

# A Study on The Impact of Organizational Culture on Employee Engagement in Gulf Countries

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**Abstract:** This study investigates the impact of organizational culture on employee engagement within the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, including the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Oman, Bahrain, and Kuwait. Employing a mixed-methods approach, the research combines quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews with employees and HR professionals across diverse industries to analyze key cultural dimensions such as leadership styles, communication transparency, recognition systems, and shared organizational values. The findings reveal a strong positive correlation ( $r = 0.712$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) between organizational culture and employee engagement, with leadership style emerging as the most influential factor ( $\beta = 0.41$ ). Culturally adaptive leadership, inclusive communication, and alignment of personal and organizational values are identified as critical drivers of engagement. However, engagement levels vary significantly among demographic groups, with Western expatriates reporting the highest engagement (60%), followed by GCC nationals (52%) and South Asian expatriates (44%), highlighting the need for culturally sensitive HR strategies. The study underscores the importance of tailoring engagement initiatives to the GCC's multicultural workforce, offering practical recommendations for organizations to enhance productivity, retention, and job satisfaction. By bridging gaps in existing literature, this research contributes valuable insights for HR practitioners and organizational leaders aiming to foster inclusive, high-performance workplaces in the Gulf region.

**Keywords:** Organizational Culture, Employee Engagement, Gulf Countries

## INTRODUCTION

In order to increase employee engagement and boost overall productivity in the cutthroat global market of today, businesses are realising more and more how important it is to cultivate a strong and positive organisational culture. Employee behaviour and workplace dynamics are shaped by the common values, beliefs, and practices that make up an organization's culture. Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Bahrain, Kuwait, and Oman are among the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) nations. Traditional values, religious beliefs, and fast modernisation are all intricately entwined with cultural elements. This special combination produces a complicated work environment that may have a big impact on how workers interact with their companies and see their responsibilities [1]. A crucial determinant of organisational success, employee retention, and work satisfaction is employee engagement, which is defined as the emotional commitment and participation that person has towards their organisation and its aims. Effective management and HR strategies in the Gulf area, where expatriate workers often comprise a significant fraction of the workforce, depend on a grasp of how local culture interacts with international business standards [2]. Although organisational culture is becoming more and more important in determining employee results, little study has been done on how it affects Gulf nations in particular. By investigating how various cultural components within Gulf organisations affect employee engagement across sectors, this research seeks to close this

gap [3].

### *Problem Statement*

Gulf workplaces are growing more diverse due to rapid economic change, yet many retain centralized, hierarchical cultures with low employee involvement. These cultural traits can impact engagement positively or negatively, depending on employee expectations. This study investigates how Gulf-specific cultural factors influence employee engagement.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### *Culture of an Organisation and the Engagement of Employees*

Organizational culture shapes employee engagement by influencing attitudes, behavior, and productivity. Herzberg highlights appreciation, support, and a positive environment as key motivators. In the GCC region, diverse workforces challenge companies to foster cultures that boost engagement. Studies show culture enhances productivity, satisfaction, and retention [1],[6],[7],[12]. Engaged employees form emotional connections to their work, driving performance and loyalty. Saks emphasizes that strong cultures with communication and recognition increase job satisfaction and reduce turnover [2],[6],[8],[11].

### *Leadership and Employee Engagement*

Employee engagement relies heavily on leadership.

Transformational leaders inspire workers by aligning them with organizational goals and values. Inclusive, supportive leadership boosts employees' sense of value and engagement—especially in the GCC's multicultural workforce. Culturally adaptive leadership fosters psychological safety, strengthening commitment and engagement [3],[6],[7],[9].

Any leadership style that encourages openness, dialogue, and employee empowerment is more likely to promote engagement. Such leaders communicate goals effectively, celebrate the achievements of their teammates, and as such, serve to promote organisational identity and cohesiveness at all levels. The achievement of these synergies deepens the relationship between the employee and organisation [3], [5], [10].

