



Thriving Beyond Boundaries

Human Performance in a Boundaryless World

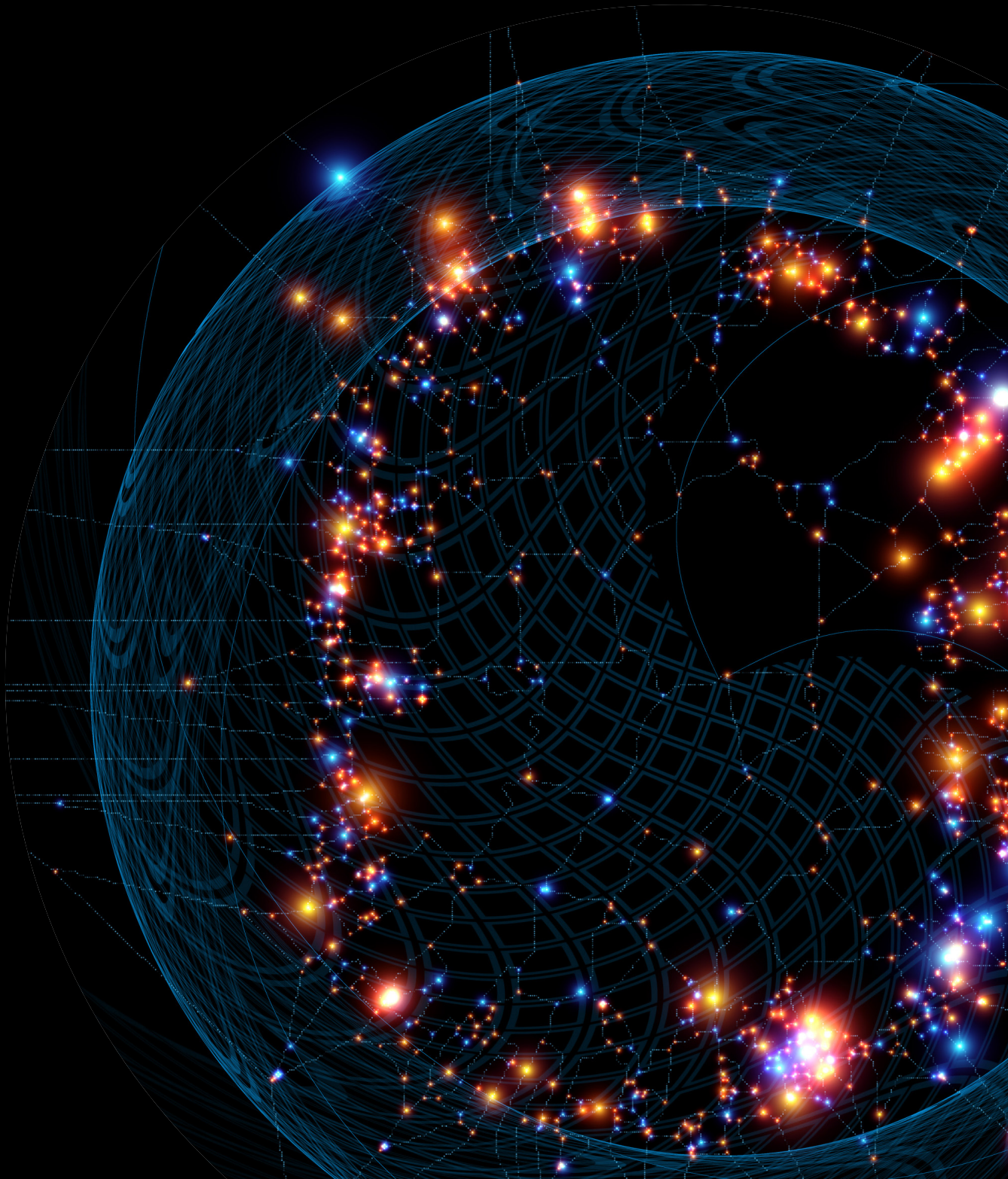




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Introduction

Thriving Beyond Boundaries: Human Performance in a Boundaryless World

It is time to trade in the rules, operating constructs, and proxies of the past. Prioritizing human performance can help organizations make the leap into boundaryless future

We are operating in a world where work is no longer defined by jobs, the workplace is no longer a specific place, many workers are no longer traditional employees, and human resources is no longer a siloed function. These boundaries, once assumed to be the natural order of things, are falling away and traditional models of work are becoming boundaryless.

Many of the technological changes happening now—the emergence of generative artificial intelligence, the rise of virtual worlds and even virtual replicas of our own selves, and the development of neurotechnology that can now quantify the brain—may seem like they've been plucked straight out of the pages of a science fiction book, but these concepts are already becoming an everyday reality. It's a time of uncertainty, shaped

by unpredictable global events, lightning-fast advances in technology and AI, evolving workplace cultures and markets, growing worker mental health and well-being concerns, and transformative shifts in how people think about work and the workplace.

Reimagining boundaryless work amidst these disruptions is no longer hypothetical—or optional. The old proxies previously relied upon to measure performance may no longer apply, and there's no easy playbook to follow that will enable organizations to thrive in this new environment. So, what's next for organizations and workers? What steps can we take to create a future full of possibility and hope in the uncertainty of a boundaryless world?

Our 2024 Global Human Capital Trends research reveals that a focus on the human factor is emerging as the bridge between knowing what shifts are shaping the future of work and doing things to make real progress toward putting them into action to create positive outcomes. Our research points to the idea that prioritizing human sustainability—the degree to which the organization creates value for people as human beings, leaving them with greater health and well-being, stronger skills and greater employability, good jobs,¹ opportunities for advancement, more equity, and heightened feelings of belonging and purpose—can drive not only better human outcomes, but better business outcomes, too, in a mutually reinforcing cycle. This combination of human and business outcomes is what we call “human performance.” Because it is humans, more than physical assets, that truly drive business performance today. This is needed more than ever by organizations to both shape and adapt to the ever-evolving future of work.

The 2024 Middle East Capital Trends report

Middle East report brings you regional insights and examples of how these trends are being implemented across the UAE, KSA and Qatar markets.

Embracing human sustainability. For many organizations, nothing is more important than its people, from employees, to external workers, to customers and community members. These human connections drive the majority of value for an organization, including revenues, innovation and

intellectual property, efficiency, brand relevance, productivity, adaptability, and risk. Yet organizations' current efforts to prioritize these all-important connections appear to be falling short, partly because many organizations may be stuck in a legacy mindset that centers on extracting value from people rather than working to create value for them. Leaders should reorient their organizations' perspective around the idea of human sustainability.

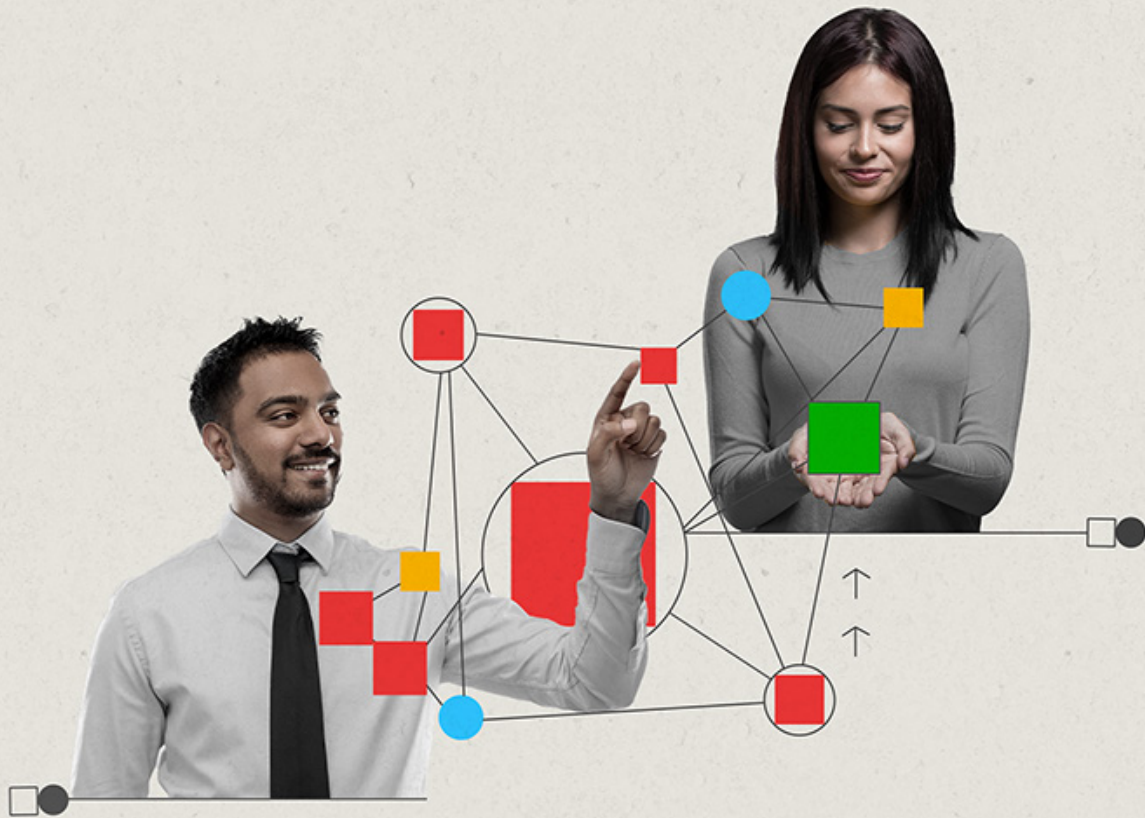
Human sustainability requires organizations to focus less on how much people benefit their organization and more on how much their organization benefits people. Some organizations are already making this shift. The organizations that embrace this perspective stand to build a beneficial cycle: one in which improving human outcomes enhances organizational outcomes and vice versa, contributing to a better future for all.

When asked about the importance of ensuring that every human interaction positively impacts individuals, 76% of respondents acknowledged this as crucial for their organization's success. However, despite this recognition, 46% of organizations are currently taking no steps to address the issue, while only 10% are actively making significant efforts to ensure positive outcomes from every interaction.

The move toward human sustainability represents a parallel shift in organizations' concept of people. It requires a comprehensive effort by an organization to add value for the individuals it affects across multiple dimensions. Human sustainability applies to all people in contact with the organization: not just current workers, but also future workers, extended workers, customers, investors, communities where the organization operates, and society broadly.

However, the worker-organization relationship is becoming increasingly fraught amid broad disruptions in business and society. Only 43% of workers say their organizations have left them better off than when they started. In the research, workers identified increasing work stress and the threat of technology taking over jobs as the top challenges to organizations embracing human sustainability.





Trends

When people thrive, business thrives: The case for human sustainability.

Empowering workforce resilience and organization prosperity

Human sustainability is essential for organizational success, emphasizing the crucial connection between individual well-being and business prosperity. This concept goes beyond simply ensuring employee welfare—it's about fostering environments that support personal development, continuous learning, and meaningful contributions. Research highlights the benefits of commitment to learning, leveraging character strengths, and creating supportive workplaces for the flourishing of diverse groups.¹

In the Middle East, the focus on education, inclusive policies, and social welfare plays a critical role in enhancing individual well-being and driving economic success. A burgeoning population serves as a catalyst for innovation, productivity, and consumer demand, creating a conducive environment for business growth. Strengthening social responsibility and community engagement further solidifies the bond between businesses and their customers, underpinning the region's overall prosperity. This interdependent relationship underscores the importance of prioritizing human sustainability for sustained economic success in the Middle East.

According to the Deloitte 2024 Global Human Capital Trends Report, a significant portion of survey respondents recognize the need to evolve management roles and practices to adapt to new ways of working as crucial for their organizations' success. Many also view their organization as being proactive or making strides in this area. However, 50% of respondents identify a lack of leadership alignment or commitment as the biggest barrier to implementing these changes.

To enhance human sustainability, organizations might consider several additional strategies:

- **Implementing Flexible Work Arrangements:** This can help accommodate individual needs and promote work-life balance, which is essential for mental health and productivity.
- **Leadership Training Programs:** Focusing on emotional intelligence and ethical leadership to better equip leaders to manage and support diverse teams.

- **Health and Wellness Programs:** Extending beyond physical health to include mental and emotional support, these programs can mitigate burnout and increase overall employee satisfaction.
- **Career Development Opportunities:** Encouraging lifelong learning and growth can help employees feel valued and invested in their roles, which contributes to higher retention rates.

By integrating these practices, organizations can better ensure the longevity and success of their workforce, thereby enhancing their overall sustainability and effectiveness in the marketplace.

UAE

In the realm of human sustainability in the UAE, DHL Express UAE exemplifies a steadfast commitment to nurturing a workplace culture that prioritizes the well-being and growth of its employees.² Through initiatives such as the “DHL’s Got Heart” program and the annual EOS (Employee Opinion Survey), the company showcases its dedication to recognizing and engaging its workforce. By fostering a positive work environment and valuing employee contributions, DHL Express UAE not only boosts satisfaction and productivity but also underscores its role in ensuring the long-term sustainability of its human capital.³

Delving deeper into employee development and well-being, the UAE National Program for Happiness and Wellbeing at Workplace aligns with the belief that a content and motivated workforce is essential for organizational success. This initiative emphasizes creating positive work environments, enhancing employee satisfaction, and promoting overall wellness. By focusing on physical and mental health, continuous learning, and work-life balance, the program underscores the intrinsic link between individual well-being and organizational endurance.⁴ This approach is consistent with the philosophy that a thriving workforce is critical to driving both individual success and the sustained achievement of the organizations they support.

In line with these principles, the Emirates Group stands out for its commitment to employee development and progression. Initiatives such as the Leadership Development Program in collaboration with GE Aviation⁵ and the UAE National Talent Acceleration Program reflect the group’s investment in enhancing leadership skills and regional talent development.⁶ By encouraging continuous improvement through training, learning, and skill enhancement, the Emirates Group actively supports career progression, facilitating internal job applications for qualified employees.^{7,8} These initiatives collectively contribute to cultivating a skilled and motivated workforce.

Additional examples of human sustainability initiatives in the UAE include:

- **Masdar’s Employee Engagement Programs:** Masdar, a leader in renewable energy, has implemented various programs to engage employees in sustainability initiatives, fostering a culture of environmental stewardship and innovation within the organization.
- **Abu Dhabi National Oil Company (ADNOC):** ADNOC’s extensive training and development programs aim to enhance the skills and capabilities of its workforce, aligning with the company’s broader goals of sustainability and operational excellence.
- **Dubai Electricity and Water Authority (DEWA):** DEWA focuses on employee wellness and professional development through its Happiness and Well-being Program, which includes initiatives aimed at promoting physical health, mental well-being, and continuous learning.

