



مؤسسة  
عبدالله الغرير  
Abdulla Al Ghurair  
Foundation

# The 3Cs of Bridging the Emirati Employment Gap

Accenture & The Abdulla  
Al Ghurair Foundation



We have been living through the most significant skill and job transformation since the early 19th century. This pressing need for rapid skills development comes at a time of crisis for youth unemployment. High percentages of youth are either unsuccessful at finding work or facing declining personal income, causing many to be concerned about whether they will be better off than previous generations.

In the UAE, leadership is adept at embracing change and turning crises into opportunities. Throughout its five decades as a nation, the country has constantly reinvented itself. Today, its leadership is riding the tidal wave that is technology, choosing to embrace it and all the benefits it will bring.

At Accenture, change is in our DNA. Accenture embraces the power of change to create 360° value and shared success for our clients, people, shareholders, partners, and communities. Our business is built on seeking technological solutions for the many challenges disruption is causing. We are committed to working with businesses and governments to create new employment and income-generating alternatives for young people and equipping job seekers with the relevant skills to thrive in the evolving economic landscape.

In a bid to increase the employability of Emirati youth in this fast-changing and digitally driven environment, Accenture has partnered with the Abdulla Al Ghurair Foundation. Together, we are working to drive upskilling programs for Emirati talent that will build the diverse workforce of the future. This paper shares relevant, innovative solutions based on first-hand research on how to equip Emirati youth with more of the necessary skills to excel in an increasingly digitized knowledge economy.

As the region welcomes the changes digital transformation brings, it is both a necessity and an opportunity to develop new talent. To succeed, leaders must act swiftly to reimagine work, pivot the workforce, and scale up future-oriented talent.

**Alexis Lecanuet**  
**Senior Managing Director**  
**Accenture Middle East**

The rapid technological advancements of the Fourth Industrial Revolution have disrupted the way we live, work, and learn. The UAE has outlined ambitious plans to remain globally competitive by harnessing the opportunities of this transition to a digital, knowledge-based economy within a sustainability framework. Realizing this vision requires assuring Emirati youth are ready to lead and compete at national, regional, and global scales.

To strengthen the local talent pipeline, strategic collaboration across sectors is essential. Educational providers and the public and private sectors must work together to enhance and harmonize the ecosystem for creative solutions that serve the interests of sustainable development for economic, social, and environmental betterment. Ensuring young Emiratis have the inner capacity to manage, learn, adapt, and lead in the private sector workplace requires collective support for initiatives such as Projects of the 50, including the Emirati Talent Competitiveness Council, the Talent Programme, and the Graduate Fund.

In line with supporting the vision of the UAE leadership and the UN Sustainable Development Goals, the Abdulla Al Ghurair Foundation launched NOMU, a multi-sector collaboration initiative that aims to empower 25,000 Emirati youth by 2025 to rise higher and secure future-proof careers. NOMU offers numerous pathways to support the diversity of needs and dreams of young Emiratis who want to engage in a purposeful future. The Foundation works with partners to offer high-quality work-relevant learning opportunities linked to UAE priority job sectors. The programs afford Emiratis the opportunity to develop transformative skills that accelerate their career readiness and access to future work.

It is my pleasure to present this paper, which focuses on closing the skills gap in the UAE by equipping Emirati youth with skills of the future and preparing them for jobs and entrepreneurship in the private sector. I hope this paper leads to more engaging and action-oriented conversations that will result in positive cross-sectoral collaborations. The intention of this joint effort is to help accelerate the UAE's journey towards a future economy that embeds sustainability principles.

We look forward to our continued partnership with Accenture and building a stronger tomorrow for all youth.

**Dr. Sonia Ben Jaafar**

**Chief Executive Officer, Abdulla Al Ghurair Foundation**

**Chairperson, Global Councils on Sustainable Development Goals**

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# Executive Summary

Maintaining the UAE's success for future generations requires finding solutions to current challenges and capitalizing on technological innovations that can advance the economy. This entails fostering more robust private sector employment where emerging technologies are developing at a fast pace. The employment gap in the UAE is more noticeable due to the unequal distribution of Emiratis in the public and private sectors. This indicates that more effort is required to attract Emiratis to areas where they can reach their full potential and meaningfully contribute to the economic growth of the country. This paper examines the challenges and opportunities associated with attracting Emirati youth to the private sector as well as creating effective upskilling programs.

Harmonizing the talent ecosystem and developing effective upskilling programs to meet the needs of job seekers and employers is a multi-stakeholder undertaking that requires a steadfast dedication to the UAE's vision. This paper introduces the Triple C's approach, suggesting that effective and successful upskilling initiatives should be:

## Triple C's Approach

**Comprehensive:** Combines complementary technical and transferrable skillsets

**Contextualized:** Tailors to the needs and interests of the local labor market.

**Centered<sup>1</sup>:** Meaningfully engages youth, putting them at the core of the ideation process.

Accenture and The Abdulla Al Ghurair Foundation collaborated to co-produce this paper, which relies on data from different stakeholders to explore employment and skill-building opportunities for Emiratis in the UAE. Based on the findings, the paper presents actionable recommendations for Emirati youth, the government and private sector entities, and educational institutions and providers to bridge the employability skills gap amongst Emirati youth.

