Progress for Women and Leadership in Qatar

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Progress for Women and Leadership in Qatar, Sweden, and the UAE: Opportunities and Challenges of a Shifting Planet

Session Chair
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Session Description (up to 80 words)
The purpose of this session is to present findings from three country-specific studies focused on understanding the progress and experiences of women and leadership in two Middle Eastern countries and one Scandinavian country: Qatar, Sweden, and the UAE. This session highlights two extremes—countries that rank at the bottom of The Global Gender Gap Report (2011) and one at the top, which will create an environment for a rich discussion after the presentations amongst panelists and attendees.

Session Abstract
In 1994, Harvard Professor Rosabeth Moss Kanter argued that it had become essential for business success to let “talent rise to the top regardless of where it is found and whether it is male or female” (p. 11). Today, all types of organizations (i.e., public, private, and social) are in search of strong, competent leadership and many look to both men and women to fill these roles. Of course this is not necessarily true in all regions of the world, but advances have been made. According to the UN Statistics Division (Geohive, 2010), women now make up 49.8% of the global population. In addition, nearly 1 billion women will enter the global economy for the first time in the coming decade alone. And they will dramatically reshape the world of business and economies (Aguirre, 2012). This includes the potential of more women in the pipeline for management and leadership positions at all levels in the wide variety of organizations located around this shifting planet. The studies presented in this session will provide insights into unique populations and perspectives that will be helpful for educators, scholars, and practitioners who conduct research on and design leadership programs for women in these countries. It will also provide ideas for important hypotheses and directions for future research.

The purpose of this session is to present findings from three country-specific studies focused on understanding the progress and experiences of women and leadership in two Middle Eastern countries and one Scandinavian: Qatar, Sweden, and the UAE. The first panelist will present a study that looked at data from nearly 200 Qatar organizations. She will outline the state of affairs in Qatar as it relates to the presence of women in senior leadership positions. The second panelist will present the results of her team’s exploratory phenomenological study, where they interviewed 15 Swedish female CEO’s, lawyers, and entrepreneurs. This study focused on the understanding why Sweden is one of the world’s best countries for women to live and work, how
they feel women are treated in the workplace, and what experiences have shaped their lives in order to enable women to succeed in ways they believe women in other countries cannot. The final paper presented will discuss the interactions of female students within team settings. Based on data collected in university teamwork settings, the panelist will discuss how these results relate to developing leadership competencies in these female students as they shift from a world of infrequent interaction with men to one where such interaction is the norm.

This engaging session is unique as it highlights two extremes—countries that rank at the bottom of The Global Gender Gap Report (2011) and one at the top. It is this historical difference combined with a shared contemporary goal of facilitating women’s contribution to the workplace and larger society that will create a strong foundation for a rich discussion after the presentations amongst panelists and attendees.

**PAPER 1: Women and Leadership in Qatar**

*Keywords: Female, MENA, Women, Leader, Middle East, Qatar, GCC.*

**Co-Authors**
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**Short Description (up to 80 words)**
The purpose of this study was to research the state of affairs in Qatar in terms of the presence (or absence) of women in senior business leadership positions generally, and also where they are located within organizations (e.g., board members, chief officers, vice presidents, top management, division or unit heads). It is based on data mined from a major database in the Middle East North Africa (MENA), that tracks information about public and private companies in that region.

**Abstract (500-1000 words)**
Studies coming from any discipline (e.g., education, management, psychology, HRD, leadership) on women and leadership in the Middle East region are just now starting to emerge. Yet, Zahra (2011) argued that the Middle East is actually “fertile ground” (p. 18) for this type of scholarship. The unique political, social, and economic climates within this region bring complexity to the role of women and the challenges they face in the workplace, particularly in relation to management and leadership roles. Yet, progress for women has been made within many of these countries. According to the Arab Women Leadership Outlook (Dubai Women Establishment, 2011), “Over 51% of the female population in Kuwait is now economically active, compared to just over 18% in Saudi Arabia. On the other hand, over the last few years, a new generation of political leaders has promoted women in leadership positions across sectors. Likewise in Bahrain, the UAE, Jordan, Oman and Qatar, among other countries, political leaders have recently shown strong commitment to women’s rights and empowerment. While countries like Tunisia, Morocco and Egypt made advances for women decades ago and had significant progress, younger countries, such as the UAE has made many achievements for women in only one generation. But even taking these strides into account, Arab women on the whole are still less economically and politically empowered than women in other parts of the world” (p. 15).
Clearly progress has been made, but other reports are not so optimistic. For example, The Global Gender Gap Report of 2011 reported that the countries of the MENA region occupied the last place in their rankings (WEF, 2012). In fact, according to the Dubai Women Establishment (2011), Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) have actually deteriorated slightly in the gender gap rankings over a five-year period. Yet, a literature review specifically about female business leadership in the Middle East shows a rise in numbers and status. Obviously, the literature is mixed in terms of reporting progress for women in this part of the world generally, and more particularly about women in business leadership.