These initiatives illustrate a broader commitment across various sectors in the UAE to prioritize human sustainability, ensuring that employees are not only well-supported but also empowered to contribute meaningfully to their organizations’ success and longevity.

Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia’s commitment to human sustainability is vividly demonstrated through initiatives such as Vision 2030, a comprehensive plan aimed at developing a thriving population in conjunction with achieving overall prosperity.⁹ This strategic framework prioritizes investment in education, skill development, and economic diversification, all designed to empower citizens and foster a robust workforce. Such efforts are intended to create sustainable employment opportunities and significantly contribute to economic growth.^{9,10} Programs like the Quality-of-Life Program further emphasize Saudi Arabia’s dedication to social well-being, fostering inclusive communities, and enhancing overall life satisfaction.⁹

As one of the world's largest oil and gas companies, Saudi Aramco exemplifies this commitment through a variety of strategic initiatives focused on employee satisfaction and retention. By fostering a culture of workforce empowerment, the company encourages collaboration and inclusivity within teams.¹¹ Recognizing the critical role of job satisfaction, Saudi Aramco's management actively addresses organizational performance challenges and strives to enhance work practices.^{12, 13} The company places significant emphasis on organizational fairness and effective performance appraisal systems to boost employee satisfaction.¹⁴ Additionally, Saudi Aramco acknowledges the importance of employee well-being in driving job satisfaction and overall performance,¹⁵ showcasing a commitment to maintaining a positive work environment, promoting employee happiness, and ensuring a motivated and engaged workforce.

SABIC, a global leader in the petrochemical and chemical industries, also prioritizes human sustainability by strategically motivating its employees. The company emphasizes internal talent development through mentoring programs and in-house training opportunities, fostering an environment of continuous learning.¹⁶ SABIC's focus on strategic human resource management aims to build a competent workforce capable of achieving organizational goals. The "HR One" platform is designed to facilitate career progression by aligning individual development with business advancement.¹⁷ Additionally, SABIC's social impact activities, such as community clean-up events, underscore the company's commitment to social responsibility while fostering a sense of community within the workforce and the broader society.¹⁸

King Abdullah University of Science and Technology (KAUST) represents another facet of Saudi Arabia's dedication to human sustainability. By investing heavily in education and research, KAUST provides state-of-the-art facilities and resources for students and researchers. This focus on high-quality education and cutting-edge research aims to cultivate a new generation of skilled professionals who will drive innovation and economic growth within the Kingdom.

These examples highlight Saudi Arabia's holistic approach to human sustainability, showcasing a multifaceted strategy that integrates education, workforce development, and social well-being to ensure long-term economic success and societal prosperity.

Qatar

Qatar is increasingly focusing on recognizing the critical role of its people in the country's development. Initiatives such as employee recognition programs, designed to appreciate and honor staff contributions, align with the broader goal of creating a sustainable and supportive work environment. By prioritizing the well-being, development, and recognition of its workforce, Qatar aims to ensure the long-term resilience and vitality of its human capital. This approach not only enhances individual lives but also contributes to the overall sustainability and prosperity of the businesses by fostering a skilled, motivated, and engaged workforce.

Qatar Airways prioritizes employee satisfaction and motivation through effective leadership styles, recognition, and rewards for achievements, as well as a focus on training and empowerment programs. The airline's managers diligently assess performance and implement leadership approaches to contribute to a motivated workforce.¹⁹ With an emphasis on sustaining employee engagement and continuous development through training initiatives, the company exhibits a comprehensive commitment to fostering a positive work environment and ensuring workforce satisfaction and motivation.²⁰

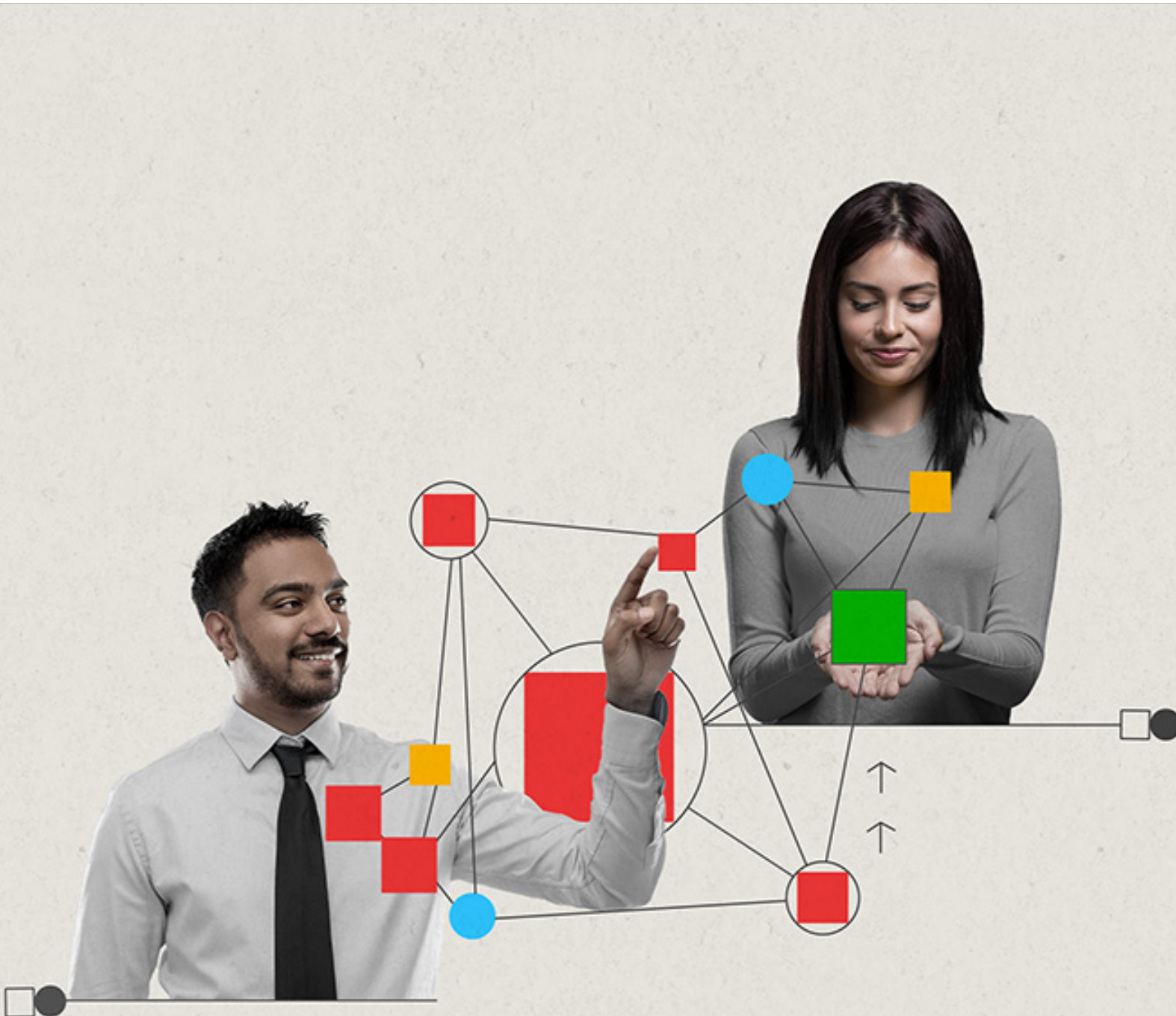
Qatar Foundation (QF), a non-profit organization, has established several employee recognition programs to honor and appreciate the contributions of its staff members. These programs aim to acknowledge the dedication and hard work of employees, fostering a positive work environment. Notably, QF organizes the Ability Friendly Recognition Awards Ceremony, an annual event that celebrates the remarkable achievements of participants and coaches involved in the Ability Friendly Program. This initiative reflects QF's commitment to recognizing the diverse talents and accomplishments of its community members.²¹ Additionally, QF conducts Appreciation Day events, highlighting the behind-the-scenes workers who play a vital role in the foundation's community.²² Long-serving members of the staff are honored during the annual Long-Service Awards ceremony, where certificates of appreciation are awarded in various categories.²³ These programs collectively contribute to building a culture of appreciation and recognition within Qatar Foundation which helps in boosting morale, engaging employees, and retaining valuable talent. Moreover, these efforts enhance Qatar Foundation's reputation, attracting top talent and support from stakeholders, ultimately contributing to the organization's growth and success.

Conclusion

In conclusion, our research results indicate that:

- Human sustainability is intrinsic to organizational success, emphasizing the link between individual well-being and business prosperity.
- Aligning business practices with sustainable and ethical principles in the Middle East enhances resilience and positively impacts brand image.

The UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar are actively dedicated to fostering employee well-being and development. This commitment is exemplified by organizations showcasing comprehensive approaches to sustained success through workforce empowerment, continuous learning, and community engagement.





As human performance takes center stage, are traditional productivity metrics enough?

In an era of human-centered work, new sources of data and artificial intelligence can help organizations shift from measuring employee productivity to measuring human performance.

In the constantly evolving work landscape, the traditional concept of productivity, primarily measured by output per input unit focusing on efficiency, is being reevaluated. A broader, more holistic approach is emerging, emphasizing human performance, which includes physical and mental well-being, engagement, creativity, and adaptability. This shift recognizes that the real value of work lies not only in the output but also in how it is produced and its impact on individuals and organizations.

Advancements in technology, especially in data analytics and artificial intelligence, have equipped organizations with new tools to measure and enhance human performance. These technologies offer a deeper understanding of employee behavior, well-being, and productivity, enabling more personalized and effective interventions. Moreover, the global pandemic has underscored the need for flexibility, resilience, and remote work capabilities, prompting a reevaluation of traditional productivity metrics that often overlook the complexities of human performance. According to the Deloitte 2024 Global Human Capital Trends report, organizations that transition from traditional productivity measures to new models are 1.7 times more likely to achieve desired business and human outcomes.²⁴

In the Middle East, this discussion on productivity and human performance is particularly pertinent due to the region's dynamic economic environment and ambitious development goals. Our Middle East 2023 Human Capital Trends report highlights several key insights that are reshaping the region's approach to human capital performance:²⁵

01. Shift in Hiring and Talent Development:

Companies in the Middle East are increasingly valuing employees' skills and experiences over mere qualifications, moving away from traditional metrics focused solely on output and efficiency. This approach recognizes the importance of a diverse and skilled workforce in driving productivity and innovation.

02. Adoption of Skill-Based Models: The shift to skill-based models for talent development represents a move from viewing productivity as merely output per unit of input to a broader perspective that includes employee development, engagement, and adaptability. This focus on developing employee skills prioritizes human performance and potential over traditional productivity metrics.

03. Alignment with Organizational Priorities:

Most business leaders surveyed in the region acknowledge the importance of aligning worker skills with organizational priorities beyond formal job responsibilities. They believe their organizations are well-prepared or prepared to embrace this trend.

This movement towards human-centric productivity metrics in the Middle East is not just a response to global trends but also reflects the region's unique cultural, social, and economic contexts. By prioritizing human performance, organizations in the Middle East can unlock new levels of creativity, innovation, and competitiveness, setting the stage for sustainable and inclusive growth.

UAE

In the United Arab Emirates, there's a distinct shift towards prioritizing human performance beyond conventional productivity metrics. This shift is evident in numerous initiatives and policies, with the UAE government placing a strong emphasis on happiness and well-being as critical indicators of national progress. This focus diverges markedly from traditional metrics, underscored by the creation of the Ministry of Happiness and Well-being. This ministry aims to enhance human performance and motivate employees to excel and innovate.

A report by the Dubai Chamber highlights innovative metrics such as 'ideas generated per employee' and 'successful collaboration projects,' which demonstrate the UAE's commitment to fostering a culture of innovation and entrepreneurship. Additionally, the Dubai Statistics Centre's 'Happiness Index' showcases the UAE's dedication to looking beyond traditional output metrics to gauge employee satisfaction and overall well-being. This commitment to employee happiness was particularly evident when the Dubai Government reported an average Employee Happiness rating of 89% in its 2020 Government of Dubai Employee Happiness Index survey, with the Dubai Statistics Centre itself achieving a top rating of 97.44%, reflecting the government's effectiveness in creating a positive work environment²⁶.

To further illustrate these efforts, here are expanded examples demonstrating how both the private and public sectors in the UAE are redefining productivity and performance metrics beyond traditional measures:

01. The National Program for Happiness and Wellbeing's Wellbeing Academy:

This academy provides training to federal and local government bodies on incorporating well-being principles into their programs, initiatives, policies, and services. It also promotes personal well-being, aligning with the broader move towards a holistic view of productivity that includes mental, physical, and emotional health.

02. Kitopi's Work-from-Anywhere Policy: Kitopi, a leading cloud kitchen platform, has introduced a work-from-anywhere policy that permits employees to work remotely from any location, as long as it does not adversely affect their work output and team collaboration. This flexibility has led to increases in productivity, engagement, and employee satisfaction²⁷.

03. ADNOC's Happiness and Well-being Programs:

The Abu Dhabi National Oil Company (ADNOC) has implemented comprehensive happiness and well-being programs aimed at boosting employee morale and performance. These programs include wellness workshops, fitness challenges, and mental health support, emphasizing the company's commitment to nurturing a productive and happy workforce.

04. Dubai's Smart Employee App: Launched by the Dubai government, this app provides government employees with access to a range of services and benefits designed to enhance their work-life balance. The app includes features for health and wellness, personal development, and flexible work arrangements, supporting the government's goal to boost employee satisfaction and productivity through technology.

These examples reflect the UAE's forward-thinking approach in redefining what productivity means in the modern workplace, focusing significantly on enhancing the quality of work life and overall employee well-being.

Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia, the largest economy in the Gulf region, is actively pursuing economic diversification as part of its Vision 2030, an ambitious development strategy aimed at reducing the country's dependence on oil. Central to this strategy is the development of human capital, which is mirrored in the evolving approach to human performance metrics.

The Human Capability Development Program (HCDP), a cornerstone initiative launched in 2021 under Vision 2030, aims to enhance the global competitiveness of Saudi citizens by aligning educational outcomes with labor market demands. This program marks a shift from traditional productivity metrics focused solely on output and efficiency to broader measures that evaluate employee potential, innovation, and adaptability. Here's how HCDP is redefining productivity and performance metrics in Saudi Arabia²⁸:

01. Strategic Pillars and Emphasis on Skills:

HCDP focuses on building a robust educational foundation, preparing for future labor market demands, and promoting lifelong learning. This shift highlights the importance of a broad range of skills and capabilities, moving beyond conventional productivity metrics to equip citizens with essential skills like numeracy, literacy, and digital literacy, as well as future skills including critical thinking, social and emotional skills, and physical and practical skills.