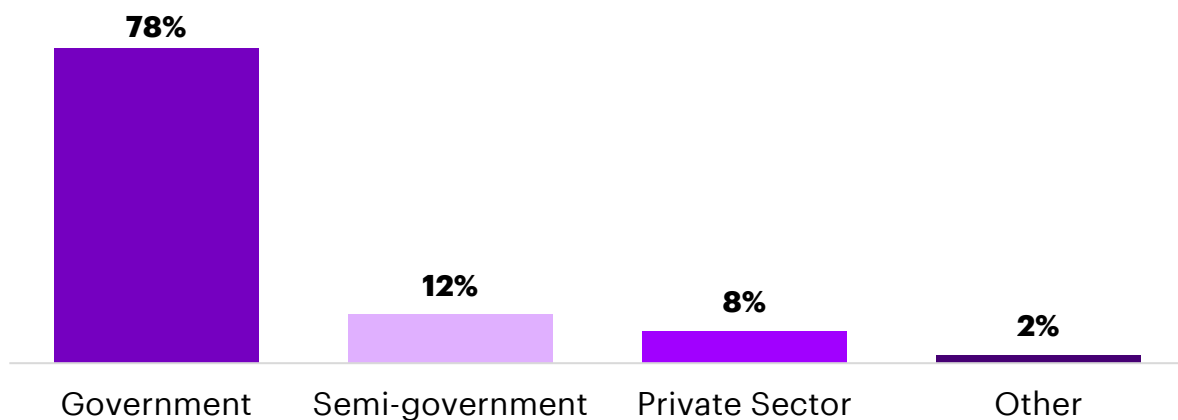


## Introduction

Globally, we are experiencing the most significant skills transformation since the First Industrial Revolution. Largescale social, political, and economic change is underway as we move from a digital era to one of embedded connectivity built upon blockchain technology.<sup>2</sup> In addition, the demands and constraints of the pandemic led us to collectively rethink what work means, where it is done and how we do it. To meet the needs of today's changing workplace, more than 1 billion people will need to be reskilled by 2030 to minimize an otherwise massive "skills gap", the difference between the skills one possesses versus those that are required. Failure to meet these needs risks \$11.5 trillion in potential GDP growth over the next decade alone, according to estimates from Accenture, a global professional services firm.<sup>3</sup>

In the UAE, the employment gap is especially pronounced due to the labor market imbalance among Emiratis in government, semi-governmental entities, and private sector organizations, as seen in Figure 1, the latest available government data.<sup>4</sup> Speaking to EdArabia in 2017, UAE Minister of Education, H.E. Ahmad Belhoul Al Falasi, noted, "a gap exists amongst Emirati graduates and the needs of the job market. Forty percent of students have skills which are not needed in the job market."<sup>5</sup> Additionally, too few university students are graduating with science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) competencies, as well as a lack of critical and analytical thinking skills, typically gained through coursework in the arts and humanities.<sup>6</sup>

**Figure 1. Distribution of Emirati workforce by sector**



Source: UAE Stat, 2019 <sup>7</sup>

Looking to the future, H.H. Sheikh Mohammad Bin Rashid Al Maktoum noted, “the digital economy is a key catalyst for the growth and development of new economic sectors and to increase our international competitiveness and in the economy of the future”.<sup>8</sup> Toward this, several initiatives called ‘Projects of the 50’ are already underway.<sup>9</sup> This series of initiatives is designed to accelerate the UAE's growth by focusing on the development of entrepreneurship, doubling down on advanced skills, and propelling the digital economy.<sup>10</sup> These initiatives put Emirati youth at the core of their success and are aimed at expanding the private sector economy. The UAE has announced \$6.5 billion in spending

to create 75,000 private sector jobs for Emiratis over the next 5 years.<sup>11</sup> Advancing Emiratization, a federal mandate to employ more Emiratis in the private sector, is crucial to providing many Emiratis with the skills needed to meet this largescale transformation.<sup>12</sup> Yet, after more than two decades since the mandate was implemented, less than 4% of the private sector workforce is made up of Emiratis, falling short of set national targets.<sup>13</sup> To advance the national agenda and vision plans, it is crucial to understand **what challenges and opportunities exist in attracting more Emiratis to the private sector to help the UAE achieve its ambitions.**





**1.0**

# **Realizing the UAE's Centennial Plan 2071**



## 1.0 Realizing the UAE's Centennial Plan 2071

Opened in 2021, Dubai's Museum of the Future transports visitors to 2071; a time of hovering vehicles, 100% renewable energy, and regular interactions with robots in the UAE. While many countries in the region have vision strategies that guide investments and ambitions for the medium-term, the UAE is the only country, globally, to have carefully laid plans for the next 50 years.

