implementation and operation of governance systems, as well as business performance and risk management capabilities for private companies and family offices. Prior to joining the Pearl Initiative, Yasmine was a Senior Manager at Deloitte and supported clients in navigating the business challenges faced by entrepreneurial families in business. Yasmine has a legal background and holds a degree in Law and Arabic from SOAS, University of London.



**Shruti Sardesai**

*Programme Assistant*

[ssardesai@pearlinitiative.org](mailto:ssardesai@pearlinitiative.org)

Shruti has a background in international relations, focusing on development and gender. Prior to joining the Pearl Initiative in 2018, she previously worked with international organizations in the humanitarian aid and development realms, and is passionate about facilitating change for egalitarian social outcomes. Shruti holds a Masters in Global Affairs from the University of Toronto, and a BA in International Studies with minors in Women's Studies and History from the American University of Sharjah.