02. Cultivation of Values and Attitudes: The program emphasizes instilling values such as national pride, tolerance, perseverance, excellence, and discipline. These values are crucial for creating a workforce that is not only productive but also innovative and adaptable, reflecting a holistic view of performance that extends beyond mere output.

03. Development of Basic and Future Skills: HCDP targets both fundamental skills enhancement and preparation for future demands, acknowledging the evolving nature of work and the necessity for adaptability and lifelong learning. This approach recognizes that traditional output-based productivity measures do not fully capture the dynamic and complex skill sets needed in today's labor market.

Expanding on these initiatives, additional examples of how Saudi Arabia is transforming its approach to productivity and human performance include:

01. National Transformation Program (NTP):

This program supports HCDP by implementing specific projects aimed at improving the quality of education and training institutions, ensuring they produce graduates with the skills needed by the kingdom's economy.

02. Saudi Digital Academy: Focused on boosting digital skills among the youth and professionals, this academy offers specialized training in emerging technologies, aiming to prepare the workforce for the digital economy and foster a culture of continuous innovation and learning.

03. Talent Partnerships: The Saudi government has initiated partnerships with global tech giants to create opportunities for advanced learning and development in cutting-edge fields, ensuring that the workforce remains competitive on an international scale.

These efforts collectively underscore Saudi Arabia's commitment to fostering a more holistic approach to measuring and enhancing productivity and performance, focusing on developing a well-rounded, skilled, and adaptable workforce capable of driving the nation towards its Vision 2030 goals.

Qatar

Qatar is committed to its National Vision 2030, which aims to transform the country into an advanced society capable of sustainable development. At the heart of this vision is human capital development, increasingly seen as a pivotal factor in economic growth and diversification²⁹. Qatar is moving away from traditional productivity metrics focused solely on output and efficiency, adopting a broader perspective that values intellectual capital and creativity. This change is in line with the nation's goals for a sustainable, knowledge-based economy and the overall well-being of its citizens and examples of these effort are:

01. Qatar National Development Strategy

(QNDS): This strategy places a strong emphasis on achieving work-life balance, enhancing employee well-being, and promoting continuous learning and development. It targets human development goals, such as enhancing the quality of life for workers and increasing the proportion of skilled Qatari personnel in the workforce.

02. Qatar Foundation's Wellness Initiatives:

The Qatar Foundation has implemented several programs to foster the holistic development of its workforce. Among these, "Sahtak Awalan – Your Health First" promotes healthy living by focusing on sustainability, physical activity, and nutrition, contributing significantly to employee wellness³⁰.

03. Reforms in Labor Laws: Qatar has made substantial amendments to its labor laws, including establishing a minimum wage and abolishing the Kafala system. These changes aim to improve financial security and freedom for workers, thereby enhancing their overall well-being and productivity³¹.

Expanding on these initiatives, additional examples of how Qatar is reshaping its approach to productivity and human performance include:

01. Qatar Science & Technology Park (QSTP):

QSTP fosters innovation through research and development, providing a platform for companies and startups to innovate in science and technology. This initiative supports Qatar's shift toward a knowledge-based economy by enhancing the intellectual capabilities of its workforce.

02. Mental Health Support Programs: In recent years, Qatar has increased its focus on mental health by implementing support programs and services across various organizations. These initiatives aim to improve psychological well-being and resilience, acknowledging that mental health is a critical component of overall productivity.

03. Qatarization Initiatives: These initiatives aim to increase the number of Qatari nationals in the workforce, particularly in key sectors. By focusing on education, training, and career development, Qatarization helps build a more skilled and committed workforce aligned with the national vision.

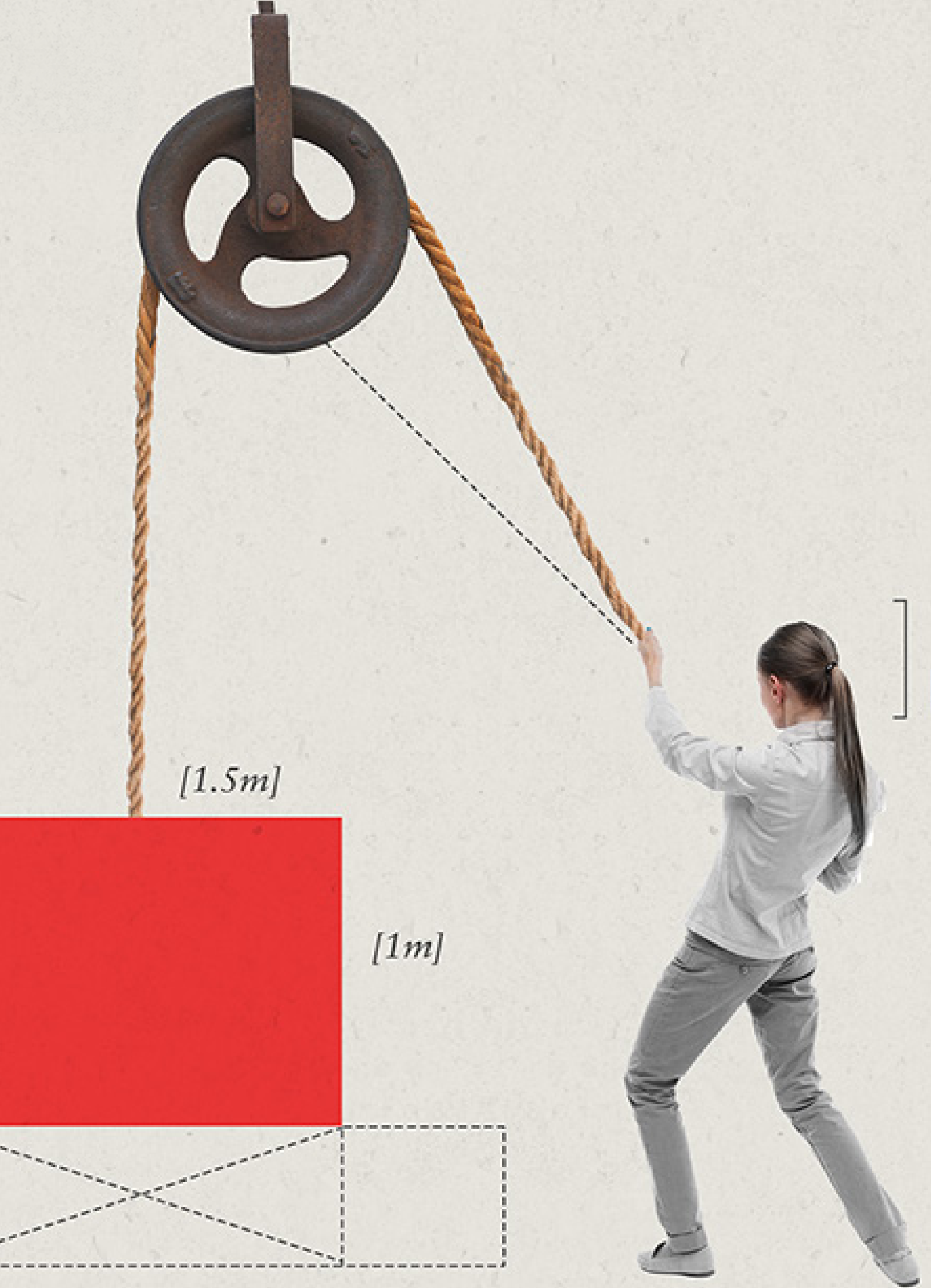
Together, these efforts demonstrate Qatar's commitment to a more holistic approach in measuring and improving productivity and performance, prioritizing the development of a skilled, healthy, and well-rounded workforce as essential to achieving the country's ambitious developmental goals.

Conclusion

In conclusion, our research results indicate that:

- There is a clear shift from traditional productivity metrics to a more holistic approach prioritizing human performance across the Middle East.
- This transformation is driven by the recognition that true productivity encompasses not only output but also the well-being, engagement, and development of employees.
- Key initiatives illustrating this shift include:
 - **UAE:** Emphasis on happiness and well-being as central to productivity.
 - **Saudi Arabia:** Implementation of the Human Capability Development Program, focusing on aligning educational outcomes with labor market demands.
 - **Qatar:** Adoption of the National Development Strategy, which prioritizes work-life balance and continuous learning.

These developments highlight a regional trend towards nurturing a workforce that is efficient, well-rounded, resilient, and continuously evolving, which is crucial for sustaining economic growth and competitiveness in the global landscape.



The Transparency Paradox: Could less be more when it comes to trust?

Greater transparency can help organizations build trust – or erode it. What considerations should leaders keep in mind to ensure transparency is helping and not hindering?

The exploration of the “transparency paradox” in modern workplaces is increasingly recognized as a critical factor influencing organizational dynamics and shaping talent strategies. This concept underscores scenarios where less is more—providing excessive details can sometimes overwhelm and breed skepticism among employees. Therefore, maintaining a balance between transparency and avoiding information overload is essential, with a focus on clear and relevant communication that meets the expectations of the audience.³²

The benefits of transparency on organizational performance are manifold. Transparent communication serves not just as a means of sharing information but as a catalyst for building trust, enhancing engagement, and fostering collaboration among employees. This shift towards a transparent culture supports improved decision-making, boosts employee morale, and contributes to a more positive work environment. Essentially, transparency plays a transformative role in elevating organizational performance.³³

Conversely, the lack of sufficient transparency can lead to several negative outcomes. In environments where communication is not clear and open, distrust can infiltrate, diminishing employee morale. This lack of transparency can hinder collaboration and leave employees feeling excluded from organizational decision-making, adversely affecting engagement and overall job satisfaction. It underscores the importance of transparency in promoting a cohesive and positive workplace atmosphere.³⁴

The relationship between transparency and trust is complex, particularly with the integration of Artificial Intelligence in business processes. As highlighted in the “AI Transparency Paradox” from the Harvard Business Review, there exists a tension between the demand for transparency and the complex nature of AI algorithms. This paradox reflects the challenge of making these algorithms transparent without undermining their effectiveness or revealing proprietary information, a critical consideration in the competitive field of AI.³⁵

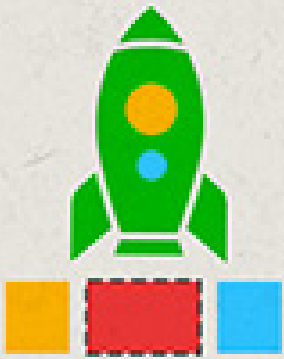
According to the 2024 Global Human Capital Trends Report by Deloitte, while 52% of surveyed organizations acknowledge that fostering trust and transparency is vital for their success, only 16% are actively leading initiatives to cultivate these values across their organizations. Additional examples further illustrating the importance of transparency include:

- **Financial Transparency in Startups:** Emerging companies like tech startups are increasingly adopting open-book management styles, where financial details are shared with all employees. This approach not only educates employees about the financial aspects of the business but also aligns their efforts with the company's financial goals, fostering a shared sense of responsibility.
- **Regulatory Compliance:** Companies in highly regulated industries, such as pharmaceuticals and finance, are enhancing transparency by proactively sharing compliance data with regulators and the public. This not only builds trust but also streamlines regulatory processes by ensuring continuous alignment with industry standards.
- **Customer Data Transparency:** In response to growing concerns about data privacy, companies like Apple and Google are offering more transparency around data usage. By providing clear, user-friendly explanations of how customer data is utilized, these companies aim to build trust and reassure customers about the security and privacy of their information.

These examples underscore the evolving nature of transparency in the modern workplace, where it is increasingly seen as a strategic asset that drives trust, collaboration, and organizational success.

UAE

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) has been actively enhancing transparency and openness, crucial components of its strategic economic objectives outlined in the Abu Dhabi Economic Vision 2030. This vision aims to “Build an Open, Efficient, Effective, and Globally Integrated Business Environment,” underscoring the country's commitment to transparency. By promoting open access to information on government policies, economic indicators, and business regulations, the UAE enhances the efficiency of decision-making processes and streamlines operations. Transparent systems are credited with achieving objectives more effectively through the clear communication of economic policies and fostering understanding among stakeholders. Moreover, transparency is essential for global integration, as it builds trust with international investors by providing clear insights into the business environment. Ultimately, transparency is acknowledged as a fundamental element in fostering a business-friendly environment that encourages trust and cooperation between the government and the business community.³⁶



In its real estate sector, the UAE is advancing transparency and accountability by integrating property transactions into the UAE PASS registration system. This digital identity verification platform enforces strict identity checks for individuals and corporate entities involved in property dealings, aiming to reduce fraud and set new transparency standards. This initiative particularly affects properties registered under a company's name, bringing about considerations for Corporate Tax implications. This move is poised to transform the real estate industry, making it more attractive to both local and foreign investors and aligning with the UAE's ambition to become a global investment hub. Companies owning property are required to comply with tax regulations, highlighting the UAE's dedication to digital transformation to boost efficiency and accessibility. This integration marks a significant advancement toward a secure and transparent real estate market, emphasizing compliance and digital progress.³⁷

Additional examples of transparency initiatives in the UAE include:

- **Financial Transparency in Government Spending:** The UAE government has implemented systems to ensure greater transparency in its expenditure and budget allocations, allowing citizens and investors to view and understand how public funds are utilized.
- **Healthcare Transparency Initiatives:** In the healthcare sector, the UAE has launched platforms that provide patients with access to their medical records and information about healthcare providers, enhancing transparency and empowering patients in their healthcare decisions.
- **Regulatory Reforms in Business Licensing:** The UAE has streamlined business licensing and permits through digital platforms that provide clear guidelines and criteria, simplifying the process and ensuring that businesses understand legal requirements and compliance standards.

These initiatives reflect the UAE's comprehensive approach to enhancing transparency across various sectors, reinforcing its commitment to creating an open and trustworthy business environment conducive to economic growth and international investment.

Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia has launched a comprehensive series of reforms under its Vision 2030 initiative, aimed at diversifying the economy, enhancing governance, and bolstering transparency. Central to Vision 2030 is the recognition of transparency as a crucial element for attracting investment, stimulating economic growth, and building a sustainable and vibrant economy. The initiative underscores the importance of public accountability, economic diversification through privatization, reforms in the financial sector, digital transformation, clear communication of social program objectives, and stringent anti-corruption practices.