The path to realizing these ambitions involves the full participation of UAE society, and that begins with the youth. The most updated estimates showed that in 2018, the private sector contributed 71%, or AED 289 billion, to the UAE's overall GDP, at a growth rate of 5x the rate of the country's total growth that year. H.E. Abdulla Al Saleh, the Undersecretary of the Foreign Trade and Industry at the UAE Ministry of Economy, noted that "the government has a growing interest in the sector" and that "it is a key driver of economic growth."<sup>14</sup> As the Emirati population comprises approximately 10% of the UAE population, their equal participation in the private sector is key for the UAE realizing its future ambitions.

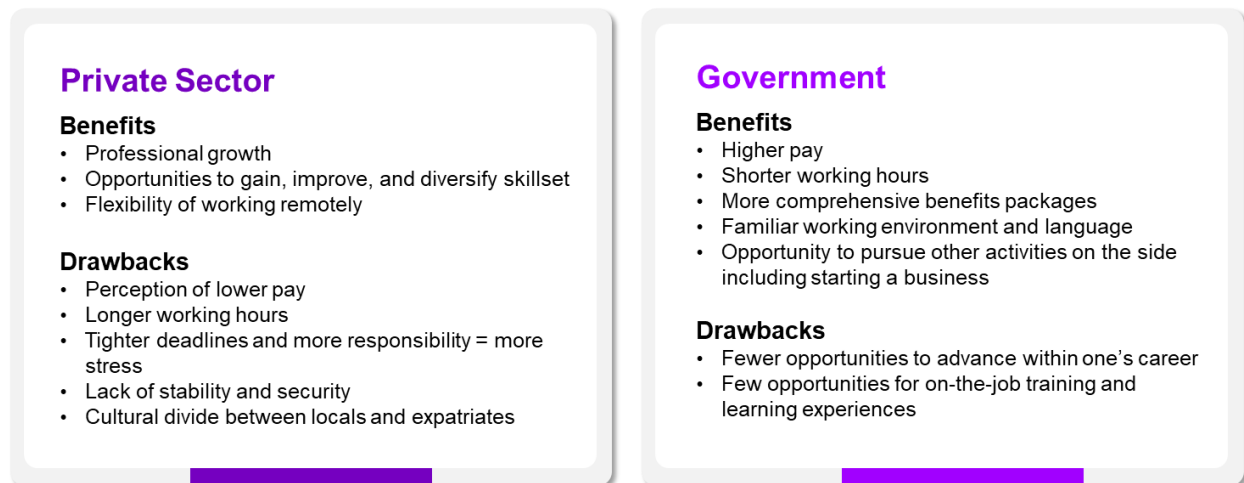
Yet, despite decades-long efforts to achieve at least 10% representation of Emiratis in the private sector, many still prefer traditional jobs in the government. According to the focus group discussion (for more, see Appendix B) amongst Emirati youth, there is a clear set of

perceived benefits to working in the government such as cultural assimilation, shorter hours, and higher pay, as shown in Figure 2. Some of the major drawbacks are limited opportunities for growth and a lack of opportunities to learn new skills. However, the benefits outweigh the lost opportunities for many.

In the 2021 Arab Youth Survey, respondents in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), which includes the UAE, marked 'work for the government' as their preferred career choice (42%) over working for themselves/for family, working in the private sector, or working for a non-profit organization.<sup>15</sup> This is only a marginal decline since 2019 (49%). Further, the youth's preference for working in the private sector is the only option that has declined since 2019, with less than one quarter preferring this path.

Interestingly, the preference for Arab youth in the GCC wanting to start their own business reached 49% in the GCC, but the primary reason for not wanting to start their own business within the next 5 years was their preference for working in the government sector. This preceded typical reasons such as 'lack of personal finances' and the 'avoidance of failure'.

**Figure 2. Perceptions about work in private sector and government**



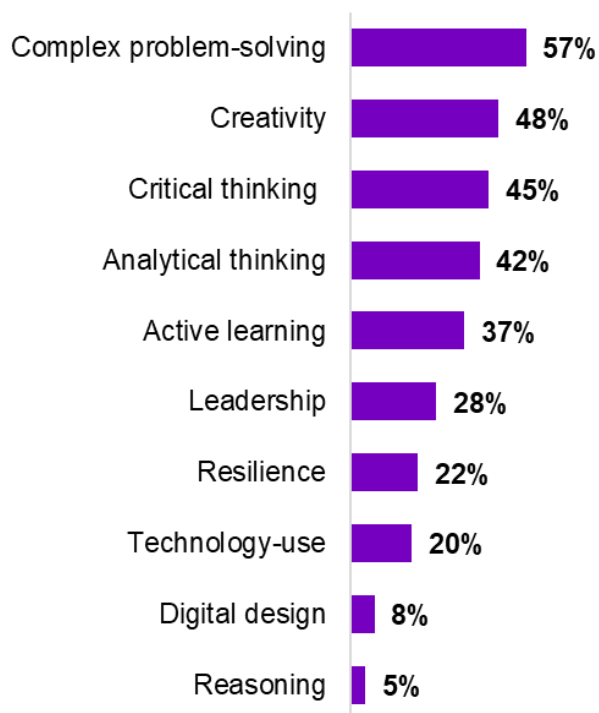
The future of work in the UAE will be in line with harnessing the ideas and plans of the current UAE leadership that envisions a future-focused government, steeped in a knowledge-based economy to create a happy and cohesive society that supports quality, long-term employment for its people.

