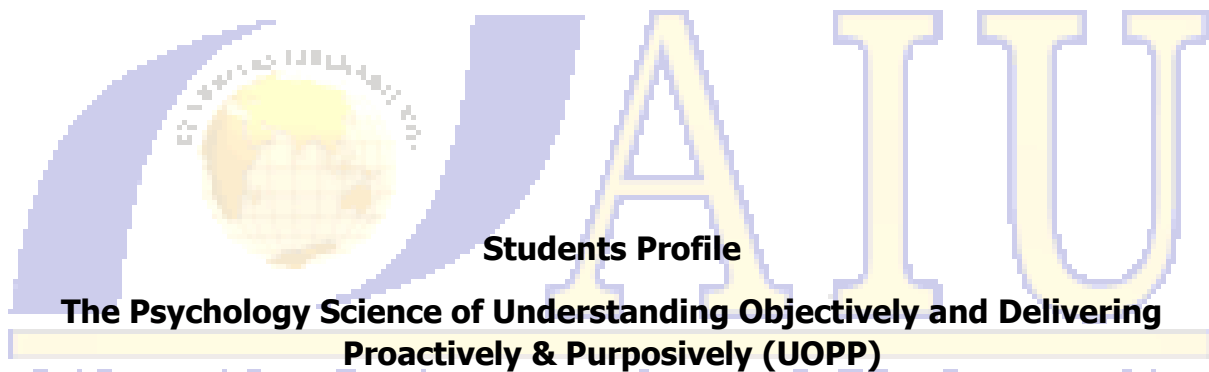


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Students Profile

The Psychology Science of Understanding Objectively and Delivering Proactively & Purposively (UOPP)

A case study of Middle East & North Africa (MENA) Social & Market Research Operations Behavioral attitudes, Work Culture, Corporate Ethics & Wasta Culture

An Essay Presented to
The Academic Department
Of the School of Social and Human Studies
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of Doctorate in Industrial and Organizational Psychology

ATLANTIC INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY

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1. Introduction

The Psychology of Understanding Objectively and Delivering Proactively & Purposively (UOPP) is a multidisciplinary field that combines insights from psychology, neuroscience, and philosophy to help individuals develop a deeper understanding of themselves and others especially in the corporate work environment. UOPP aims to cultivate objective thinking, emotional intelligence, and intentional behavior to achieve personal and professional success/growth.

In this paper, I will endeavor to outline real scenarios that outline the struggle and the conflict at workplace that is related to the differences in corporate behavior as experienced in my time within the Middle East and Northern Africa regions. The paper will draw references on a number of principles that have direct impact on the ways of working, on how we relate corporately and how we professionally deliver our mandate at place of work. Some of the principles that I will largely rely on to delve deeper into the subject matter includes:

- i. Cognitive Biases: deep review on how cognitive biases can influence our thinking, such as confirmation bias, anchoring bias, and the availability heuristic. Understanding how these biases can lead to inaccurate assumptions and flawed decision-making at place of work and how this affects working relationships and delivery of corporate objective and mandate.
- ii. Empathy: How one can develop empathy by putting oneself in others' shoes and trying to understand their perspectives. Reviewing the impact of this concept in working relationship and how they can help to build stronger relationships and improve communication at workplace.
- iii. Active Listening: The practice of active listening that puts focus on the speaker, asking open-ended questions, and paraphrasing what you hear. Outlining how this can help in clarifying misunderstandings and avoiding misinterpretations.
- iv. Non-attachment: how you can separate work and emotions- by recognizing that your thoughts, emotions, and actions are not fixed or permanent. Connecting

this and aligning its position to help develop a greater sense of freedom and flexibility at place of work.

- v. Self-Awareness: Develop self-awareness by recognizing your strengths, weaknesses, values, and motivations. This can help you make more intentional decisions and align your actions with your goals.
- vi. Emotional Intelligence: Cultivate emotional intelligence by recognizing and managing your emotions, empathizing with others, and developing effective communication skills.
- vii. Purposeful Thinking: Practice purposeful thinking by setting clear goals, prioritizing tasks, and focusing on what's truly important. This can help you stay motivated and directed.
- viii. Objectivity: Strive for objectivity by considering multiple perspectives, acknowledging uncertainty, and avoiding assumptions.
- ix. Intentional Action: Take intentional action by setting clear goals, prioritizing tasks, and focusing on what's truly important. This can help you achieve your goals and make progress towards your desired outcomes.
- x. Reflection: Practice reflection by regularly examining your thoughts, feelings, and actions. This can help you identify areas for improvement, develop new insights, and refine your approach.

In organizational psychology, we cannot wish away the component element of knowledge and knowledge management, which is a proven to be the main source of competitive advantage in corporate setup. Drucker (1985) argues that knowledge is a critical source of an organization's competitive advantage, while Liao, Fei, and Liu (2008) suggest that enterprises attempt to look for ways that strengthen the management of knowledge resources in order to cope with the company's challenges in competing environment for improved business performance.^{2, 3.}

Understanding Objectively and Delivering Proactively & Purposively (UOPP) is based on what you know and how you put into action (applying) what you know. This paper will focus on the benefits that the region can get from instilling applicability of both

knowledge and corporate experiences from all levels of corporate structure. This paper tends to outline the importance of UOPP that is pegged on corporately integrating objectivity, proactivity, and strategic corporate purpose in personal and professional settings. By understanding objectively, delivering proactively, and acting purposefully, MENA region research personnel can make more informed decisions, respond effectively to challenges, and achieve their goals.