These actions collectively demonstrate the Saudi government's dedication to embedding transparency within the framework of a business-friendly environment and fostering trust among both citizens and international investors.³⁸

Further illustrating its commitment to transparency, Saudi Arabia has achieved a leading position in the MENA region for e-government services, underscoring its embrace of digital technologies to enhance public service efficiency. This distinction not only showcases Saudi Arabia's technological capabilities but also marks a significant stride towards greater transparency. Leading in e-government services signifies the Kingdom's resolve to offer accessible and streamlined services to its populace. The digitalization of government functions inherently increases transparency, promoting open communication, efficient dissemination of information, and heightened accountability in governance practices. Saudi Arabia's top position in this area is a testament to its successful integration of technology to not only enhance service delivery but also to foster a more transparent and responsive government.³⁹ Additional examples of Saudi Arabia's transparency initiatives include:

- **Judicial Reforms:** Recent reforms in the judiciary system aim to increase transparency and efficiency in legal proceedings, making the judicial process more transparent and understandable to the public and reducing bureaucratic red tape.
- **Public Investment Fund (PIF) Transparency:** The PIF, Saudi Arabia's sovereign wealth fund, has increased its transparency by regularly publishing its strategy and investment allocations. This move is designed to align with global best practices and boost investor confidence.
- **Saudi Authority for Data and Artificial Intelligence:** SADAIA promotes transparency in Saudi Arabia by driving the use of open data. It develops awareness programs and identifies investment opportunities to support the national economy in line with Saudi Vision 2030. By providing thousands of datasets to the public, SADAIA enhances access to information, collaboration, and innovation.

These examples further illustrate Saudi Arabia's robust efforts to promote transparency across various sectors, reinforcing its commitment to creating an open and trustworthy environment conducive to comprehensive national development and economic prosperity.

Qatar

Qatar has made significant strides in enhancing transparency, as demonstrated through various initiatives aligned with the Qatar National Vision 2030. This vision articulates the country's long-term development objectives and underscores a commitment to transparent planning and governance. Qatar's push towards digitization, improving digital skills among the workforce, and optimizing government services are all part of its strategy to establish itself as a global benchmark in efficient and accountable governance. Key initiatives, such as the establishment

of the Center of Excellence for Data and Emerging Technologies and performance monitoring systems, are indicative of Qatar's embrace of transparent, state-of-the-art practices. The IT & Digital Services Cluster initiative further exemplifies Qatar's commitment to forging a transparent digital future, enhancing accountability, and boosting efficiency in line with its ambitious 2030 objectives.^{40,41}

Additionally, Qatar's strong performance in international transparency rankings reinforces its dedication to good governance. The nation secured the second spot among Gulf and Arab countries in the Corruption Perceptions Index 2022, reflecting its effective anti-corruption measures and legislative reforms. The establishment of the Administrative Control and Transparency Authority and the Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani Anti-Corruption Award are pivotal in Qatar's anti-corruption framework. These efforts are complemented by the National Strategy for Integrity, Transparency, and Prevention of Corruption (2022–2026), which aims to enhance the integrity and accountability of its institutions. Furthermore, Qatar invests in targeted educational programs for state employees, particularly in financial institutions, to bolster their ability to recognize and combat corruption effectively.⁴² Additional examples of Qatar's transparency initiatives include:

- **E-Government Portal Development:** Qatar has significantly invested in developing comprehensive e-government portals that offer citizens and residents easy access to a wide range of governmental services online. This not only streamlines processes but also makes governmental operations more transparent and accessible.
- **Public Sector Financial Reporting:** Qatar has enhanced the transparency of its public sector's financial reporting by adopting International Public Sector Accounting Standards (IPSAS). This adoption ensures that financial statements are clear, comparable, and provide a true and fair view of the financial position of the public sector.
- **Open Data Initiatives:** Qatar has launched open data initiatives, making government data available to the public. This openness is intended to increase transparency, facilitate public engagement, and encourage the use of data for innovation and development.

These initiatives are a testament to Qatar's proactive approach to fostering transparency across multiple facets of governance, contributing significantly to its vision of becoming a leading example of good governance and transparency on the global stage.

Conclusion

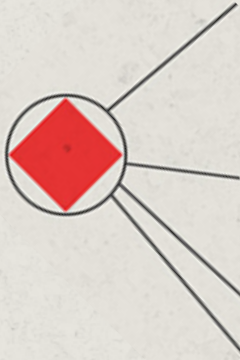
Ultimately, our research on the "transparency paradox" underscores its essential role in modern organizations. Achieving the balance between optimal information-sharing and information overload is key for clear communication to any audience. Indeed, transparency emerges as a crucial driver of organizational performance due to its role in enhancing trust, improving decision-making and facilitating teamwork.

However, Artificial Intelligence makes striking this balance an ongoing challenge given the tension between transparency and algorithmic complexity. An additional challenge is optimizing AI's effectiveness while protecting proprietary information. The experiences of the UAE, KSA, and Qatar illustrate the growing importance of transparency and the national-level commitment to applying this principle across various sectors and initiatives. Key examples include:

- **Digital Integration of Property Transactions:** Highlighting how process visibility increases transparency in the real estate sector.
- **Enhancements in E-Government Services:** Demonstrating improved public service delivery through technological advancements.
- **Anti-Corruption Strategies:** Showcasing efforts to maintain integrity and accountability in governance.

These examples point to the power of transparency in navigating the complexities of today's organizational environments and enabling tomorrow's national development visions and strategies.





What do organizations need most in a disrupted, boundaryless age? More imagination.

Generative AI and other technologies may be exposing an imagination deficit. Scaling human capabilities like curiosity and empathy can help organizations replenish it.

Countries in the Middle East are making significant strides in the artificial intelligence (AI) sector, showing a strong commitment to technological innovation and a forward-thinking ethos. Their approach to AI extends beyond just economic and technological growth; it includes a dedication to enhancing human capabilities alongside digital progress. A recent survey across the MENA region underscores this perspective: over 74% of participants recognize the importance of fostering imagination and curiosity to keep up with technological advancements. However, this enthusiasm faces a major hurdle—the scarcity of capabilities and resources, which poses a significant challenge in achieving a balance between human potential and technological development.

As these nations integrate AI into their socio-economic frameworks, they are coming to a crucial realization: the future is shaped not only by the technologies we create but also by the human qualities we nurture. This perspective sets the stage for an exploration of how Middle Eastern countries are not merely progressing technologically but are also earnestly striving to forge an environment where technology enhances human life. Here, innovation, creativity, and sustainable growth thrive, propelled by a dynamic interplay between human creativity and artificial intelligence.

In this evolving landscape, Middle Eastern nations are actively working to address these challenges by investing in education and training programs focused on AI and digital skills, fostering public-private partnerships to drive innovation, and implementing policies that encourage research and development in AI. These efforts are crucial in creating a thriving ecosystem where technology and human talent coexist harmoniously, driving forward both technological prowess and human development.

UAE

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) stands prominently as a beacon of technological innovation and UAE is a leading example of technological adaptation and innovation, particularly in the field of artificial intelligence (AI). Its strategic adoption of AI is part of a wider goal to transform into a sophisticated, knowledge-based economy. The UAE is investing heavily in AI to diversify its economy and enhance human capabilities alongside technological progress. Central to this effort is the UAE's National Strategy

for Artificial Intelligence 2031, which aims to position the country as a global AI hub. This strategy is a key component of a broader vision to enhance the economy's digital ecosystem and advance knowledge-based sectors. Practical applications of AI across the UAE, such as in public services, healthcare, and transportation, demonstrate the effectiveness of this vision⁴³.

In public services, the virtual assistant 'Rashid,' developed in collaboration between Dubai's Department of Economic Development, the Smart Dubai Office, and IBM, exemplifies transformative AI application. Rashid automates responses to routine inquiries, enhancing government service efficiency and allowing human agents to focus on complex problem-solving tasks. This not only improves service accessibility but also enriches customer interactions with its 24/7 service in multiple languages, enhancing the overall quality of service delivery⁴⁴.

Another notable example is the Road and Transport Authority's (RTA) autonomous taxi project. This initiative is integral to Dubai's strategy to convert 25% of its transportation services to autonomous solutions by 2030. It highlights the UAE's leadership in smart transportation and commitment to building a sustainable, efficient urban transport system⁴⁵.

Further strengthening human capabilities in AI, the UAE has established the Mohammed bin Zayed University of Artificial Intelligence, the world's first AI-dedicated university. This institution highlights the UAE's commitment to developing a workforce skilled in AI, mathematics, analytics, and data science, preparing them for future technological challenges⁴⁶.

Additionally, the Dubai Health Authority's implementation of AI in medical diagnostics and patient management systems exemplifies the healthcare sector's embrace of AI to improve efficiency and patient outcomes. These systems use AI to analyze medical data, helping healthcare professionals make more informed decisions and providing personalized patient care.

These initiatives underscore the UAE's proactive approach in merging AI technology with human ingenuity, aiming to create a thriving, future-ready economy.

Saudi Arabia

In Saudi Arabia, AI plays a pivotal role in the Vision 2030 plan, which aims to diversify and innovate the economy. The country is positioning itself as a leader in the AI sector, particularly in generative AI, underlining the crucial role of AI in shaping the future alongside human creativity and ingenuity.

The strategic deployment of AI in Saudi Arabia is widespread, from the Saudi Data & AI Authority's (SDAIA) innovative tech applications to optimizing renewable energy⁴⁷. The emphasis on AI is further highlighted in initiatives such as the Generative AI Program and projects aimed at improving environmental monitoring, national economic transformation, and workforce development.

Central to Saudi Arabia's AI advancements is Aramco, which utilizes AI and Big Data to enhance operations and achieve ambitious objectives such as improving worker safety, cutting CO2 emissions by 50% since 2010, and boosting profitability. Aramco's use of AI in flare monitoring, reservoir modelling, and pipeline management exemplifies its commitment to increasing safety and efficiency⁴⁸.

In the realm of supply chain management, AI significantly enhances logistical operations, with Saudi Arabia aiming to become a global logistics hub. Companies like SPAR are utilizing AI to transform supply chain management, improving prediction, optimizing stock flow, and driving operational efficiencies⁴⁹.

Addressing the challenges posed by AI and technology, Saudi Arabia is implementing numerous initiatives across education, government, and the private sector to foster imagination and curiosity. The Saudi Minister of Education, Yousef Al Benyan, advocates for integrating AI in educational settings, highlighting the need to equip educators with digital skills and address cybersecurity concerns⁵⁰.

Expanding on these efforts, additional examples include:

- **Neom's AI Integration:** In the futuristic city of Neom, AI is integrated into urban development plans to create a smart city that leverages technology for sustainable living, traffic management, and infrastructure maintenance.
- **AI in Healthcare:** Saudi Arabia is advancing AI in healthcare, with projects like the National Unified Medical Record using AI to streamline patient data management and improve diagnostic accuracy, enhancing healthcare delivery across the kingdom.

- **AI-driven Tourism Initiatives:** Efforts to boost the tourism sector through AI include personalized travel experiences and enhanced visitor management systems, showcasing Saudi Arabia's commitment to using technology to expand its economic sectors beyond oil.

These initiatives demonstrate Saudi Arabia's holistic approach to AI adoption, aiming to harmonize technological advancements with human development to achieve a sustainable and prosperous future.

Qatar

Qatar is making remarkable advancements in AI across various sectors, significantly boosting innovation and growth. The launch of the National AI Strategy in 2019 underscores Qatar's ambition to become a global AI powerhouse, striving to build an advanced society with sustainable development and enhanced quality of life. Spearheaded by the Ministry of Communications and Information Technology (MCIT), this strategy aims to foster a thriving AI ecosystem, with the AI market in Qatar projected to reach approximately \$58.8 million by 2026⁵¹.

The nation's digitalization efforts are meticulously orchestrated by entities such as MCIT and the Communications Regulatory Authority. Initiatives like the Cloud Policy Statement are instrumental in establishing a robust foundation for cloud computing in Qatar. The Hukoomi e-government portal and the Smart Qatar Programme (TASMU) exemplify Qatar's commitment to integrating technology seamlessly into public services and beyond⁵².

AI's impact in Qatar includes improving citizen and customer experiences, bolstering decision-making, and promoting environmental sustainability. Notable projects include Hukoomi and Invest Qatar's use of Azure OpenAI Service and GPT to develop Ai.SHA, an AI-driven chatbot, enhancing user interactions through tailored digital services⁵³.

AI is also vital in advancing research and innovation, demonstrated by the National Museum of Qatar's NMoQ Explorer project, which employs AI to provide immersive virtual museum tours⁵⁴. These initiatives illustrate AI's role in making services more accessible and boosting various sectors in line with Qatar National Vision 2030.

In the educational sector, the WISE Summit hosted in Qatar explored AI's potential to transform education, highlighting its capacity to foster creativity, enhance learning, and prepare future generations for an AI-integrated world⁵⁵. The National Skilling Program, aiming to equip 50,000 individuals with advanced digital and AI skills, further underscores this commitment⁵⁶.

Adding to these examples:

- **AI in Healthcare:** Qatar is using AI to revolutionize healthcare diagnostics and patient management systems, improving the accuracy and efficiency of medical services.
- **AI in Traffic Management:** The implementation of AI technologies for traffic control and safety in Doha helps reduce congestion and accidents, showcasing AI's utility in urban planning.
- **AI in Sports Analytics:** With the upcoming sporting events, Qatar is leveraging AI for sports analytics and athlete performance enhancement, illustrating the versatile applications of AI.