The shift from government employment to private-sector employment is a natural transition to achieve meaningful progress toward the Projects of the 50 initiatives. More Emiratis need to be employed in areas that allow them to achieve their fullest personal and professional ambitions to lead the charge toward actionable progress in carving out a more prosperous future for the country's next generations. As Sameh Al Qubaisi, the Director General of Economic Affairs at the Abu Dhabi Department of Economic Development, said at an economic conference in 2021, "the private sector is the backbone of the economy -- the government is just an enabler".<sup>16</sup> According to research by IZA World of Labor, the effect of public sector employment on the economy can have both positive and negative effects. Ultimately, the available research suggests that when public wages are relatively high and unresponsive to productivity or the ebbs and flows of the economy, private sector employment is affected, and ultimately unemployment rises. If public wages are linked to productivity and matched more closely with the overall labor market, the two sectors stabilize one another.<sup>17</sup>

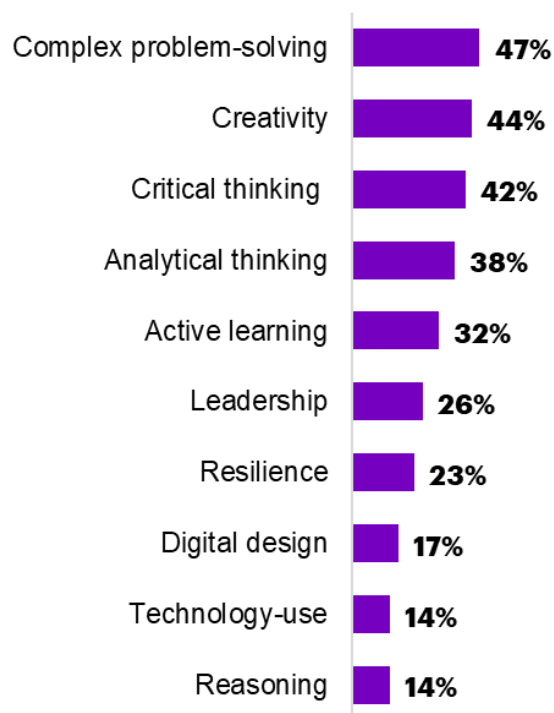
Based on data collected through the Thought Exchange (see Appendix C for more information), complex problem solving, creativity, and critical thinking were the top 3 skills that respondents believed are the most important at work. Those same 3 skills were also rated as those most lacking amongst recent graduates/young professionals in the UAE, highlighting a critical imbalance that all stakeholders are positioned to help address.

**Figure 3: Most important & most often lacking skills**

**Question: Which 3 skills does your organization look for when hiring recent graduates/young professionals? If you're a young Emirati professional, which 3 skills do you believe are most important at work?**



**Question: Which 3 skills are recent graduates/young professionals often lacking? If you're a recent graduate, which skills do you feel were not emphasized enough during your education/internship experience(s)?**



Additionally, the post-pandemic era has forced companies to look at their overall employee value propositions (EVP), as the youth today are not just looking at pay as the sole determinant for taking a job. Launched in 2021, Accenture's "Net Better Off"<sup>18</sup> research advises companies to consider 6 dimensions of an EVP, emotional & mental, relationship, physical, purposeful, employable, and financial. For instance, based on insights gathered in the focus group, some individuals prefer personal ambition over professional, occurrences that skills-based initiatives will not address. If employers can address the full spectrum of preferences and needs, they will be best positioned to attract talent.

A man with a beard, wearing a white thobe and a white ghutra with a black agal, is shown in profile, looking out of a window. The background is a blurred view of a city skyline.

**2.0**

# **Bridging the employment gap**



## 2.0 Bridging the employment gap

The key component in attracting and retaining individuals in any organization is ensuring they have the necessary skills to best perform their roles. This includes technical, transferrable, interpersonal, and digital skills. As technologies allow us to automate various processes, skills such as creativity and critical thinking are innately human and are only expected to grow in demand. Yet, local education programs are not geared toward cultivating many of these skills. In recent years, policymakers have prioritized education, some efforts of which are reflected in the last edition of the Global Gender Gap Report where the UAE was the highest ranked Arab country.<sup>19</sup> However, to achieve the ambitions of the country's leadership, the UAE needs to compete *globally*, not just regionally.

