

Emiratis need career exploration

Negative attitudes towards private sector employment are due to lack of education about options

- By Rania Moussly, Staff Reporter
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The Emirati youth's main reason for not seeking employment in the private sector is due to ignorance about their career options away from the public sector.

UAE University (UAEU) academics found education at all levels about career options outside the public sector will increase Emirati youth's willingness to migrate to private sector jobs.

"Some of them don't know about the private sector, not even in theory," said Professor Ingo Forstenlechner, Assistant Professor at the faculty of Business and Economics at UAEU. "There are Emirati families where the entire family works in the public sector."

He added that when a youth is surrounded by a family entirely employed in public sector jobs such as in the municipalities, the police force and the military, as far as they are concerned that is their world of work because they do not know any better.

These findings were revealed in a recent research study conducted by Professor Forstenlechner, Professor Mohammad Madi and Dr Hassan Selim from UAEU. The academics have conducted the largest recorded representative sample of almost 2,300 young Emiratis enrolled in higher education for their year-long research sponsored by the Emirates Foundation.

Education about career options

"Just knowing about alternative options will increase their willingness to work in the private sector," said Professor Forstenlechner.

These findings were documented in academic paper: Career Theory in an Emerging Arab Gulf Economy: the Impact of Expectations and Self-Efficacy, which investigated the Emirati youth's attitudes towards public and private sector employment.

The findings are to be presented to a private panel this week, a step viewed as one closer to levelling out the demographics of the private sector workforce.

The paper states that in modern, yet still tribally organised and influenced societies of the Arab Gulf states, motivating indigenous youths to actively explore career options in the private sector poses challenges for years to come.

However, the challenges can be overcome through behavioural modification and the creation of sufficient opportunities for the Emirati youth's migration to employment in the private sector.

"The government needs to tell people there will not be public sector jobs for everybody for eternity," said Professor Forstenlechner. "To really support career exploration initiatives, bringing knowledge about careers to all educational levels should be much stronger than they are right now."

Easy life

For Abdul Salalm Jasem Mohammad Al Hosani, 24, a reform of the youth's entire mentality is essential to increasing Emirati presence in the private sector.

"The mentality of Emirati males and youth in general is that they want an easy ride," said the recent graduate, now employed as an engineer at the National Petroleum Construction Company (NPCC). NPCC is a semi-private public joint stock company established in 1973 to facilitate the fabrication of steel structures required by the onshore and offshore oil and gas production industry.

"Logically, if someone is used to an easy life surrounded with friends who take it easy, you can't expect them to willingly take up hard work," added Al Hosani.

Al Hosani is a self-professed hard worker who works up to 13-hour days and weekends on oil and gas rigs under the blistering sun, simply because of his love of learning.

"I personally believe that I need to work hard while I'm young to learn as much as possible and gain experience," he said. "The place to gain this knowledge is through hard work."

However, for his peers, Al Hosani believes shorter working hours and longer holidays are a priority.

"The problem is they think that they can rest now and in a few years when they've gained experience start to work harder," said Al Hosani.

Security

Yet, according the UAEU study it is the youth's confidence in their own abilities to successfully compete with expatriates in the private sector that also hinders them.

"Even if they are unhappy with their current public sector job and want to change they are scared they won't find another job," said Al Hosani. The research paper touches on many issues pertaining to Emirati private sector work attitudes, such as stereotypes and structural systems. However, it states another major factor deterring the Emirati youth from employment in the private sector is security.

"Job security is non-existent in the private sector, something nationals are looking for," said Professor Forstenlechner. "Another thing is their built-in expectation of being provided a comfortable public sector job, which is an expectation that might not be possible to fulfil for every Emirati person reaching working age right now."

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