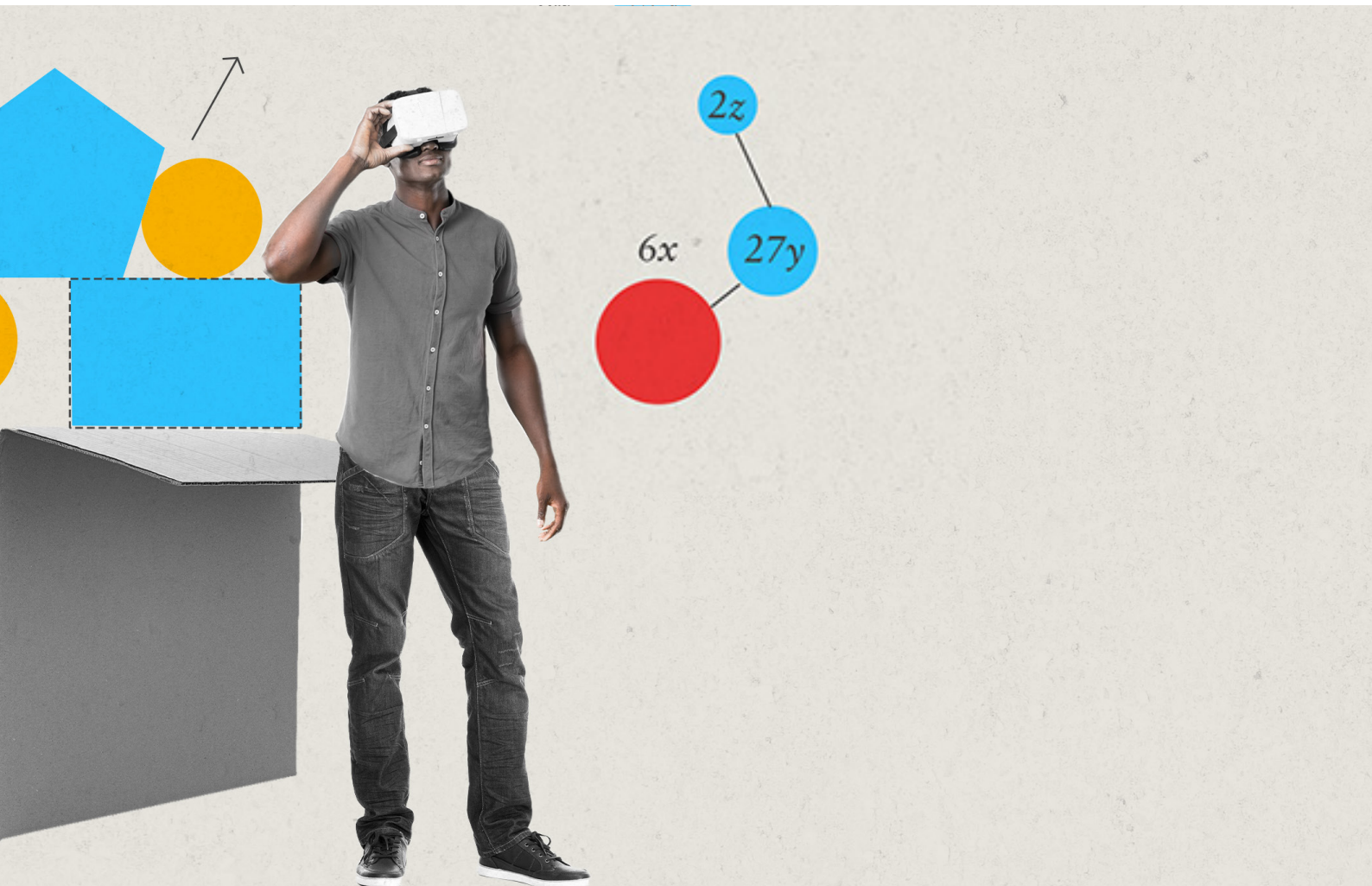
These comprehensive efforts illustrate Qatar's dedication to using AI to drive economic growth, societal betterment, environmental conservation, and cultural enrichment, all while carefully addressing the ethical implications of AI technology.

Conclusion:

Ultimately, our research results indicate that:

- Middle Eastern countries are at the forefront of integrating artificial intelligence (AI) to both spur technological innovation and enhance human capabilities, fundamentally transforming their economies and social frameworks.
- There is a strong emphasis on deploying AI across key sectors such as public services, healthcare, and transportation, showcasing broad applications and benefits.
- The region grapples with challenges such as shortages in resources and skills, leading to significant investments in education and forming strategic partnerships to develop a workforce proficient in AI and data sciences.
- By prioritizing the cultivation of creativity and imagination alongside technical skills, the Middle East is positioning itself to achieve sustainable development and innovation in an AI-driven future.

These findings highlight the strategic efforts in the Middle East to not only adopt AI technology but also to ensure it complements and enhances human capital, aligning with long-term developmental goals.



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How can play and experimentation in digital playgrounds drive human performance?

As technology continues to spark change in the relationship between workers and organizations, they need safe spaces to cocreate their common future.

Driven by the twin forces of rapid digital transformation and a burgeoning young population, the GCC landscape is undergoing a dynamic shift. Today, organizations are navigating a world of disruptive technologies, ever-evolving customer expectations, and a workforce brimming with digital-native talent. To thrive in this dynamic environment, one resource is paramount: Human Capital.

However, simply having a skilled workforce is no longer enough. The key lies in unlocking the full potential of that human capital, fostering a culture of continuous learning, adaptability, and innovation. This is where the innovative concept of digital playgrounds steps in.

These safe spaces, distinct from traditional training grounds, offer employees the freedom to experiment, explore, and unleash their creativity using pioneering technologies. Think virtual reality simulations for honing surgical skills, AI-powered assistants automating tasks, or collaborative environments for prototyping futuristic cityscapes. It is not about frivolous fun; it is about breaking down barriers to exploration, encouraging risk-taking, and nurturing a growth mindset.

According to this year's survey results or something to that effect, nearly 89% of regional business leaders surveyed believe that reimagining the work, workplace and workforce through digital footprints simulations and related tools is of moderate to critical importance to their organization's success. The survey further reveals that addressing this gap will have a significant impact on the success of the organization in the next 3 years. The survey also indicated that 88% of regional business leaders consider human imagination and curiosity to be of moderate to critical importance for keeping up with technological innovations.

Additionally, in our Middle East 2023 Human Capital Trends Report⁵⁷ we noted that according to the Oxford Insights Government AI Readiness Index 2022, an annual report that analyzes the readiness of governments in adopting AI technology across the globe, "the Middle East & North Africa region has the second largest range of scores within any region globally". This should serve as an additional indicator that the Middle East's pace in adopting intelligent technologies is on the path of exponential acceleration. Also, according to the ME 2023 Deloitte Human Capital Trends, more than 80% of surveyed regional business leaders believe that using technology to improve work outcomes and team performance is very important or important to their organization's success.

UAE

The UAE has a long history of embracing innovation and seeking transformative pathways. Now, the country is setting its sights on the exciting frontier of digital playgrounds – immersive and interactive environments that foster experimentation, collaboration, and learning. But for the UAE, these playgrounds are more than just entertainment hubs. They are strategic tools designed to accelerate progress and build a future characterized by a skilled and adaptable workforce, responsible technological integration, and a culture of playful exploration.

At the heart of this lies the UAE Artificial Intelligence (AI) Country Strategy 2031⁵⁸. This ambitious roadmap lays the groundwork for the responsible development and implementation of AI across diverse sectors like healthcare, education, and law enforcement. By integrating AI ethically and effectively, the UAE aims to achieve a trifecta: improved government efficiency, enhanced citizen well-being, and a more competitive economy.

Taking this vision a step further, Dubai's government has unveiled a metaverse strategy⁵⁹ that aims to create 40,000 jobs and add \$4 billion to the emirate's economy. And building on the Dubai Metaverse Strategy, the Dubai Metaverse Assembly⁶⁰ was announced to explore the potential of the metaverse to revolutionize human capital development. The event highlighted the power of immersive learning experiences, remote collaboration tools, and inclusive virtual environments in upskilling, reskilling, and empowering diverse workforces. This playful exploration paves the way for preparing the UAE's workforce for the demands of the ever-evolving future economy.

Beyond grand strategies, the UAE is already putting its plans into action through innovative projects like the Dubai Police VR Training program⁶¹. This initiative utilizes virtual reality simulations to train police officers and specialized teams on police operations on more than 365 scenarios, fostering better decision-making skills and enhancing their preparedness for real-world crisis situations. Additionally, in sectors like aviation, VR and AR are used for training purposes. Emirates Group⁶² is all set to embrace Extended Reality (XR) and change the way its employees are onboarded and how its cabin crew are trained enhancing performance through realistic and immersive learning experiences.

Similarly, the Abu Dhabi Life Science Hub⁶³ in the Metaverse demonstrates the UAE's commitment to harnessing the power of digital playgrounds across different sectors. This virtual platform connects healthcare providers, entrepreneurs, and investors within a simulated environment, fostering knowledge exchange, collaboration, and innovation. It also offers immersive learning experiences, promotes investment, and plans to provide telemedicine consultations in the future, ultimately increasing access to specialized care for residents across the UAE. Additionally Hub71 in Abu Dhabi⁶⁴ which is a tech ecosystem that provides a dynamic environment for startups to experiment and grow. This initiative supports a range of sectors including AI, fintech, and healthcare, fostering a culture of innovation that enhances job performance and competitiveness. On the other hand, Dubai has established Area 2071⁶⁵ as a digital and physical platform for experimentation and innovation. It invites tech companies, startups, and creatives to collaborate on future-oriented projects, thereby driving human performance through a culture of continuous innovation and learning.

Saudi Arabia

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, propelled by its ambitious Vision 2030 plan, is undergoing a remarkable transformation. This journey hinges on technology, and digital playgrounds as powerful tools to unlock human potential and accelerate progress.

Saudi Arabia's commitment to digital playgrounds is evident in its numerous initiatives across various sectors. KAUST VR/AR initiative⁶⁶ for example, allows medical students to practice complex procedures in a safe and immersive environment. This approach not only enhances their skills and reduces training time but also fosters a growth mindset and encourages risk-taking, crucial qualities for future healthcare professionals.

Similarly, the SEHA Virtual Hospital⁶⁷, stands as a beacon of innovation in healthcare. This centralized hub connects over 130 hospitals and healthcare facilities, offering virtual consultations, remote monitoring, and advanced training platforms. By bridging geographical barriers and boosting efficiency, the virtual hospital empowers patients and paves the way for the future of healthcare delivery.

Beyond healthcare, Saudi Aramco utilizes digital twins⁶⁸. These real-time digital replicas of physical assets in oil & gas fields enable engineers to virtually experiment and optimize operations, leading to increased efficiency, productivity, and informed decision-making.

Additionally, NEOM, a mega-project aimed at diversifying the Saudi economy, includes plans for state-of-the-art digital labs. These labs serve as playgrounds where individuals can experiment with AI, robotics, and other advanced technologies. The

goal is to spur innovation and develop skills that are critical in modern industries such as the futuristic smart city powered by Tonomus⁶⁹, which exemplifies how immersive learning environments and digital twins can revolutionize urban development. NEOM's citizen engagement platforms and Tonomus technology-driven solutions, built on principles of cognitive technology and ethical data usage, showcase the potential for creating sustainable and livable urban environments.

On a government level, the Digital Government Authority signed a Cooperation Agreement with Sandbox Company⁷⁰ to reserve a virtual space on Sandbox Metaverse platform for its use, with a view to promoting innovative solutions in the government sector.

Qatar

Qatar, a nation blending tradition with innovative vision, is harnessing the transformative potential of digital playgrounds. This commitment is guided by Qatar's National AI Strategy⁷¹, a blueprint for responsibly integrating AI into various sectors. This visionary approach, termed "AI+X Future" foresees widespread AI adoption in healthcare, business, education, and research.

This ambitious vision is fueling several groundbreaking initiatives. Qatar will soon host the World Summit AI MENA 2024⁷², a global forum uniting experts and enthusiasts in the field of artificial intelligence. This event signifies Qatar's commitment to fostering collaboration and driving innovation within the AI landscape.

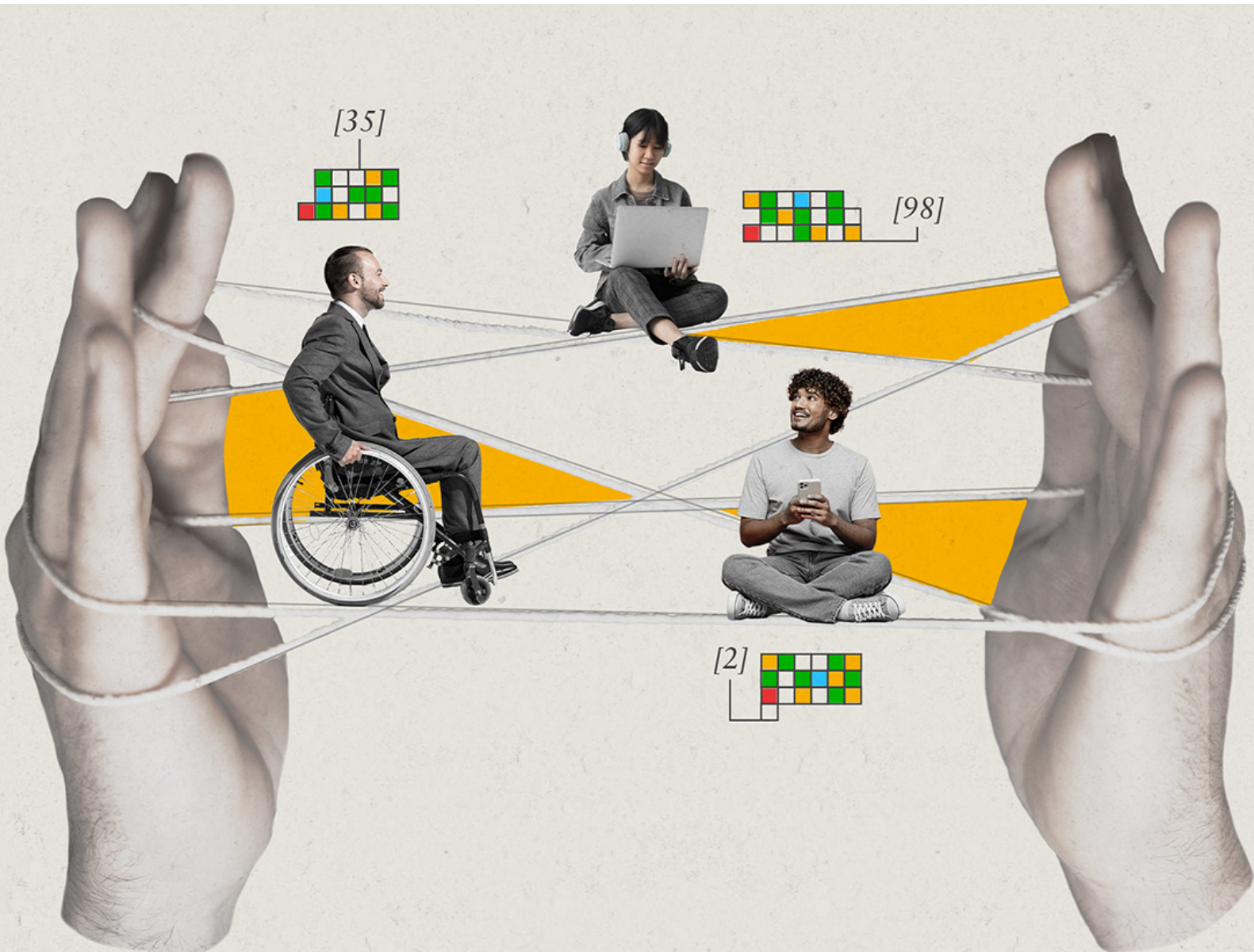
Qatar's dedication to advancing healthcare technologies manifests in the Qatar Robotics Surgery Centre⁷³. This state-of-the-art training and technology development facility serves as a hub for surgeons and healthcare professionals to hone their skills and explore cutting-edge surgical technologies. Through surgical simulation and training programs, the QRSC empowers healthcare professionals and ultimately enhances patient care across the nation. Similarly, Sidra Medicine Simulation Center⁷⁴ demonstrates how digital backgrounds and training can be used to significantly improve human capital in the healthcare sector. The center utilizes simulation-based learning to enhance inter-professional learning, critical skill development, and effective team behaviors in a safe, constructive environment and according to the principles of participatory learning.