Although generalizations can be made about the Middle East, each country therein is unique. The State of Qatar is a sovereign Arab state, and it is totally surrounded by the Persian Gulf, except to its south where it borders with Saudi Arabia. It is one of the regions wealthiest countries because of its oil and natural gas. In fact, in 2010 this country had the world’s highest GDP per capita. Similar to the UAE and some other countries in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), foreign workers substantially outnumber nationals (approximately 250,000), with only 32.6 percent of the population being female.

Qatar has shown commitment to women’s rights and employment in recent decades, yet the country ranks 123 of 130 countries in the 2008 global gender gap index rankings (Dubai Women’s Establishment, 2011). Qatar has the strongest ratio in terms of female university graduates in the region; in Qatar the gender ratio in universities is four-to-one in favor of women. The legal climate is changing as well. According to the Arab Women Leadership Outlook report (2011), “Family law was promulgated in Qatar in 2007, giving women more rights in marriage, divorce, child custody and inheritance” (p. 61). So far, with all of this information about the progress of women, the study of women and leadership in Qatar is in its infancy. Currently, no literature provides an in-depth descriptive look at the number of women employed in any sector, including public and private companies. Yet, these types of initial studies can be foundational in setting the stage for future work that can then explore the developmental experiences of those who have succeeded within Qatar.

The purpose of this study was to research the presence or absence of women in senior business leadership positions in the State of Qatar; it also looked at where the women leaders are located within organizations (e.g., board members, chief officers, vice presidents, top management, division or unit heads). This study is part of a larger research project that is investigating the presence of women in the six countries of the GCC (Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, and the UAE). A comparative study of all six countries is planned once all of the data for individual country explorations are prepared. This research is based on data available from the Zawya database that tracks information about public and private companies (Zawya, n.d.). Zawya is a major online business intelligence platform that focuses on the MENA region and includes detailed profiles on companies within the private and public sector, as well as comprehensive industry and asset class research. Companies with 300 employees or more (n=185) were included in this study and available demographics were also included (e.g., sector, ownership, number of employees).
The aim of this presentation is to deliver the details of the study, review its value, and discuss plans for similar studies in various countries within the MENA region. We will present detailed statistical findings and discuss the important contributions of this study. For example, understanding the presence and development of female business leaders can provide an important baseline from which to measure future progress and track movement toward a more equitable workforce environment. This is one of the first known scholarly studies conducted on the presence of women leaders in Qatar. This study can provide useful insights for government leaders, educators, scholars, practitioners, and others who work to help prepare women for leadership in the MENA region. The presence of women in leadership positions in all sectors in this region is growing, and attention is needed in terms of academic research and publication.

PAPER 2: Women and Leadership in Sweden

Keywords: Female, Sweden, Women, Leader, Scandinavia

Co-Authors
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Short Description (up to 80 words)
The purpose of this exploratory phenomenological study was to learn more about one of the best places in the world for women to live and work—Sweden. Fifteen CEO’s, lawyers, and entrepreneurs were interviewed to understand the lived experiences of Swedish women in leadership. Themes, interview quotes, and implications will be shared to learn from these female Swedish leaders who, more than women in other countries, experience more pay equity, leadership and management opportunities, and find more work-life balance.

