

# Dubai's work and cultural environment

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Dubai has already emerged as a leading regional commercial hub offering world class infrastructure and a business environment second-to-none. But barriers for an easily successful work assignment in the UAE, particularly Dubai consist of a number of factors that make people exchanges more complicated—differences in principle, language and behavior in the work environment. Although business customs will vary somewhat in the region, by trying to understand Islam and Arab culture, an individual is in better position to be effective.

In Dubai, the work is demanding, going from 7 or 8 a. . to noon or 1 p. m. , when the midday heat encourages long lunches and perhaps naps; people work again from 4 to at least 8 p. m. Far more than government employment, private business is competitive and demanding, and the hours are long. For many businessmen, lunches are also business meetings, and sometimes international business timings mean that there is no real break at midday. Meetings in Dubai take a little getting used to as business executives are expected to arrive punctually, but can end up waiting a long time for the host.

Meetings, when they do eventually start, can go for hours without seemingly achieving anything tangible. It should be also pointed out that in the emirate, employees are more loyal to their companies and therefore are difficult to lure away even for big money. Negotiation and informal mediation or conciliation remain the most common means of resolving commercial disputes in Dubai. The scale and pace of development within the emirate over the past few years have, however, brought about an increased need for more formal dispute resolution services.

More recently, the growing desirability of Dubai as an investment destination and as a regional or international base for multinational companies, has created a demand for dispute resolution services. In ascriptive cultures characteristic of Dubai, status, which is derived from the job title or general characteristics such as age or birth, is what matters. Ascription oriented cultures tend to correspond with cultures which exhibit high power distance dimension (Jackson 357). Care needs to be taken regarding who represents an organization in negotiations in ascriptive-oriented cultures.

Representation of an organization in negotiations by young, high-fliers from an achievement oriented culture is often regarded by an ascriptive organization as an indication that the talks are not taken very seriously or even as a sign of disrespect. The size of the team can also be an issue: if the lead negotiator/ company representative is not accompanied by a suitably large team of assistants, then an ascriptive oriented organization can reach similar conclusions about its counterparts.

Dubai is more culturally South Asian, as compared to its rival emirate Abu Dhabi, which is more culturally Arabic. Traditional gender conventions weigh less heavily on expatriate women in Dubai than in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait or Abu Dhabi. Dubai, as a member of the UAE, also follows Islamic sharia and Arabic is its official language, but it was strongly influenced by the British and South Asian connection (Moran, Harris and Moran 338). Thus, in Dubai, Urdu (Hindustani) is readily spoken and understood by many Arabs.

Also, in the said emirate, expatriate workers are conspicuous on Fridays, when most have their day off. The challenge for a business executive when

operating on foreign soils, in this particular paper Dubai, is to understand and properly infer the different cultural signs. This could be significant in an expatriate work environment, as expatriates operate in a very uncertain environment, and the reality can be vicariously influenced by the culture that prevails within.

Inability to do this can end in severe difficulties for specific initiatives. In order to cooperate with rather than work against factors that are culturally related, it is essential to make out that all humans see society by means of a cultural prism and that, although cultural preconceptions may be shared by others within the organization and to an extent by those with the identical nationality, they may be foreign to those to whom the organizational venture is hoping to do business with.