Another example would be adopted by Qatar Science & Technology Park (QSTP)⁷⁵ which fosters an environment of innovation and experimentation in fields like information technology, health sciences, and energy. It provides state-of-the-art facilities where researchers and companies can experiment with new technologies and solutions, driving human performance through innovation.

Conclusion

Ultimately, our research results indicate that:

- The initiatives in KSA, UAE, and Qatar enhance technological skills while fostering a culture of experimentation and play. This is essential for keeping pace with the rapid changes of the modern world. By focusing on digital playgrounds for professional and personal development, these countries are building a foundation for a competitive and innovative workforce.
- The strategic emphasis on digital playgrounds, coupled with the broader adoption of AI and immersive technologies, is pivotal for the GCC's transition to knowledge-based economies. This transformation not only aligns with the region's aspirations for sustainable growth but also underscores its commitment to leading the change on the global stage.
- Digital playgrounds serve as powerful catalysts for progress within the GCC, their versatility fueling transformative initiatives across a wide range of sectors. From revolutionizing healthcare to reimagining urban landscapes, these dynamic platforms embody the region's future-focused mindset and adaptability, optimizing traditional processes for a more innovative tomorrow.
- By embodying participatory learning principles, digital playgrounds empower individuals and teams to collaborate, take risks, and unleash their creativity. This approach not only enhances skill development and problem-solving abilities of the GCC workforce but also cultivates a workforce prepared for the demands of the future economy.
- The UAE, Saudi Arabia and Qatar are leading the way in the GCC by embracing digital playgrounds, fostering a culture of creativity. This approach has the potential to drive breakthroughs in technology, service excellence, and competitiveness, ultimately revolutionizing the future of work in the region.





One Size Does Not Fit All: How Microcultures Help Workers and Organizations Thrive

As the Middle East continues to diversify, the need for organizations to embrace microcultures becomes ever more necessary.

Within the Middle East, expatriates account for nearly 50% of the total population⁷⁶, making the region a mixing pot of different thoughts, perspectives and therefore microcultures. There is also a strong overarching culture, with principal values, beliefs and behaviors playing a key role in “how work gets done” in the Middle East, such as an emphasis on building and maintaining professional relationships.

The Middle East’s workforce diversity underscores the necessity for organizations to embrace and nurture a multiplicity of microcultures, whilst aligning to the overarching values of the organization and region. These microcultures, reflective of varying team dynamics, functional roles, and geographic contexts, offer a pathway to greater agility and responsiveness—a crucial competitive advantage in today’s rapidly evolving business environment.

However, although ‘Diversity of Workforce’ presents a strong foundation for embracing microcultures, it is just one example cited in the 2024 Global Human Capital Trends Report. There are other factors required which may make embracing microcultures within the region more difficult, such as decentralized ‘Decision-Making Speed and Style’ and ‘Governance’. The need to understand and embrace microcultures requires leadership autonomy, moving some perceived locus of control away from leaders and toward employees, which may contradict the traditionally hierarchical structures observed in the region. In these environments, decision-making and governance are typically centralized. Consequently, the notion of effectively empowering individuals or teams to navigate and adapt to microcultures may face resistance if not purposefully nurtured, meaning the benefits may not be fully achieved.

With 74% of Middle East respondents to the 2024 Global Human Capital Trends research saying that individual teams and work groups are the best placed to cultivate culture, fluidity, agility and diversity, addressing this balance is imperative for Middle East organizations seeking to thrive in an increasingly interconnected and diverse global landscape.

UAE

The UAE has experienced a significant amount of cultural transformation over the last 20 years. Curiosity and tolerance in the UAE highlight the country’s evolved cultural position. This has been both a result of and resulted in an influx of foreign cultures, to the point where the UAE is home to over 200 nationalities (exceeding even the United Nations⁷⁷). Embracing microcultures within the UAE unlocks a couple of key benefits:

Work-Life Balance and Flexibility: The UAE is known for its fast-paced business environment, with long working hours being common in some sectors. Embracing microcultures allows organizations to offer flexible work arrangements tailored to the diverse needs of their employees, for example, working parents. This could include options such as remote work, flexible hours, or compressed workweeks, enabling individuals to achieve better work-life balance and improving overall well-being and productivity. This is important for both attracting and retaining talent, with full time working from home preferred by 38% of Middle East professionals.⁷⁸

Multilingualism and Communication: In a multicultural setting like the UAE, language diversity can be both a challenge and an opportunity. Embracing microcultures involves recognizing the linguistic preferences and communication styles of different employee groups (e.g., direct or indirect, high or low context, formal or informal), which is particularly important for team leaders and middle managers who are often communicating strategic initiatives to their team. Organizations can facilitate language training programs, provide multilingual communication channels, and promote cultural sensitivity to enhance collaboration and cohesion among teams.

How microcultures help workers and organizations thrive in the UAE:

01. Expatriate Communities in Free Zones: Expatriate workers in UAE's free zones often form microcultures based on shared nationalities, professions, or industries. These communities provide social support, networking, and cultural exchange, helping expats navigate the challenges of living and working in a foreign country and contributing to their overall well-being and job satisfaction.

02. Innovation Hubs and Co-Working Spaces: In Emirates like Dubai and Abu Dhabi, microcultures thrive within innovation hubs and co-working spaces, where startups, freelancers, and creative professionals converge. These environments foster a culture of collaboration, idea sharing, and experimentation, leading to the development of new products, services, and business models.

Saudi Arabia

Embracing organizational microcultures fosters resilience and agility, which is important given the Kingdom's rapidly evolving business landscape and ambitious economic reforms. The Kingdom is currently home to the world's largest civil infrastructure engineering program, covering the development of residential, industrial and tourism projects in the Kingdom. It includes NEOM, which at \$500bn is the world's largest single project⁷⁹. With an increase in projects and an influx of expats (an increase of 34.7% since 2010⁸⁰), there will be divisions and departments within these large-scale project and programme teams with different work dynamics and expectations. NEOM alone has over 3,600 staff from 97 countries⁸¹; by enabling leaders to adapt their ways of working to suit the microcultures within their team, respecting local custom and Islamic principles, staff will have an improved ability to drive business outcomes, perform at higher levels and will be more likely to stay on the programme and therefore the region.

Similar to the rest of the Middle East, Saudi Arabia has a unique demographic composition, with a significant expatriate population working alongside Saudi nationals. Embracing microcultures can help address the challenge of Saudization, which aims to increase the participation of Saudi nationals in the workforce (rate of Saudi citizens in the labor market has increased to 52.5%⁸²). By understanding and accommodating the cultural preferences and work styles of Saudi employees, organizations can create inclusive environments that support their integration and development within the workforce.

While progress has been made in recent years, with the increase in participation of women in the workforce in Saudi Arabia (up from 19% of the total workforce in 2016 to 36% in 2022⁸³), gender diversity can be further improved in the Kingdom's workforce. Embracing microcultures involves addressing gender-specific

needs and preferences to create more inclusive workplaces. Organizations can implement initiatives such as mentorship programs, leadership development opportunities, and family-friendly policies to support the advancement and retention of women in the workforce, contributing to greater gender diversity and equality.

How microcultures help workers and organizations thrive in KSA:

01. Women's Entrepreneurship Networks: In KSA, microcultures of women's entrepreneurship have emerged, particularly in response to societal changes and government initiatives to empower women economically. These networks provide a supportive environment for female entrepreneurs to share experiences, resources, and opportunities, fostering collaboration and innovation.

02. Tech Startups Ecosystem: Within the larger business landscape of KSA, microcultures have formed around tech startups, especially in cities like Riyadh and Jeddah. These communities offer support, mentorship, and networking opportunities for entrepreneurs, contributing to the growth of the startup ecosystem and driving innovation in the Kingdom.

Qatar

Qatar's national Vision 2030 aims to diversify its economy and reduce the country's reliance on oil and gas reserves. Embracing microcultures can support traditional oil and gas organizations who are already in Qatar to be more innovative and agile, ultimately supporting with diversification. For new organizations, embracing microcultures can also facilitate relationship-building and trust among employees, which are vital components of business success in the country's close-knit society.

Technological innovation is at the heart of Qatar's industrial and broader economic development agendas; The Qatar government has been actively promoting innovation and entrepreneurship as part of its economic diversification efforts. Qatar Science and Technology Park (QSTP) provides an operational base for companies such as Microsoft, Siemens, ExxonMobil and Mitsubishi, while also offering business incubation and acceleration facilities to start-ups. As Qatar attracts talent from around the world to contribute to its ambitious technology-driven plans, there is a need to accommodate entrepreneurial and collaborative cultures akin to those typically found in technology startups. Technology startups are classified by a workplace environment that values creative problem-solving, open communication and a flat hierarchy⁸⁴, which contrasts with Qatar's formal hierarchy. By purposefully fostering microcultures that prioritize innovation and flexibility within these sectors, organizations in Qatar can attract top talent and drive sustainable growth.

How microcultures help workers and organizations thrive in Qatar:

- 01. Sports and Fitness Communities:** Qatar's microcultures include vibrant communities built around sports and fitness activities. Whether it's football, running, or yoga, these groups provide opportunities for social interaction, physical well-being, and stress relief, contributing to a healthier and more engaged workforce.
- 02. Expatriate Networks:** Qatar's diverse expatriate population forms microcultures based on shared nationalities, languages, and cultural backgrounds. These networks serve as sources of support, friendship, and professional connections, enriching the social fabric of the country and facilitating cross-cultural understanding and cooperation.

Conclusion

Ultimately, our research results indicate that:

- Embracing microcultures across the Middle East is vital due to the region's significant expatriate population and diverse workforce composition.
- The concept of microcultures may challenge traditional hierarchical structures in the Middle East, emphasizing the importance of understanding and navigating cultural nuances effectively.
- Embracing microcultures can support with improving work-life balance, communication across multilingual teams, gender diversity, nationalization, and diversification efforts.
- While challenges remain, embracing microcultures presents opportunities for organizations to innovate, attract top talent, and thrive in the dynamic business landscape of the Middle East.

Despite the importance of understanding and embracing microcultures, there is a need for more consulting services in the Middle East, highlighting a potential area for growth and development in the region's professional services landscape.





From function to discipline: The rise of boundaryless HR

The future of work requires human resources to evolve, shifting from a siloed function to a boundaryless discipline integrated with the people, businesses, and community it serves.

Flexibility, agility, collaboration, and adaptability are increasingly critical to address the dynamic needs of businesses and their workforces. With technological advancements and demographic shifts reshaping the workplace, HR professionals are pivotal in fostering a more fluid and responsive organizational structure. The Deloitte Human Capital Trends survey indicates that 70% of respondents from UAE, KSA, and Qatar view the transformation of HR from a purely operational role to a broader, cross-functional discipline as essential for organizational success. Yet, only 58% report significant progress in achieving this transformation.

In a boundaryless world, HR professionals must adopt a similarly boundaryless mindset, transitioning from isolated operations to a holistic approach that integrates with the entire organization, including its people, business, and community. The rise of AI in the workplace further underscores the need for HR to collaborate closely with departments like Information Technology, Governance, Risk and Compliance, and Legal. This collaboration is crucial for educating employees about AI's benefits and implications, enhancing their productivity and job satisfaction, and developing comprehensive policies for AI usage in the workplace⁸⁵.

Despite these efforts, only 53% of survey respondents believe their HR function has significantly influenced how work is conducted over the past three years. The Middle East stands out not only for its economic achievements but also for its commitment to workforce well-being and growth. HR has been instrumental in implementing wellness programs that support physical, mental, and emotional health, including access to wellness facilities, mental health resources, and flexible working conditions. Additionally, HR has played a key role in empowering local talent to take on significant positions within organizations.

However, despite HR's dedication, there remains a gap in the confidence that business leaders have in HR's ability to manage upcoming changes over the next three to five years. Adding to the existing examples, HR departments are increasingly involved in strategic decision-making processes, reflecting their growing influence and responsibility in shaping organizational cultures that are adaptive, inclusive, and forward-thinking⁸⁶.

UAE

The future of HR is poised to be shaped by a focus on employee-centricity, automation, agility, and collaboration across various business disciplines. Embracing a boundaryless HR model provides organizations in the UAE with an opportunity to integrate people-focused expertise more deeply into their core business operations. Here's how organizations in the UAE are leveraging boundaryless HR to unlock their full potential:

Several organizations are beginning to distinguish between the roles of People Managers and Work Managers, while many others are evolving the concept of management into "People Leadership." This shift involves providing managers with additional training, support, and accreditation in people skills. A notable initiative is the partnership between the Emirates Institute of Finance and Said Business School at the University of Oxford. They offer a Leadership Development Program (LDP) that focuses on cultivating exceptional leaders through enhanced leadership and professional skills development⁸⁷.

Another aspect of boundaryless HR that has gained prominence is the collaboration between Human Resources and other business units. The Covid-19 pandemic served as a catalyst for breaking down silos and implementing necessary solutions to remain operational. For example, during the pandemic, the Ministry of Human Resources and Emiratization (MoHRE) introduced two pivotal policies: Redundancy and Restructuring, and a Remote Working policy. These initiatives were aimed at preparing the workforce for the crisis through comprehensive training and empowerment, in close cooperation with other business sectors⁸⁸.