Abstract (500-1000 words)
Gender equality is strongest in the Scandinavian countries (Claire, 2012). After ranking first in the world in 2006 and 2007, Sweden now ranks 4th on The Global Gender Gap Report (2011), while the United States is currently listed as 17th, Qatar at 111th, and the UAE at 103rd. There are 135 countries listed in the report. Sweden presents itself as a fascinating case study in the transformative power of gender equity in the lives of women. Over the past twenty years, Sweden has experienced a rapid increase in labor force participation (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2011). Swedish culture is more susceptible to fostering female leaders due to the vital role egalitarian ideology plays in everyday life. In Sweden, gender equality pervades the entire social system (Haas, 1986). Therefore, it is reasonable to infer that this frame of mind would translate well into the workforce and government policy decisions, especially those made on behalf of women.

Central to the lives of women in Sweden is motherhood and family. However, in the past, this component has prevented women from staying in the labor force and progressing to leadership roles within all types of organizations. In recent years, however, Sweden's political and legislative strategies have succeeded, in many ways, in making it easier for women to combine both work and family life (Thomas and Hildingsson, 2009). A publicly subsidized network of childcare centers and child caretakers, labor union contracts that guarantee women’s equal employment opportunities and equal pay for comparable work, a school curriculum based on the
principle of equality between the sexes, and a devotion to promoting programs that give employers financial incentive to train and hire women in nontraditional occupations have played a large part in this national shift (Haas, 1986). Moreover, Swedes tend to see these government programs as particularly beneficial for the economy, since it prevents the nation's investment in women's education and expertise from going to waste (Orange, 2012). However, more than simply retaining women in the workforce, this legislation also addresses Sweden's parental leave policy and, as a result, fosters gender equity at home and has increased men's domestic involvement (Thomas & Hildingsson, 2009). As a result, women in Sweden are free to pursue their career goals, which means many women emerge as leaders in their respective organizations.

This presentation is based on qualitative, phenomenological research aimed at understanding why Sweden is one of the leaders in the world in cultivating an environment for women to succeed in the workplace. Within this holistic approach, persons are viewed as multi-dimensional and complex beings (Van Manen, 1990). The women involved in this study represent a diverse set of circumstances, personal histories, and lived experiences. These interviews allowed each woman to tell their unique stories. Data are derived from 15 in-depth interviews with influential women in both metropolitan and rural areas of Sweden. All 15 respondents serve in significant leadership positions: CEO’s, lawyers, entrepreneurs, and educators. The interviews were audio-taped with their permission and transcribed. Theme analysis was used to identify the findings. The women leaders ranged in age from 28 to 75 years of age.

The study asks: Why is Sweden the world’s best country for women to live and work? Specifically, how are women treated in the workplace? What experiences have shaped their lives in order to enable women to succeed in ways they believe women in other countries cannot? Likewise, what can women in the international community learn from Swedish women leaders?

In summary, the purpose of this presentation is to learn what makes Sweden a leader for women in the world? We will present themes from the interviews, specific quotes from the women, and include implications for other countries trying to improve the leadership gender gap. This study can provide meaningful insights for women educators, business professionals, and others interested in improving the gender equality and overall quality of life for women throughout the world.

PAPER 3: Women and Teams in the United Arab Emirates

Keywords: Female, Women, Teams, Education, UAE, GCC

Co-Authors
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Short Description (up to 80 words)
Given the rising participation of women in the workplace in Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, the purpose of this study is to begin to explore the interactions of female students within team settings. Based on data collected in university teamwork settings, it is expected that
this study will contribute to our understanding of the ways in which GCC women perceive their team experience and how they behave in a variety of team settings.

Abstract (500-1000 words)

Neal, Finlay and Tansey noted in 2005 that an increasing number of females were entering the workforce in Arab states, and in many case were rising to positions of leadership in both the public and private sectors, citing Salloum (2003), UNDP (2002) and Al-Lamki (1999) in support. The UNDP in 2003 stated that the number of females entering the workforce in almost all Arab countries was increasing yearly, both in absolute terms and proportionally; further, in most cases Arab women had equal access to education at all levels and are outperforming their male counterparts (UNDP, 2003). Growth in participation has been marked. Mostafa (2005) notes that while in 1960 women in the Arab world made up only 12 percent of the workforce, by 1995 this figure had increased to 30 percent. Al Shaikh (2004) estimated females to make up 20 percent of the labour force, compared with 40 percent globally, and 44 percent in the industrialized world.