The UAE trails behind most developed countries in international assessments at the primary and secondary levels. The Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) 2019<sup>20</sup> showed that the UAE ranks below the international average in both Grade 4 and Grade 8 assessments.<sup>21</sup> At the secondary level, the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA)<sup>22</sup> showed that the UAE falls below the average for all 38 countries within the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) in all three

categories assessed in the program, mathematics, science, and reading, and, in fact, the country's scores have worsened by a few percentage points across all three categories since the 2015 assessment.<sup>23</sup>

Furthermore, the UAE's Federal Competitiveness and Statistics Center reports that 33 percent of Emirati youth who are currently enrolled in universities are majoring in the subjects of engineering, information technology, and natural sciences. Although there is no global index that ranks high-education enrollment in STEM subjects across all countries, a 2020 United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) report highlighted that STEM enrollment in Tunisia was the highest at 43%.<sup>24</sup> With a population of only 10 million in the UAE, local enrollment is relatively low for a country that is making significant investments in fields such as blockchain technology, robotics, and artificial intelligence.<sup>25</sup> There are some barriers that need to be overcome. A 2018 study by the British Council showed that many Emiratis pursue non-STEM disciplines due to a variety of reasons including language barriers and a lack of localized content.<sup>26</sup>

Education has a notable impact on the future workforce as further evidence shows that higher education is not preparing youth for the labor market. According to the WEF Future of Jobs Report, around 30 percent of Emiratis do not have tertiary education that is 'business relevant' or 'business relevant' skills.<sup>27</sup> This reality is also acknowledged amongst the youth themselves, as the 2021 Arab Youth Survey found that 85% of Arab Youth in the GCC<sup>28</sup> say they are 'very concerned' about the quality of education in their country and that their number one priority is starting their career.<sup>29</sup> An important question to think about is the distinction between a job and a career, the latter of which requires additional investment in development and

ownership both by the individual and the employer of choice.

The government recognizes the need for improvement and has implemented multiple initiatives aimed at improving the education system so that it is on par with top performing countries, but these bottom-up changes will take time to take effect, and the imperative to close the skills gap is pressing.

Starting today, all stakeholders can accelerate skilling and learning through a targeted approach – the Triple C's. The approach outlines three areas; comprehensive, contextualized, and youth-centered, where stakeholders can focus to make actionable progress in skilling Emirati youth.



# Triple C Approach



## Multi-stakeholder partnerships

Youth | Government | Private Sector |  
Academic institutions and education providers

### Triple C Approach



#### Comprehensive

- Combining complementary technical and transferrable skillsets
- Fostering a continuous-learning mindset

#### Contextualized

- Tailored to the needs and interests of local population
- Aligns skills and specializations with demands of the labor market

#### Centered

- Placing youth at the center of the learning process by considering their needs and interests
- Youth are active participants rather than passive



## Comprehensive

A comprehensive approach, one that combines complementary technical and transferrable skillsets, is essential for skills building initiatives to meet the demand of current and future labor markets. Accenture promotes learners' mindsets by placing learners at the center of the ecosystem. **This approach defines the learning ecosystem of digital learners in 3 parts. The first 10% includes formal training that is based on a culture of continuous learning and promoting new behavior adoption in a safe environment. The next 20% of learning is doing so from others by encouraging collaboration and opportunities to see the best practices from others. Finally, the additional 70% is based on new ways of working, which harnesses flexibility and is part of the employee experience.** Apprenticeships, field work, emerging technology, bootcamps, learning apps, gamification and video-based learning are all modalities that can be leveraged.

In an increasingly digitalized world, the human touch has never been more important. Alexis Lecanuet, Senior Managing Director, Accenture Middle East, emphasizes how employees who can bring a human touch – the ability to work collaboratively, cooperatively, and creatively, with each other – to the workplace are more likely to succeed than their peers who do not exhibit these skills. For Lecanuet, “it is this humanity that will distinguish humans from computer technology in the future”. As part of its commitment to constantly innovate, Accenture invests nearly \$900 million each year in continuous learning and professional development programs, which deliver more than 31 million training hours each year to its 710,000-person global workforce.<sup>30</sup> This practice ensures that employees are equipped with information and know-how about the latest developments in the field and are also provided with regular opportunities to learn and grow. It is important to note that a comprehensive approach includes building the foundation for learning, not teaching specific skills themselves. With emerging technologies, the average shelf-life of skills is limited. When corporations foster learning mindsets, they are able to constantly stay on top of the latest trends.





Education providers and companies cannot simply import and implement global best practices without adapting them to the local context. To succeed, programs need to be contextualized- in other words, tailored to the specific needs and interests of the local labor market and its needs. Abdulla Aljefri, is the co-founder of Najah Train Limited, a local training company that supports Emirati youth in developing transferrable skills.<sup>31</sup> Aljefri notes that if we want to support robust employment for Emirati youth, particularly in the private sector, “we must devise solutions that are grounded in the struggles of Emirati youth.”