### ***Strategic Communication***

The role of communication in the participation of all employees within any organisation is paramount. By maintaining communications that are open and frequent, an organisation is able to build trust and a sense of inclusion with its employees. Such communication and involvement is highly crucial in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) region where a multicultural pool of expatriate and local employees may have varying levels of expectations when it comes to organisational communication and participation in business activities. Effective communication boosts engagement by clarifying employees' roles and organizational goals. Studies show that transparency increases employees' sense of value and motivation [9],[12],[14]. Consistent feedback also aligns individual performance with company objectives, fostering trust, accountability, and ownership—ultimately improving engagement [6],[8],[13].

### ***Recognition and Rewards Systems***

Recognition and rewards significantly boost employee engagement. Herzberg's theory highlights personal responsibility as a key motivator [23]-[26]. In the GCC's multicultural workforce, culturally tailored recognition systems drive higher motivation (Schylander & Martin 2023). Barrier-free appreciation fosters participation and emotional connection [6],[7],[9],[15]. When embedded in organizational culture, recognition enhances loyalty, job satisfaction, and performance while reducing turnover. Targeted recognition aligned with employee interests maximizes engagement impact [6],[8],[9],[12].

### ***Shared Organisational Values and Employee Engagement***

Value alignment between employees and organizations is critical for engagement. When personal and organizational values resonate, employees form deeper emotional connections, boosting motivation and productivity. This is particularly vital in the GCC's diverse workforce, requiring inclusive cultural values that accommodate different employee groups. Studies confirm that value congruence enhances engagement and commitment [15]-[17].

In GCC workplaces, where local and expatriate employees may have differing value systems, culturally sensitive

practices are essential to build trust, loyalty, and engagement [9],[19],[23].

### ***Effects of Cultural Diversity on Engagement***

Like other global regions, the GCC faces engagement challenges stemming from workforce diversity. Cultural differences influence how employees perceive and participate in organizational practices, creating varying engagement levels. Without culturally responsive strategies, organizations risk disengagement—particularly among expatriates who may feel excluded from core processes [15],[21],[22].

To mitigate this, GCC organizations must develop engagement frameworks that accommodate diverse cultural values and ensure inclusivity across all employee groups [16],[17],[19],[20].

## **RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS AND DATA GATHERING**

### ***Hypothesis Development***

This study is anchored on Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory (Hofstede, 2001), which provides a basic understanding of the area of differences in culture and how it impacts the behaviour of an organisation. Hofstede's theory is made up of Power distance, Individualism versus Collectivism, Uncertainty Avoidance, Masculinity versus Femininity, and Long Term versus Short Term Orientation. These components are useful in analysing the cultures of the GCC where traditional values such as strong hierarchies and collectivism, as well as religion, have a profound impact on organisational cultures.

Simultaneously, Kahn's (1990) engagement theory presents a psychological perspective pertaining to how employee engagement can be understood. Heavily influenced by professors from Harvard University, Kahn's theory suggests engagement is derived from three core conditions: meaningfulness, safety and availability. All organisational culture strongly influences these conditions. Organisational culture tends to support these conditions. Organisational culture is accepted as a key contributor to positive organisational engagement. Supportive culture enhances the emotional and psychological attachment to work.

Based on these theoretical models, it is fully justified to say that participants in this study are focusing on examining the relationships between organisational culture, cultural diversity in the GCC region and employee engagement. The proposed hypotheses are as follows:

**H1:** There is a significant positive relationship between organisational culture and employee satisfaction. A positive organisational culture strengthens employee satisfaction. Supportive organisational cultures with active, criteria-based leadership strongly boost employee satisfaction.

**H2:** The company culture and the leadership style affect employee engagement significantly.

This working hypothesis suggests that the specific style of leadership, especially transformational leadership, is important in cultivating employee engagement. With the presence of hierarchies in the GCC region, it is important to know what type of leadership stimulates employee engagement.

**H3:** The Impact of Organisational Culture on Employee Engagement is Moderated by Demographic and Cultural Diversity.

This working hypothesis examines the influence of demographic characteristics like nationality, age, and gender, and the multicultural nature of the workforce on the linkage between organisational culture and employee engagement. The GCC countries have a multicultural workforce that includes local nationals as well as expatriates from different cultures and backgrounds. All these aspects will influence the way organisational culture impacts employee engagement. The hypotheses aim at not only the consequences of organisational culture on employee engagement but also the impact of cultural diversity and demographic variables on this relationship. In concentrating on the GCC region, the intent of the study is to fill the gap in the existing literature on organisational culture and employee engagement in a multicultural context in developing economies.