In the realm of public sector innovation and digital transformation in the UAE, HR is playing an increasingly significant role. The Dubai Government Human Resources Department (DGHR) is dedicated to advancing government human resources by modernizing practices in line with local laws and international best practices. DGHR's efforts include updating regulatory and organizational structures, enhancing HR applications and practices, and leading the development of national capacities. Additionally, DGHR facilitates knowledge exchange across government agencies, providing them with modern methodologies and practical tools for HR management and development⁸⁹.

HR is also instrumental in supporting national ambitions alongside business objectives. The Dubai Health Authority (DHA) launched the Elite Programme, an innovative initiative aimed at attracting nationals to various sectors and specializations within the DHA. This program aligns with the Emiratization policy, enhancing the recruitment of national talents into specialist positions, as highlighted by Ahmed Al Nuaimi, CEO of the DHA's Joint Corporate Support Services⁹⁰.

Further examples of HR's strategic role in the UAE include:

- **Masdar's Talent Development Programs:** Masdar, a leader in renewable energy, has implemented comprehensive talent development programs that focus on continuous learning and adaptation. These programs are designed to ensure that employees are not only technically proficient but also equipped with leadership and innovation skills necessary for the evolving energy sector.
- **e&'s Digital Transformation Initiatives:** Telecom giant e& has embraced digital transformation within its HR practices by incorporating AI-driven analytics to optimize talent management and recruitment processes. This approach allows for a more dynamic HR function that can better predict staffing needs and improve employee retention strategies.
- **DP World's Global Education Program:** DP World has established a global education program aimed at developing a diverse workforce capable of handling complex logistical challenges. This program includes partnerships with international educational institutions to provide employees with access to cutting-edge training in logistics and supply chain management.
- **ADNOC's Wellbeing Programs:** The Abu Dhabi National Oil Company (ADNOC) has implemented advanced wellbeing programs that go beyond physical health to include mental and emotional support services. These programs are part of ADNOC's broader HR strategy to ensure a healthy, engaged, and productive workforce.
- **Dubai Police's Smart HR Initiatives:** The Dubai Police force has integrated smart technology into their HR operations, using AI and machine learning to enhance various HR functions, including payroll management, performance evaluations, and recruitment processes. This technological integration has increased efficiency and allowed HR staff to focus on more strategic tasks.
- **Emirates Group's Career Development Centers:** Emirates Group operates dedicated career development centers that offer training and development opportunities tailored to the needs of their employees. These centers support career growth and skill enhancement in alignment with the company's strategic objectives.

These examples from the UAE demonstrate how boundaryless HR practices are not just theoretical concepts but active, practical strategies being adopted to drive innovation, adaptability, and growth within organizations across various sectors. By integrating these practices, organizations in the UAE are not only redefining HR roles but also enhancing their overall business agility and responsiveness to changing market dynamics.

Saudi Arabia

HR has undergone a remarkable evolution, transitioning from a primarily administrative function to a strategic partner within businesses. Haithem Al Balawi, CHRO at John Hopkins Aramco Healthcare, emphasizes the critical role HR plays in organizational success, especially in Saudi Arabia where economic diversification and talent development are top priorities⁹¹. Nowadays, HR is centered on utilizing data-driven insights, boosting employee engagement, and promoting a diverse and inclusive workplace, thereby earning a significant role in collaborating with top leadership to align human capital strategies with overarching business goals.

In another instance of HR integrating with technology to enhance operational efficiency, Infosys, a major Indian tech firm, signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Saudi Arabian oil giant Aramco to enhance Aramco's employee learning and development experiences through advanced HR data and analytics, automation tools, and artificial intelligence⁹².

HR is also increasingly working in tandem with other departments such as Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). For example, Almarai collaborated with the Authority of People with Disabilities to train, qualify, and employ individuals with disabilities. This partnership aligns with Almarai's CSR initiatives, creating an inclusive workplace that supports over 500 employees with disabilities, as noted by Fahad Aldrees, CHRO of Almarai⁹³.

Additionally, Waleed N. Al-Ghonaim, Assistant Deputy Minister for Skills & Training at the Ministry of Human Resources & Social Development in Saudi Arabia, highlights the importance of a well-crafted rewards and recognition strategy in enhancing employee experience, fostering loyalty, reducing turnover, and enriching the organization's value proposition to attract potential hires⁹⁴. Further examples of HR's strategic role in KSA include:

- **Saudi Telecom Company's (STC) Talent Management Programs:** STC has implemented sophisticated talent management strategies to identify and nurture high-potential employees, ensuring leadership continuity and fostering a culture of excellence and innovation.

- **SABIC's Global Competency Framework:** SABIC has developed a global competency framework to standardize skills and behaviors across its workforce worldwide. This framework helps align employee capabilities with the company's strategic objectives, promoting a unified corporate culture and driving global performance.
- **The National Industrial Development and Logistics Program (NIDLP) HR Initiatives:** As part of Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030, the NIDLP includes HR initiatives aimed at enhancing the skills of the Saudi workforce to meet the demands of industrial and logistical sectors, supporting the country's aim to become a leading industrial powerhouse and global logistics hub.

These initiatives demonstrate how HR in Saudi Arabia is not just supporting but actively driving the strategic objectives of organizations across various sectors, aligning workforce capabilities with the nation's ambitious economic goals.

Qatar

HR functions are being significantly transformed as organizations in Qatar adopt employee-centric models to empower their workforce and improve the overall employee experience.

Ooredoo, a leading telecommunications operator in Qatar, has recently demonstrated its commitment to human capital development with the appointment of Eman Al Khater, a Qatari national, as Chief Human Resources Officer. This move aligns with the company's strategic focus on 'Building Capabilities of the Future,' placing Human Resources at the forefront of its development agenda. Ooredoo's innovative HR initiatives are tailored to help employees unlock and develop their potential within a dynamic and performance-oriented workplace, supported by top-tier professional mentors. A key aspect of these efforts is the Qatarisation programme, which aims to provide career development opportunities for Qatari nationals, facilitating their growth within the organization⁹⁵.

Antonio Schulthess, the Chief People Officer at Qatar Airways, expressed pride in the airline's ability to deliver world-class services, a feat made possible by the commitment of its employees. He emphasized the airline's success in fostering a culture of innovation and creativity, highlighted by receiving the Brilliance in Employee Engagement Award. This recognition was for the Employee Experience team's CSR initiative during Breast Cancer Awareness Month, themed 'Think Pink,' which united staff in raising awareness and support for the Qatar Cancer Society. Additionally, Qatar Airways engages in various other CSR activities throughout the year, including initiatives promoting environmental sustainability, autism awareness, mental health and wellness, and encouraging sports and healthy lifestyles. The airline was also awarded the Brilliance in Use of Technology in Internal Communications Award for its PeopleX mobile app, which was developed in collaboration between the HR Employee Experience and IT teams⁹⁶. This app offers a user-friendly digital platform that provides essential tools and resources to employees, enhancing internal engagement and satisfaction. Further examples of HR innovation in Qatar include:

- **Sidra Medicine's Leadership Training Programs:** Sidra Medicine has implemented leadership training programs designed to enhance the skills of their medical and administrative staff, ensuring that leaders are well-equipped to handle the complexities of a modern medical institution.
- **Commercial Bank of Qatar's Wellness Initiatives:** The Commercial Bank of Qatar has launched comprehensive wellness programs aimed at improving the physical and mental health of its employees. These initiatives include fitness challenges, health screenings, and mental health days to encourage a balanced lifestyle.
- **Vodafone Qatar's Digital Workforce Solutions:** Vodafone Qatar has introduced various digital solutions aimed at streamlining HR processes and enhancing workforce productivity. These include automated systems for performance management and digital platforms for effective communication and collaboration among teams.

Conclusion

Ultimately, our research results indicate that:

- The examples from Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Qatar illustrate a strong emphasis on fostering human development as a key strategy for driving economic and societal progress in these countries.
- HR departments are refining recruitment methods, enhancing skill sets, improving communication channels, and promoting better work-life balance. They are also implementing continuous training and talent development programs aimed at fostering more employee-centric workplace policies and practices.
- The integration of advanced technologies like artificial intelligence into HR processes is enabling organizations across these countries to enhance operational efficiency significantly.
- Additionally, our research underscores the necessity for ongoing collaboration between HR and other departments such as Finance, IT, Governance, Risk and Compliance, and core business functions. This collaboration is crucial in creating optimal work environments that support both employee and business growth.
- There is a notable shift towards strategic HR management, where HR leaders are not just executors of policies but also key strategists in shaping organizational culture and employee engagement.
- The growing focus on sustainability and CSR in HR practices reflects a broader commitment to ethical business practices and social responsibility, aligning with global trends towards more conscientious corporate behavior.
- The rise of remote and hybrid work models has prompted HR to become more adaptive and responsive to the changing dynamics of the workplace, ensuring that policies remain relevant and supportive of diverse workforce needs.

These initiatives collectively highlight a regional commitment to transforming HR from a support function to a central, strategic pillar within organizations, crucial for long-term sustainability and competitiveness in the global market.





Evolving Leadership to Drive Human Performance.

Evolving leadership enhances human performance by promoting adaptability, emotional intelligence, and empowerment in a dynamic environment, thus boosting employee engagement and productivity. By emphasizing continuous learning, collaboration, and a clear vision, leaders establish a foundation for sustained performance improvement and organizational success.

In the dynamic environments of the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), and Qatar, the role of leadership in promoting human performance is increasingly critical as these nations pursue economic diversification and growth⁹⁷. The evolving business landscape demands visionary and adaptive leadership styles that transcend traditional approaches. Leaders today must be agile, empathetic, and dedicated to unlocking the full potential of their teams.

It is crucial to understand the specific roles and responsibilities of these leaders to appreciate their impact on both business performance and human development in these vibrant regions⁹⁸. According to the Deloitte Middle East 2024 Pulse Survey, 66% of respondents recognize that leadership is vitally important in enhancing human performance. However, only 56% believe that their organizations are making significant strides in transforming leadership roles to better support and develop their workforce.

This chapter focuses on the critical roles played by senior leaders and board members as their organizations adapt to new realities. In the UAE, KSA, and Qatar, these leaders are pivotal in steering their organizations toward sustainable human development.⁹⁹ Research shows that while many leaders in these regions are confident in their ability to improve human capabilities, engage employees, and achieve environmental, social, and governance (ESG) goals, there is often an overestimation of progress, with many still relying on outdated performance metrics.

To truly prioritize human performance, leaders need to overcome several challenges. For example, a substantial number of executives continue to work in isolation, only collaborating occasionally on specific projects or partnerships. Achieving the desired human and business outcomes requires a shift toward integrated, cross-functional leadership models and a change in mindset that may be unfamiliar to many.

This transition demands new standards for leadership accountability across the organization. Furthermore, it is essential for leaders at all levels to not only adopt innovative management practices but also to set a strong example themselves. Adopting a boundary-less approach to human resources is crucial, embedding people management expertise across all levels and functional areas of the organization.

UAE

Leaders in the UAE are spearheading innovative approaches to boost human performance within their organizations. This transformative effort encompasses a comprehensive strategy that includes redefining organizational priorities, updating governance models, and enhancing psychological safety for team members. A prominent initiative is the UAE's National Agenda 2021, which establishes clear objectives for key sectors such as education, healthcare, the economy, and broader societal needs, with a strong emphasis on human capital investment¹⁰⁰. This strategic focus is demonstrated through initiatives like the Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum Foundation, which awards scholarships and offers resources for Emirati youth to advance their education and develop their skills¹⁰¹.

Additionally, governance structures in the UAE are being adapted to empower employees and instill a sense of ownership among them. The UAE Cabinet's introduction of long-term visas for select professionals and investors is an example of this, aimed at retaining top talent and attracting skilled workers to foster national growth¹⁰². The creation of roles such as the UAE Minister of State for Artificial Intelligence and the UAE Minister of State for Advanced Technology further highlights the nation's commitment to nurturing innovation and technological progression, thereby providing a stimulating environment for employees to innovate and embrace new methodologies.

Furthermore, prioritizing psychological safety in the workplace is a key focus for UAE leaders, recognizing its significance in enhancing employee well-being and performance. For instance, Emirates Group, a major regional employer, has launched initiatives centred on mental health and well-being, offering support and resources to employees dealing with personal challenges.¹⁰³ This approach is part of a larger trend towards cultivating a workplace culture characterized by openness, trust, and cooperative collaboration. To augment these strategies, additional examples from the UAE include:

- **Abu Dhabi's Ghadan 21 accelerator program**, which is designed to drive the emirate's development through investments in business, innovation, and people, is facilitating business reforms that make it easier for organizations to attract, retain, and develop talent.

- **Dubai's Smart City Initiative** enhances digital skills among its workforce by integrating advanced technologies across city operations, thereby preparing employees for future challenges and opportunities in a digitally driven world.
- **The Dubai Future Foundation's initiatives** encourage employees to engage in futuristic learning and development programs that emphasize critical thinking and innovative problem-solving skills.

These measures collectively underscore the UAE's proactive approach in reshaping leadership frameworks to better support and enhance human performance, thus ensuring sustained organizational success.

Saudi Arabia

Leaders in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) are actively pioneering initiatives aimed at enhancing human performance within their organizations, guided by the strategic objectives outlined in Saudi Vision 2030. This ambitious plan seeks to diversify the economy, empower the youth, and improve quality of life, with a significant focus on bolstering education and skill development.¹⁰⁴ For instance, the King Abdullah Scholarship Program enables Saudi nationals to pursue higher educational opportunities abroad, preparing the workforce to excel in an increasingly dynamic economic landscape.

Moreover, KSA's leaders are reforming governance structures to increase transparency and accountability.¹⁰⁵ The establishment of the Saudi Authority for Intellectual Property (SAIP) and the Saudi Data and Artificial Intelligence Authority (SDAIA) highlights the nation's dedication to fostering innovation and safeguarding intellectual property. These entities not only drive technological progress but also support an environment that nurtures creativity and entrepreneurial spirit among employees.¹⁰⁶

In addition to focusing on education and governance reforms, Saudi leaders are prioritizing psychological safety in the workplace to boost employee well-being and performance. For example, Saudi Aramco, one of the largest oil companies globally, has introduced various initiatives that promote mental health support and encourage a healthy work-life balance, underscoring the increasing awareness of the critical role that employee well-being plays in achieving business success.¹⁰⁷

Further expanding on these efforts, additional examples from KSA include:

- **Neom's Investment in Futuristic Technologies:** As part of Vision 2030, the Neom project is investing heavily in cutting-edge technologies and infrastructure to create a smart city that emphasizes sustainable living and innovation, providing a multitude of opportunities for professional growth and development in new industries.
- **Public Investment Fund Programs:** The Public Investment Fund (PIF) has launched several initiatives to attract top talent and invest in skills training within sectors such as entertainment, renewable energy, and tourism, which are pivotal to the country's economic diversification efforts.
- **Taqat and HADAF Support:** The Taqat employment program and the Human Resources Development Fund (HADAF) are enhancing job matching and career development services, aiming to align individual skills with market needs and drive higher employment rates among Saudis.

