

Why the UAE Has So Many Engaged Workers

Why such a high percentage of workers are engaged and satisfied in the United Arab Emirates

According to the Steelcase Global Report, twenty percent of employees are highly engaged and highly satisfied with their workplace in the United Arab Emirates, making it one of the most engaged and satisfied nations. As someone born and raised in Dubai, it did not surprise me to find that our country has some of the most engaged and satisfied workers in the world. I have seen first-hand how the culture has evolved, workplaces have transformed and people have come to appreciate where and how they work.

When I shared these results with my friends, they were amazed at such low levels of engagement around the world. Only 13 percent of global employees are highly engaged and highly satisfied. How is this possible? And why are UAE workers so much more engaged? These questions got me thinking, do these results depict the real picture? What makes UAE workers so highly engaged?

Compared to many Western nations, workers in the UAE work in a very traditional way. The majority of employees work either in a private office or a shared private office.

To answer these questions I asked my friends and networks if their work places allow them to do focus work, relax and rejuvenate, socialize or if their space inspires them. What about unplanned meetings – do they have a space that supports all this? Not surprisingly, most of them answered no. I learned that these things don't matter to workers in the UAE. **The majority of workers in the UAE have a lower standard of expectations when it comes to the workplace. In other words, they don't know what they don't have.** My conclusion aligns with the findings in the Steelcase Global Report which finds that the country an employee resides in and its cultural norms have an impact on employee perspectives about work and the physical workplace. It can influence how satisfied employees are with the workplace and their overall engagement levels.

Compared to many Western nations, workers in the UAE work in a very traditional way. The majority of employees work either in a private office or a shared private office, with 52 percent of Emirati employees working in shared private offices, compared to the global norm 37 percent. Few organizations (11 percent) embrace entirely open-plan spaces compared to the global average of 23 percent. Yet many Emirati employees say their workplaces don't allow workers to share projects and achievements, have access to real-time information about the company, or feel relaxed and calm at work.

The majority of UAE workforce is made up of expats from various countries. When they come to the UAE, “the land of opportunities”, they unconsciously compare the living and working standards to their home country which are often much different. Simply having a desk to call one’s own or a place to go each morning is an amenity appreciated by many. Many workers do not see anything missing from these standards even if their holistic wellbeing needs are not being met.

I see this as an opportunity for workers and organizations in the UAE. I felt compelled to tell my friends that their office is where they spent more than half of their day, and let them know how the workplace could meet their physical, cognitive and emotional needs. The workplace can help employees feel a sense of belonging to the organization, share their projects and ideas and of course, help workers concentrate on individual work or in groups and teams without being interrupted.

As our country and organizations evolve, there will be an opportunity for business leaders to see the workplace as a strategic asset that impacts employee engagement, meets the wellbeing needs of its employees and furthers business results.

Introducing New Research on Engagement + the Global Workplace

1/3 of workers in 17 of the world’s most important economies is disengaged, according to new research from Steelcase. Working with global research firm Ipsos, the Steelcase Global Report is the first to explore the relationship between engagement and the workplace.

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