**Gabriel Dalporto, the CEO of Udacity, an online educational platform offering Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) and a key partner of the Abdulla Al Ghurair Foundation in the Foundation's NOMU initiative, highlights the necessity of understanding the local employability challenges. This means that stakeholders need to create and support an integrated support system that considers the economic and demographic makeup and challenges to decipher what skills are in-demand.**

At times, language barriers can be a challenge, especially when studying or working with technical subjects such as STEM. Reflecting on his experience across various markets, Alexis Lecanuet argued the importance of providing bilingual trainers and instructors to aid youth as well as Emirati mentors and experts to coach them and provide them with the necessary support in Arabic. This is in line with the preliminary research conducted by Najah Train Limited. According to Aljefri: “the lack of Arabic content for skills development is at the root of the [skills gap] problem.” For these reasons, Al Najah offers courses in Arabic and provides its beneficiaries access to bilingual Emirati experts and professional career coaches. The ecosystem could work to address this issue further by ensuring that local publishing houses can translate, print, and distribute best-in-class reading materials that may originally be in English.

## Centered

To be successful, skilling and upskilling programs must also be youth-centered. Like student-centered learning, this approach places the learner at the center of the process by taking into consideration their needs and interests. Youth are meaningfully engaged throughout this process and active in knowledge acquisition through skills such as thinking, questioning, or researching. In the best-case scenario, youth would be leading throughout the ideation process.<sup>32 33</sup> **According to Dr. Sonia Ben Jaafar, CEO of the Abdulla Al Ghurair Foundation, “a participatory approach empowers youth to think critically about effective solutions to their own challenges, and with appropriate support, will lead to positive and sustainable impact, especially in education.”** Evidence shows that learners in student-centered learning formats perform significantly better than their peers in teacher-centered classes<sup>34</sup> and are more likely to develop problem-solving and critical thinking skills.<sup>35</sup>



Recognizing the benefits of including youth in the ideation process, the Foundation recently launched the Al Ghurair Foundation Youth Advisory Council to embed the voices of youth throughout the conceptualization and implementation process of its programmatic efforts and knowledge production. To that end, members of the Council reviewed and provided feedback regarding the key takeaways and recommendations from this research.

A photograph of two men in traditional white Arab attire (thobes and ghutras) walking in front of a building with classical architectural features like columns and a dome. The man on the left is looking upwards and to the left, while the man on the right is looking down and to the left.

**3.0**

## **Leveraging multi-stakeholder partnerships**

### 3.0 Leveraging multi-stakeholder partnerships

Purposeful and strategic multistakeholder partnerships are the linchpin of an integrated talent ecosystem, ensuring that market-driven upskilling initiatives and programs are aligned to the needs of the local economy and national priorities. Purposeful engagement from all relevant stakeholders – the private sector, government, Emirati youth, and education providers - is crucial in supporting the UAE in narrowing the skills gap and develop a qualified and competitive talent pipeline for future jobs.<sup>36</sup> These efforts would also lead to a more seamless transition from education to employment and will increase the scale and impact of upskilling initiatives and programs.

Successful strategic partnerships leverage the strengths, resources, and capacities of all collaborators to achieve progress – and there is research to support this. A recent publication by PwC reports that closing the employability skills gap requires the convening of government and business leaders to identify national economic priority sectors and present the pipeline of jobs that will support the sectors' development.<sup>37</sup> With this understanding, the UAE is strengthening its multistakeholder partnerships, recognizing the need for strategic partnerships in achieving its employability targets. In 2022, the Emirati Talent Competitiveness

Council launched the NAFIS initiative, a federal program that facilitates employment opportunities for Emirati nationals in the private sector, designed to provide candidates with upskilling opportunities with a variety of partners, ranging from universities to semi-government entities, and private sector companies.<sup>38</sup>

Additionally, for partnerships to be effective, a governance structure that prioritizes information sharing, transparency, and accountability among the partners is vital. This will allow partners to hold each other accountable to specific metrics and measurable goals and work toward a purpose-driven vision with concrete deliverables. Finally, following a participatory approach to program creation and implementation will ensure that beneficiaries receive the training they want in the format that best suits their needs. In this context, this means that youth should be a part of the design and implementation of upskilling initiatives. Research from other fields suggests that balancing of top-down and bottom-up approaches would ultimately lead to better results and higher impact as participants feel empowered and own the process.<sup>39</sup>

There are local examples of where these principles have been put into practice.