Through these comprehensive strategies, leaders in KSA are not only enhancing the professional capabilities of their workforce but are also laying a robust foundation for sustained economic growth and social advancement, aligning with the overarching goals of Saudi Vision 2030.

Qatar

Leaders in Qatar are at the forefront of developing innovative paradigms aimed at boosting human performance within their organizations. The Qatar National Vision 2030 provides a strategic blueprint for sustainable development and economic diversification.¹⁰⁸ A key element of this vision is the focus on education and skills enhancement, as demonstrated by the Qatar Foundation's Education City. This initiative hosts campuses of prestigious international universities and is dedicated to equipping both Qatari nationals and residents with the necessary skills to foster innovation and drive economic progress.¹⁰⁹

Furthermore, Qatar is refining its governance structures to enhance transparency and operational efficiency. The formation of bodies such as the Qatar Financial Centre Regulatory Authority (QFCRA) and the Qatar National Cyber Security Centre (QNCSC) reflects a strong commitment to fostering an innovative and secure business environment.¹¹⁰ These entities play crucial roles in safeguarding intellectual property and data, thereby bolstering confidence among employees and business stakeholders.

In addition to these structural advancements, Qatar is aligning with international best practices by emphasizing psychological safety in the workplace. For example, Qatar Airways has been proactive in implementing comprehensive well-being programs that support the mental, physical, and emotional health of its employees. Such initiatives promote a resilient and high-performing organizational culture. Expanding on these initiatives, additional examples from Qatar include:

- **Sidra Medicine's Employee Development Programs:** Sidra Medicine has launched several initiatives aimed at professional and personal growth, including leadership training and health and wellness programs, which are designed to improve job satisfaction and employee retention.
- **Aspire Zone Foundation's Employee Engagement Strategies:** Known for its world-class sports facilities, the Aspire Zone Foundation also excels in employee engagement by offering various sports and health programs that enhance the well-being of its staff, thereby improving their work-life balance and productivity.
- **Qatar Science & Technology Park's Innovation Incentives:** The park actively supports tech innovation through collaborations between academia and industry, providing a platform for employees to engage in cutting-edge research and development activities.

These efforts demonstrate Qatar's proactive approach in reshaping leadership practices to enhance human performance, supporting the nation's ambitions for continued growth and prosperity under the Qatar National Vision 2030.

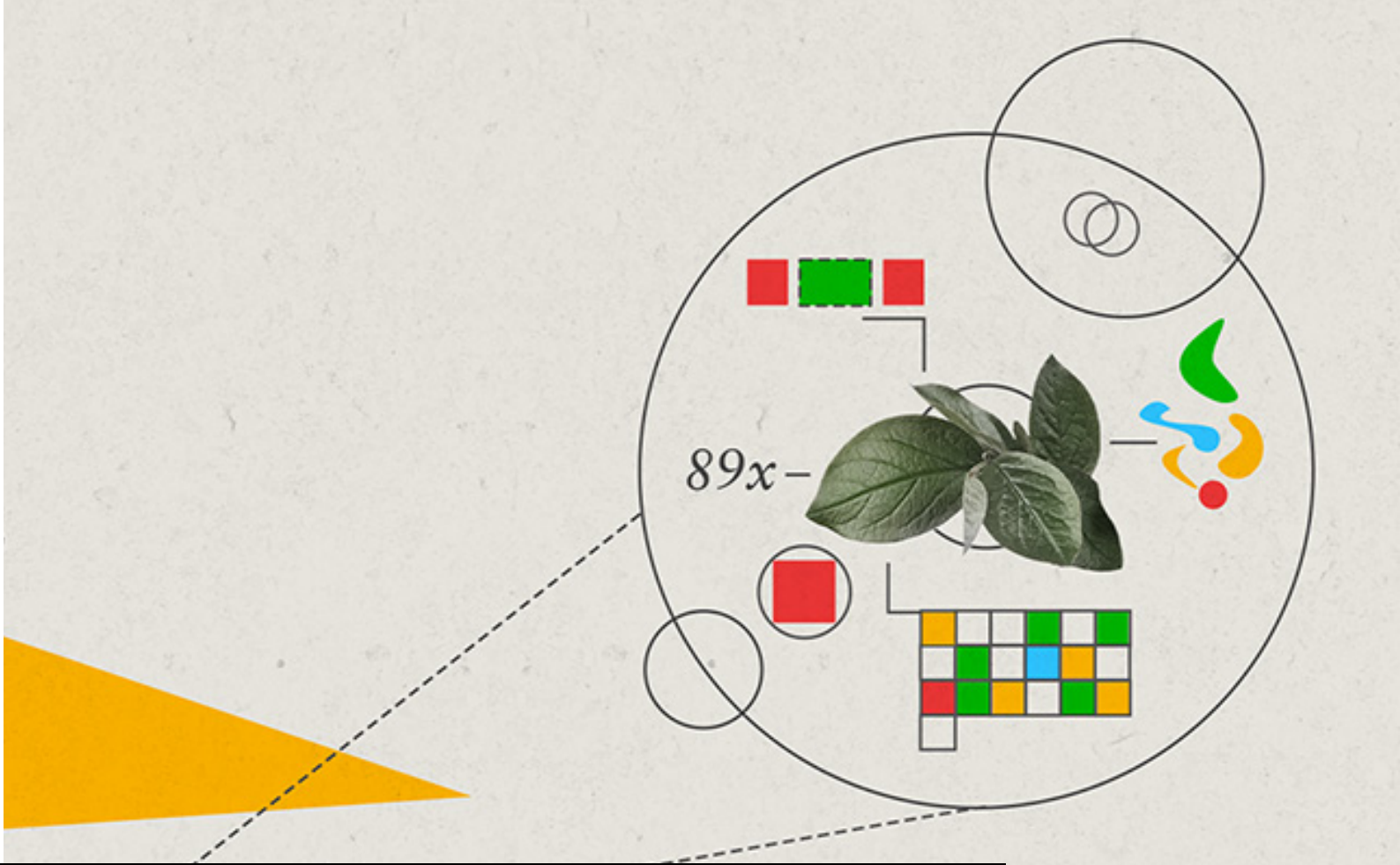
Conclusion

Ultimately, our research results indicate that:

Leaders in the UAE, KSA, and Qatar are aligning their organizational strategies with their national visions. These visions, which focus on economic diversification, educational advancement, and sustainable development, underscore the vital importance of human capital in realizing long-term objectives.

- Governance structures are being transformed to enhance transparency, efficiency, and innovation. Institutions such as the Saudi Authority for Intellectual Property (SAIP), the Qatar Financial Centre Regulatory Authority (QFCRA), and the UAE Minister of State for Advanced Technology are pivotal in nurturing creativity, safeguarding intellectual property, and propelling technological progress.
- The significance of psychological safety in the workplace is increasingly acknowledged, with entities like Emirates Group in the UAE, Saudi Aramco in KSA, and Qatar Airways in Qatar launching initiatives aimed at promoting employee well-being and mental health. Programs like Majid Al Futtaim's "Net Positive" sustainability strategy and Saudi Aramco's well-being initiatives contribute to a supportive work environment where employees can excel.
- There is a move towards integrated, cross-functional leadership models that dismantle silos and foster collaboration. This approach encourages innovation, creativity, and idea sharing across various levels and departments, thereby enhancing both human performance and business results.
- The pursuit of enhancing human performance is a continuous process, with leaders in the UAE, KSA, and Qatar dedicated to ongoing development. They are prepared to adapt and embrace new ideas, technologies, and methods to maintain a competitive edge in a swiftly changing global landscape.

Ultimately, the evolution of leadership in the UAE, KSA, and Qatar is essential for organizations that aim to succeed in the current dynamic business climate. By adopting principles of agility, empathy, inclusivity, talent development, and technological integration, leaders are poised to elevate human performance to unprecedented levels.¹¹¹ As these nations advance and diversify their economies, the role of effective leadership becomes increasingly crucial in unlocking their full potential.



Concluding remarks

The speed at which the boundaryless world is evolving will likely continue to accelerate. While our research shows that many organizations haven't yet made the important mindset and operational shifts needed to respond to this imminent future, it also shows that knowing is not the barrier. Where organizations are generally getting stuck in the doing: making real, actionable progress toward unlocking human performance.



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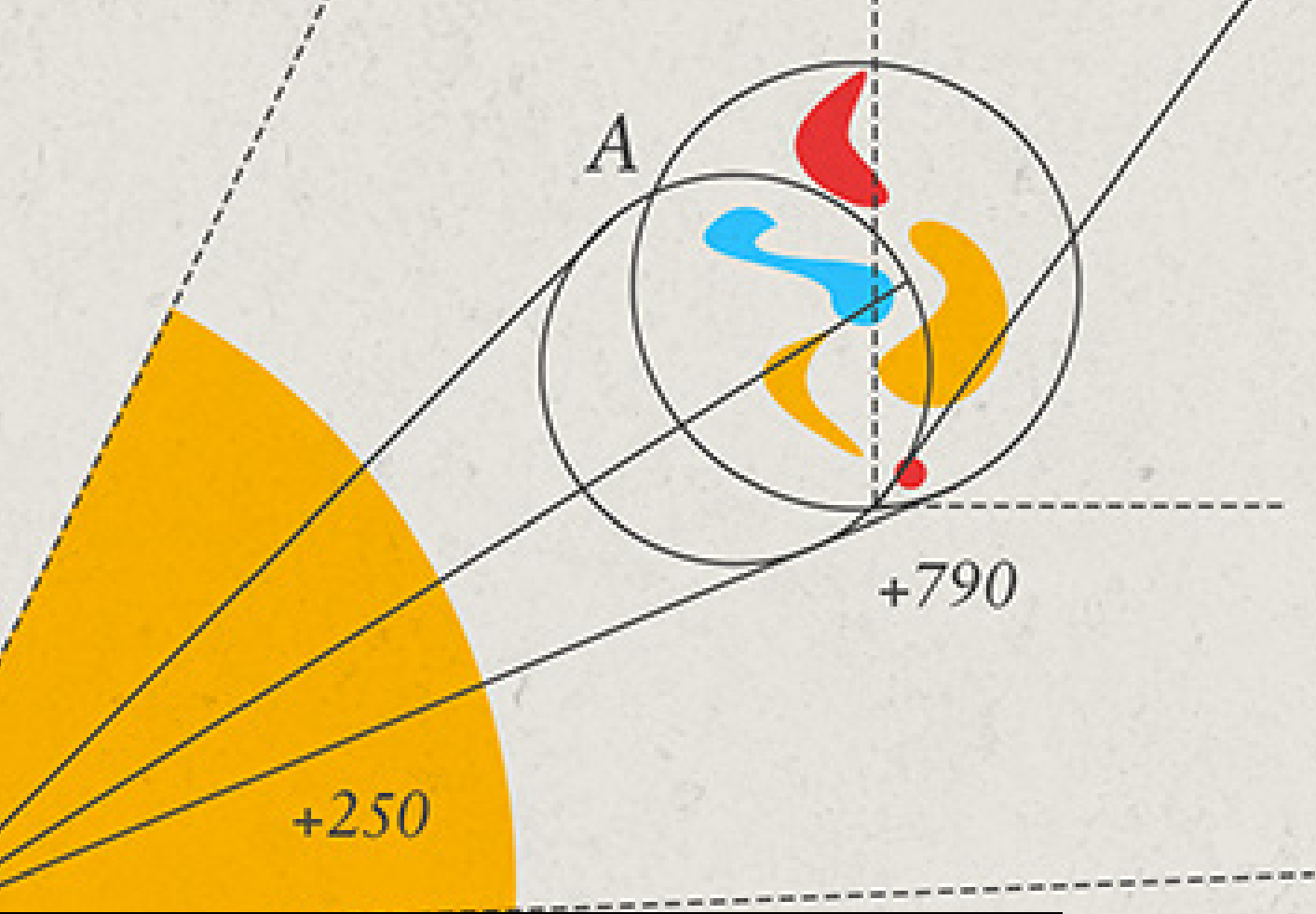
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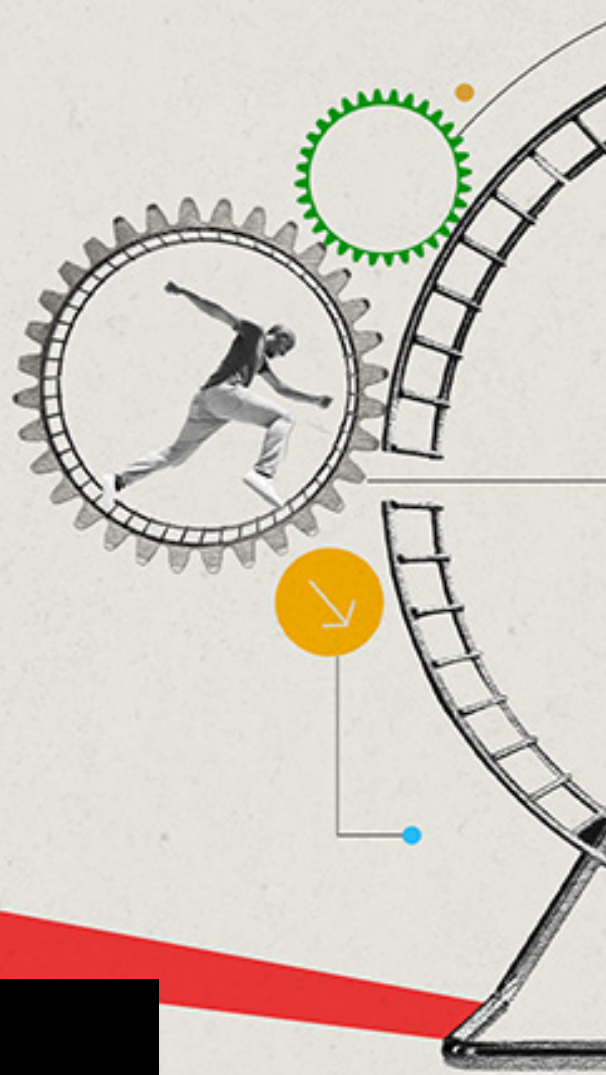
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Endnotes

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