These trends were seen as continuing as cited by the Arab Women Leadership Outlook (Dubai Women Establishment, 2011), “Over 51% of the female population in Kuwait is now economically active, compared to just over 18% in Saudi Arabia. On the other hand, over the last few years, a new generation of political leaders has promoted women in leadership positions across sectors. Likewise in Bahrain, the UAE, Jordan, Oman and Qatar, among other countries, political leaders have recently shown strong commitment to women’s rights and empowerment. While countries like Tunisia, Morocco and Egypt made advances for women decades ago and had significant progress, younger countries, such as the UAE has made many achievements for women in only one generation. But even taking these strides into account, Arab women on the whole are still less economically and politically empowered than women in other parts of the world” (p. 15).

In the United Arab Emirates (UAE) the rate of employment uptake by females started slowly but has grown rapidly. Mostafa (2005) estimated the proportion of female nationals in the workforce to have risen from 3.4 percent in 1980 to 13 percent in 1995. Official figures note the proportions to have been 13.7 percent (2001), 14.1 percent (2002), rising to 14.7 percent in 2003 (U.A.E. Yearbook, 2005). By 2010 (Dubai Women Establishment) that number had increased to 43% including 17% of all ministers in the country. This growth was both foreseen and intentional. As noted in 2005, for example, “as the U.A.E. Government forges ahead with its policy of emiratisation in an economic climate in which knowledge-dependent sectors are of paramount importance, women are seen as being more and more crucial to its success” (U.A.E. Yearbook, 2005, p. 238).

Related to significant efforts to increase the participation of Emiratis in the workforce, it is worth noting that female participation in higher education in the U.A.E. is very significant, and outnumber that for males. Females accounted for 62 percent of those seeking admission to further education by 2005 (U.A.E. Yearbook). This number mirrored international trends remaining steady as late as 2009 with 62% of university students being women (data from the U.A.E. Embassy in Washington, D.C.). Clearly females constitute a significant proportion of those in higher education and in the national workforce. These women are not only filling roles in government agencies but, also, in private sector companies where they are working in a
mixed-gender and mixed-culture settings. Indeed, as noted above, women are increasingly taking leadership roles in these settings and require education appropriate to these new roles.

Given the societal shift in the U.A.E. towards greater leadership roles for women, one of the competencies that U.A.E. higher education, particularly those institutions influenced by Western philosophies, is now bringing to females is the leadership ability to work in and lead teams. The aim of this presentation then is to highlight information regarding the experience of GCC women working to develop team leadership skills in university settings.

For this study data were collected from two different institutions of higher learning in the U.A.E. including one dedicated to the education of Emirati women and one open to men and women from any country. The sample from the first institution consists of 79 female, undergraduate, Emirati students while the sample from the second institution consists of 41 female, undergraduate students from the GCC (predominantly Emirati). Finally, for the sake of global comparability, the Emirati sample is also compared with a larger sample of women consisting of Anglo (n=87) and Asian (N=69), undergraduate students.

The results of the comparison of Emirati women with Anglo and Asian women find that Emirati and Asian women largely perceive their team experience as more characterized by conflict when compared with Anglo women and are more likely to accommodate that conflict by stifling their own voice in such situations. In the second stage of the study, negative perceptions of conflict and behaviors such as social loafing and absenteeism were lessened when Emirati women were working only with other women. Interestingly, the same tendency to stifle one’s own voice was higher in the homogenous team setting than it was in the mixed-gender setting.

These findings hold significant implications for Emirati and other GCC country women who are seeking to develop the skills needed to lead not only among their female peers but in mixed gender and culture settings as well. The results, then, are discussed in terms of assisting women in the GCC to develop the leadership competencies they need moving forward. As noted, GCC women are playing an increasingly significant role in almost every aspect of society, including situations where men and women interact more freely. A better understanding of the foundation from which they approach these leadership roles is key to creating the type of education and the working conditions that will encourage women’s personal growth and their contribution to their employers and the larger society.