## The Arab Youth Center Technology Fellowship

In 2020, the UAE's Arab Youth Center launched the Arab Youth Technology Fellowship. Accenture served as the Center's 'Knowledge and Innovation Partner' and did extensive research to understand how technology can empower a region that has the highest rate of young individuals not in employment, education, or training (NEET) in the world. Based on the research, the Fellowship was created to empower Arab youth in the digital and technological industries by providing high-quality skills through a training program with global and local partners.<sup>40</sup>

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### **H.H. Sheikh Rashid bin Humaid Al Nuaimi said:**

*"Investing in the technology knowledge of Arab youth is the fastest way to advance development in the region that is full of bright young minds with immense creative potential."*

*The first cohort saw over 100 participants from more than 15 countries in the Middle East and North African region. Throughout the duration of the fellowship, more than 50 workshops and sessions with experts were held by more than 20 partners from the private sector. Launched in 2020, the fellowship proved that there are no barriers to learning as participants engaged in online sessions to develop intensive tech skills.<sup>41</sup>*

## NOMU

The Abdulla Al Ghurair Foundation recently launched a national youth development initiative, NOMU, aimed at upskilling 25,000 Emirati youth by 2025. To reach this target, the Foundation is collaborating with strategic partners to leverage best practices and reach greater numbers of youth. Describing the initiative, Dr. Sonia Ben Jaafar, CEO of the Foundation, said “NOMU leverages new and existing partnerships with academic institutions, government and non-government organizations, and the private sector to design and implement high-quality learning opportunities tied to UAE priority sectors in the nation's sustainability strategy.”



In early 2022, the Foundation launched TechUp, the first pathway project under NOMU. In partnership with Udacity, TechUp will provide 20,000 young Emiratis with foundational digital literacy skills and 1,000 young Emiratis with Nanodegrees in highly specialized and market-driven fields that are aligned with UAE national priority areas. These skills will prepare youth to join the tech workforce in areas such as UX design, data analytics, and web development or work as freelancers. The Foundation is facilitating youth's access to workplace learning and employment opportunities through hiring partners such as Mashreq.

As the Foundation continues to identify opportunities for young Emiratis to contribute to national priorities, NOMU will continue adding pathway projects to bridge these gaps to best serve diverse Emirati youth and contribute to UAE national priorities and the Sustainable Development Goals.

## Recommendations

### Youth

#### **Adopt a lifelong learning mindset.**

Lifelong learning has become essential in keeping up with the changing demands of the private sector; this includes investing time and effort in learning new skills, and constantly updating abilities and networks.

#### **Shift mindset from job to career.**

Work is often lifelong, building a career requires different attention, focus, and skills than having an indeterminate number of jobs throughout life.

**Proactively explore different and diverse opportunities.** Youth must be proactive in their search and pursuit of opportunities, including work-integrated learning, and employment.

**Consider innovative and in-demand courses.** Youth should consider moving toward new and innovative industries and sectors such as data analytics, blockchain technology, and artificial intelligence.

**Seek mentors early on.** Youth should identify individuals that they trust, admire, and want to emulate in ways that will provide a sounding board as they navigate through different stages of their early years. Having someone who will help them develop their thinking as a person also pays off professionally.

### Government

**Redefine education beyond university.** The policy, strategy, and agenda can redefine what it means to be trained, skilled, and educated and shift education toward lifelong learning.

**Provide youth with exposure to the private sector at all levels of education.** Youth should be exposed to different sectors and industries through high school electives and work-integrated learning experiences such as internships, co-ops, or apprenticeships, amongst others.

**Strengthen the capacity of interdisciplinary studies.** The capacity of interdisciplinary studies can be strengthened so that students gain exposure to a variety of disciplines, allowing them to work horizontally at any point. Disciplines within the liberal arts, for example, foster many of the soft or transferrable skills such as critical thinking, problem solving and communication.

**Provide quality academic and career counseling.** High-quality and tailored counseling should be more widely available beginning in high school.

**Support learning for life.** Build programs and initiatives that encourage lifelong learning. Skills change and the workforce needs to have both the resources and the

adaptability to learn on a regular basis.

**Champion a national skills council.**

To understand how to service supply and demand when it comes to skills, jobs, and overall employment trends, a national skills council should incorporate participation from all the relevant stakeholders in the market.

**Standardize salaries and benefits**

**across sectors.** Standardized salary and benefits packages between the government, semi-government, and private sector should reflect market trends and incentivize potential candidates based on merit and potential.

## Private sector

**Early-entry opportunities.** Offer apprenticeships and internships that allow youth to gain critical skills early on.

**Embrace Emirati culture and values.**

To attract and retain Emirati talent, it is fundamental for businesses to be culturally aware and accommodating of Emirati traditions and customs in the workplace (i.e., prayer times, Islamic holidays, lifestyles that include family obligations).

**Create one-to-one opportunities for**

**mentorship.** it is important that youth have role models and mentors that can help them navigate the work environment.

**Create opportunities for work-integrated learning.**

Corporates can collaborate with educational institutions and the government to create training to employment pathways.

**Develop corporate training.**

Corporates can develop national talent through formal in-house training programs (ex. Tomoh<sup>42</sup> by Microsoft and Nujoom by IBM).

**Rethink your attract, develop, and**

**retain framework.** The proposition to candidates and ongoing employee value proposition should encompass all 6 components of a company's value proposition as defined by the research in "Net Better Off".