#### **Data Gathering**

This research seeks to gather both quantifiable and descriptive data to develop an informed understanding of the correlation between organisational culture and employee engagement in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) region. Combining quantitative and qualitative methods, self-administered questionnaires and guided interviews were conducted to capture statistical patterns as well as detailed qualitative information.

In this research, all items measuring organisational culture and employee engagement used the Likert scale. Specifically for business culture, answers are constructed according to the Organisational Culture Assessment Instrument (OCAI) by Cameron and Quinn, which identifies six dimensions of culture as: clan culture, adhocracy culture, market culture, hierarchy culture, leadership style, organisational communication, and employee appreciation (Cameron & Quinn, 2011). The OCAI framework is ideal for capturing the impact of cultural constituents on organisations with regards to performance and employee behaviours.

In terms of engagement, the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) is employed alongside an operational definition of engagement as measuring three core components of engagement: vigour, dedication, and absorption (Schaufeli et al., 2006). The UWES has been

#### **Descriptive Statistics**

This entails computations which help portray organisational culture and employee engagement in aggregate form for the sample as the first step in organising everything in relative cleanliness. Table 1 depicts the means and standard deviations for those variables. With descriptive analysis completed, some form of structure has started to form on understanding what the data depicts especially pertaining to a reasonable level of organisational culture as well as employee engagement and what levels of

documented as a holistic measure of employee engagement and has proven to be a culturally adaptable instrument to gauge engagement levels in various national settings.

To ensure that the sample captures different sectors and countries within the GCC, a stratified random sampling approach is used. The study aims for a sample size between 300 and 500 respondents, which is considered adequate for obtaining accurate and generalisable findings. This sample consists of participants from several sectors, including oil and gas, finance, education, and hospitality, in order to broaden the work diversity representation in the region.

To support the quantitative data, semi-structured interviews are performed with human resource professionals from several organisations across the GCC. These interviews aim to capture the specifics of organisational culture and employee engagement beyond what the survey could provide. They enable HR managers to discuss the intricacies of enhancing employee engagement in diverse cultural contexts. These interviews help explain the quantitative results by examining perceptions of organisational culture and its impact on engagement for the qualitative data collected.

## **DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION**

### **Data Analysis**

The data analysis for this study utilizes both descriptive and inferential statistical methods. Descriptive statistics are used to profile demographic data and summarize the key variables, such as organizational culture and employee engagement. Inferential statistics, including Pearson correlation and regression analysis, are employed to examine the relationships between the variables.

The use of a mixed-methods approach allows for a more robust understanding of the data, with qualitative insights from HR managers helping to contextualize and validate the quantitative findings. The research aims to identify key trends in employee engagement across different cultural contexts, while exploring the specific impact of leadership styles, communication practices, and organizational values on employee engagement levels.

The description transforms into a more logical flow narratively covering these parts: descriptive statistics, correlation, regression, and discretionary analysis. Each part features an integration of specific statistical procedures that were followed along with results, and implications based on those outcomes.

that were found between the respondents.

**Table 1:** Descriptive Statistics and Organizational Culture Measure of the Key Variables

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
<b>Organizational Culture Score</b>	<b>3.87</b>	<b>0.64</b>	<b>2.20</b>	<b>4.90</b>
<b>Employee Engagement Score</b>	<b>3.76</b>	<b>0.71</b>	<b>1.80</b>	<b>4.85</b>

The mean score of 3.87 indicates that respondents generally perceive their organisational culture positively. This score also indicates that, on average, employees in the Gulf region view their work environment as supported and aligned with organisational objectives. The relatively low standard deviation (0.64) suggests that most responses are concentrated around the average, indicating a consensus about the organisational culture among employees from diverse organisations. The range of scores (from 2.20 to 4.90) illustrates the variability in perceptions among employees about their work environment, which may stem from differences across industries, organisations, or even countries within the GCC.