## Academic institutions and Education providers

**Encourage experiential learning**

**early on.** Allow students to experiment and learn through trial and error.

**Incorporate comprehensive skills**

**building.** For youth to excel in this volatile market, they must be equipped with skills such as adaptability, resilience, and digital skills.

**Deliver market-relevant**

**coursework.** Academic institutions can collaborate with the private sector to ensure that their coursework is aligned with labor market demands.





The UAE has set ambitious plans for the next 50 years and the realization of these plans requires synchronization and strategic approaches from all sectors of society, with an emphasis on Emirati nationals driving the change. Young Emirati men and women must be equipped with the technical and transferable skills necessary to thrive in the future knowledge-based economy driven by accelerated technological advancements, most notably in the private sector. This paper sought to understand the pressing challenges that Emirati youth face when entering the labor market and present upskilling solutions to overcome these challenges. Through candid conversations with youth, business leaders, entrepreneurs, and educators, we identified some of the contributing factors and reasons for the current reality. This includes recognizing that skilling is a critical component of employment but is only part of the challenge. The recommendations address a wider range of factors to consider.

The realization of the Triple C approach rests on purposeful and strategic multi-stakeholder partnerships between the youth, government, the private sector, and education providers. In addition, the recommendations laid out provide actionable steps stakeholders can act on today. Human capital is one of our greatest, and most underutilized, assets and to remain competitive in an increasingly competitive environment, talent must be allowed to reach its fullest potential.



## Methodology

This paper relies on data gathered from three different forums as well as desk research. The conclusions made in the report are meant to offer some direction to relevant stakeholders and should not be taken conclusively. We collated key takeaways from a **panel discussion**, “Bridging the Employability Gap: Skilling, Reskilling, and Upskilling Emirati Talent,” (for more, see Appendix A). Second, we conducted a **focus group** with 14 Emirati youth to discuss their education and employment experiences (for more, see Appendix B). Lastly, we conducted a **Thought Exchange exercise** in which 42 participants voted on the skills they think are the most sought after and those least prevalent in the workplace (for more, see Appendix C).



## Appendices



### Appendix A

#### Panel discussion on Bridging the Employability Gap: Skilling, Reskilling and Upskilling Emirati Talent

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The panel was organized by the Abdulla Al Ghurair Foundation and Accenture on February 23, 2022, at the Accenture Lounge in Expo 2020 Dubai, bringing together around 40 attendees from different sectors and industries.

Dr. Sonia Ben Jaafar, CEO of the Foundation, kicked off the event by discussing the importance of partnerships and collaborations in contributing to the UAE's Emiratization efforts. The panel, which was moderated by Danah Dajani, Director of Partnerships and Programs at the Foundation, included: Mr. Alexis Lecanuet, Senior Managing Director Middle East Market Unit at **Accenture**, Mr. Gabriel Dalporto, CEO of **Udacity**; Ms. Randa Bahsoun, Partner at PwC and Mr. Abdulla Aljefri, government attorney and co-founder of **Najah Train Limited**.

The discussion focused on Emirati youth's employment challenges and the roles of education providers, ministries, and private sector in addressing these challenges and supporting the UAE's Emiratization efforts. The panel discussion culminated with a call to action, underlining the importance of multi-stakeholder partnerships and innovative collaboration models in ensuring that Emirati youth have access to upskilling and reskilling opportunities. Following the panel discussion, the Foundation and Accenture signed a Memorandum of Understanding to promote employment opportunities and upskilling programs for Emirati and Arab youth, as well as contribute to the development of a diversified future workforce.



## Appendix B

### Focus Group Discussion on Emirati Youth's Perspectives on Bridging the Employability Gap

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The Abdulla Al Ghurair Foundation conducted a focus group discussion on March 16, 2022, in the Dubai Cares Pavilion at Expo 2020 in Dubai as a follow-up to the panel discussion.

14 Emirati university students and young professionals from around the UAE consented to participate in the focus group and discuss challenges that Emirati youth face on their path to employment in the private sector. Participants were asked about their demographic, educational, and employment backgrounds as they relate to skills-building. They talked about their career aspirations and preparedness to work in the private sector, citing their university and workplace learning experiences, as well as their individual self-development efforts. They also discussed the skills that they believe are necessary for success in the workplace, and challenges in acquiring those skills.

Finally, participants recommended potential solutions and talked about their aspirations for the UAE over the next 50 years, emphasizing the significance of upskilling and reskilling in preparing Emirati youth for the future.



## Appendix C

### Thought Exchange

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The Thought Exchange<sup>43</sup> is a data-first platform that allows multiple participants within an organization or forum to share and rate ideas in an anonymous and unbiased manner. Accenture piloted the tool for the purpose of gathering ideas from stakeholders in the previous two forums on what skills are important, which are lacking and how the employability gap amongst Emiratis could be solved. We received ideas and ratings from 42 participants and have included some of the findings in this report.

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