Engagement level across Gulf region employees is represented by a mean score of 3.76, indicating that employees are generally engaged with their work. Engagement is usually shown through emotional commitment, enthusiasm, and involvement in tasks. Further, this engagement is moderate to high across the sample. Engagement is a little more variable as shown by the standard deviation of 0.71 which is slightly higher than that for the organisational culture measurement, which indicates discomforting by rigidity in these factors. Presence of minimum and maximum scores (1.80 and 4.85 respectively) indicates the range of responses from more engaged employees to less engaged employees where the less engaged claim could harbour numerous individual, cultural or organisational reason.

Based on the descriptive analysis, there is no question that the culture of the organisations and engagement in them is positive from the view of the employees. These insights are especially important to be noted as they serve the required baseline within the sample to be used for further analyses.

### **Correlation Analysis**

Analysis of Pearson’s correlations between the culture of the organisation and employee engagement provides insight into the incidence of interdependence and its direction. This test is designed for examining inter-variable dependence aimed at establishing a relationship and measuring its weight.

**Table 2:** Pearson Correlation Organizational Culture with Employee Engagement

Variables	Correlation Coefficient (r)	Significance (p-value)
<b>Organizational Culture &amp; Employee Engagement</b>	<b>0.712</b>	<b>0.000</b>

The Pearson correlation coefficient of .712 indicates a strong positive relationship between organisational culture and employee engagement. This magnitude means that as employees perceive the organisational culture to be more supportive and positive, their engagement with work increases. This aligns with research indicating that a strong organisational culture with tangible communication and well-placed leadership fosters higher employee engagement (Saks, 2006; Kahn, 1990).

A p-value of .000 indicates the relationship between organisational culture and employee engagement is significant in relation to organisational culture at any conventional significance level (e.g., .05). These results strongly support the hypothesis that organisational culture is a fundamental determinant for the level of employee engagement within the organisation for the GCC region.

This strongly corroborates the argument regarding the positive influence of cultural alignment on employee engagement. This strongly supports the argument that organisational culture shapes employee attitudes and behaviours in the Gulf region as it provides robust evidence on the positive influence of cultural alignment on engagement.

### **Regression Analysis**

Subsequently, a regression analysis is performed to evaluate the relationships between particular dimensions of organisational culture and employee engagement to assess for possible impacts. This analysis aims to evaluate the cultural factors of leadership style, communication transparency, recognition and rewards, and underlying organisational values individually. With the results from our regression model, we are able to assess which factors of organisational culture have a stronger relationship with employee engagement and contribute to the explanatory power of the model.

**Table 3:** Organizational Culture Dimensions and Employee Engagement Regression Analysis

Predictor Variable	Beta Coefficient (β)	t-value	Significance (p-value)
<b>Leadership Style</b>	<b>0.41</b>	<b>6.25</b>	<b>0.000</b>
<b>Communication Transparency</b>	<b>0.32</b>	<b>4.88</b>	<b>0.000</b>
<b>Recognition and Rewards</b>	<b>0.27</b>	<b>3.90</b>	<b>0.001</b>
<b>Shared Organizational Values</b>	<b>0.30</b>	<b>4.40</b>	<b>0.000</b>

<b>Adjusted R<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>0.58</b>		
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This indicates that employee engagement is influenced most by leadership according to the strongest standardised beta coefficient, thus, serving the greatest extent of impact. Through positive engagement with the organisation's employees accompanied by inclusive and transformational leaderships, higher employee engagement will result. This supports Kahn's engagement theory which states that leading and guiding people toward meaning and presenting them with safe spaces to help them stay at work, heightens the employee's workplace engagement (Kahn, 1990).

The coefficient value of 0.32 indicates that transparent and open communication serves as an important predictor of engagement. This emphasises how honest and straightforward communication promotes engagement by ensuring employees are kept up to date in a work setting where they constantly feel valued (Saks, 2006).

The effect of recognition and rewards on employee engagement is slightly weaker than that of the leadership style and communication but remains on the positive side. Moreover, recognition and rewards outline an important part of engagement as rewarding employees for positive contributions reinforces such behaviours and strengthens the employee's bond with the organisation.

Engagement also depends on shared organisational values that embrace the congruency of employees with the organisation; employees become more engaged with their work when there is congruence between their personal values and the organisation's values.

With the model accounting for 58% of employee engagement, this finding demonstrates a strong relationship between the defined dimensions of organisational culture targets and employee engagement. These findings strengthen the understanding that organisational culture highly impacts engagement, apart from personal drivers and external work environment factors.

The regression analysis further indicates that all the factors mentioned above, including leadership style, communication openness, recognition policies, and organisational culture, significantly impact employee engagement, with leadership style representing the greatest influence.

#### ***Volitional Analysis***

As a final step, I conduct a cross-tabulation analysis to assess employee engagement by different nationality groups in the GCC workforce. This analysis adds another dimension to engagement by considering cultural and demographic factors as well as the differences among various groups of employees.

**Table 4: Employee Engagement Cross-Tabulation by Nationality Group**

<b>Nationality Group</b>	<b>High Engagement (%)</b>	<b>Moderate Engagement (%)</b>	<b>Low Engagement (%)</b>	<b>Total Respondents</b>
<b>GCC Nationals</b>	<b>52%</b>	<b>39%</b>	<b>9%</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>South Asian Expats</b>	<b>44%</b>	<b>46%</b>	<b>10%</b>	<b>150</b>
<b>Western Expats</b>	<b>60%</b>	<b>30%</b>	<b>10%</b>	<b>50</b>

The relatively high engagement levels reported by GCC nationals, where 52% indicate high engagement, suggests a culturally favourable context. This is likely the result of alignment between local employees' values and the fostered organisational culture, particularly with respect to dominantly local-led culturally adaptive companies.

South Asians show lower high engagement levels at 44%, while moderate engagement participants comprise 46%. A possible explanation might be issues with alignment and integration, organisational or cross-cultural communication, or discrepancies in expectations between expatriate employees and host country organisations.

Western expatriates report the highest levels of engagement, with 60% reporting high engagement. This may indicate that Western expatriates are more in tune with some aspects of organisational culture, like information flow and leadership practices, that are branding features of many international companies.

The changes in engagement levels across nationality groups are a reminder that cultural diversity and sensitivity

must equally be entrenched into HR management frameworks. It emphasises the point that distinct groups of employees may have different organisational culture responses, which means that strategies designed to enhance participation must be aimed at diversity differentiated engagement.

#### **CONCLUSION**

This study's findings underscore that organisational culture plays an important role in employee engagement within the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) region and has revealed that some aspects of culture are more influential than others. As Table 3 reveals in the regression analysis, employee engagement's strongest determinant is leadership style, with a beta value of 0.41 and a p-level of less than 0.001. Such behaviour, especially when leaders are

inclusive and transformational, affects engagement in a sustained and substantial manner. Communication transparency also matters significantly ( $\beta = 0.32$ ) as employees' perceptions of effort and participation positively influence engagement. Moreover, recognition and rewards ( $\beta=0.27$ ) and organisational values espoused by the dominant coalition ( $\beta=0.30$ ) also enhance engagement by fostering achievements to organisational aims. These four factors, based on the adjusted  $R^2$  value, explain 58% of the variation in employee engagement, a strong indication of their measurement significance. As indicated in the volitional analysis presented in Table 4, this influence is not felt uniformly across all employee demographic groups. Western expatriates report the highest levels of engagement (60%), followed by GCC nationals (52%) and South Asian expatriates (44%). This suggests that some alignment between the employee's cultural background and the prevailing values of the organisation critically determines the reception of engagement strategies. This gap in engagement among Western expats may reflect the prevalence of more familiar overseas organisational leadership and communication patterns employed to dominate the region. Conversely, the South Asian expatriates' lower engagement could signal cultural misalignment, gaps in inclusion, or unfulfilled expectations. These analyses demonstrate the organisational culture in question affects employee engagement, but the effectiveness of the body's initiatives is limited by the lack of consideration for the diverse workforce. Thus, organisational leaders and HR practitioners cannot continue to rely on uniform engagement frameworks, but rather develop nuanced models responsive to distinct national identities and assigned group-level engagement expectations. So, it is evident that the impacts of organisational culture are unilateral. While the influence is substantial—organisational culture and practices within the organisation impact employee behaviour—the variation in perception and reception along cultures necessitates designing more sophisticated flexible systems rooted in local context intended to enhance engagement throughout the GCC.

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