This paper will try to analyze to build a strategic UOPP framework, that can be improved and applied within corporate space to develop a high-level corporate delivery objective. The UOPP matrix is pegged on the three main attributions contained strategically in the subject matter: objective understanding, proactive delivery, and purposive operation.

The initial UOPP framework components are indicated in the farmwork outline below:

Understanding Objectively	Delivering Proactively	Operating Purposively
Recognizing and acknowledging the facts, data, and evidence-based information (e.g., scientific research, expert opinions)	Anticipating and addressing potential issues or challenges before they arise	Aligning actions with goals, values, and priorities
Avoiding biases, assumptions, and emotional influences	Taking initiative and being prepared to respond to changing circumstances	Being intentional and strategic in one's decision-making and behavior
Developing a comprehensive understanding of the situation or issue at hand	Fostering a proactive approach to problem-solving and decision-making	Focusing on achieving specific outcomes or results

Matrix 001_ UOPP Framework Outline_ Davis Sango, 2024, AIU

2. Description

To get clear understanding into the attributes, it is paramount to separate them and deduce their unique yet common attributes that work together to deliver high level operational excellence in research and insights environment. The basic principles that make up the overall expectations outlined in the UOPP framework can be elaboratively defined in their existential character as follows:

a) Understanding Objectively

Understanding something objectively refers to the ability to comprehend a topic or situation without being influenced by personal biases, emotions, or preconceptions. Objectivity is crucial in various aspects of life, including science, academia, journalism, and everyday conversations. At workplace, objectivity is the fundamental expectation of every professional as a basic principle that guides strategic collaboration and business expectation amongst people who work together.

There is a high urge for professionals to be carried away by their feelings and personal opinion. It is very easy, especially in diverse work environment to lose objectivity. In its bare definition, objectivity is the quality of being unbiased, neutral, and detached from personal opinions or emotions. It involves considering all relevant information, evaluating evidence, and making conclusions based on facts rather than assumptions or feelings.

MENA region, which is the subject of or case study, it is highly hierarchical, and opinion is extremely based on where you are domiciled in the structure. Objectivity mostly understated when you are communicating to ranks above, and it is overly started when the rank above is communicating to ranks below. Horizontal collaboration is mostly ideal in maintaining objectivity, but it is also thwarted by other elements- who are you, where are you from, what color are you, who do you know, how long have you been around. What is strategically missed in this skewed workplace massacre of objectivity is the question of WHAT DO YOU KNOW!

In corporate environment, there is unending struggle to maintaining neutrality, impartiality, factuality, and detach-mentality. Being fair to all employees is a key trait for successful managers – but it can be difficult to put into practice⁴. The biggest challenges for objectivity stem from:

- i. Biases: Personal biases can stem from various sources, such as upbringing, culture, education, or personal experiences. These biases can influence our perceptions and interpretations of information.
- ii. Emotions: Emotions can cloud our judgment and lead to impulsive reactions or conclusions.
- iii. Preconceptions: Preconceived notions can lead us to filter information through our existing beliefs, making it difficult to consider alternative perspectives.
- iv. Confirmation bias: We tend to seek information that confirms our existing beliefs and avoid information that challenges them.
- v. Sensory limitations: Our senses can be limited or biased, leading to incomplete or inaccurate perceptions.

There exist notable strategies that can be explored to achieve objectivity in a corporate work environment:

- i. Seek diverse perspectives: Expose yourself to different viewpoints, opinions, and experiences to broaden your understanding.
- ii. Evaluate evidence: Consider multiple sources of evidence and evaluate their credibility before making conclusions.
- iii. Avoid emotional responses: Recognize when emotions are influencing your judgment and take a step back to re-evaluate the situation.
- iv. Be aware of biases: Identify your own biases and make an effort to overcome them by considering alternative perspectives.
- v. Use objective language: Use language that is neutral and fact-based, avoiding loaded words or emotional appeals.

- vi. Take a step back: Sometimes, taking a break or approaching a problem from a different angle can help you gain a more objective perspective.
- vii. Seek feedback: Seek input from others who may have different perspectives or expertise to help you refine your understanding.

The benefits of objectivity in work environment include.

- i. Improved decision-making: Objectivity helps you make informed decisions by considering all relevant information.
- ii. Enhanced critical thinking: Objectivity develops critical thinking skills by encouraging you to evaluate evidence and arguments critically.
- iii. Better communication: Objective communication is more effective because it avoids misunderstandings caused by biased language or emotional appeals.
- iv. Increased credibility: Objectivity builds trust and credibility with others by demonstrating a commitment to factual accuracy and fairness.

Objectivity is a valuable skill that enables us to navigate complex work situations with clarity and precision. By being aware of the challenges to objectivity and employing strategies to achieve it, we can improve our decision-making, communication, and overall understanding of the work assigned to us and our corporate strategic roles at any point of hierarchy we find ourselves. Remember that objectivity is not about being completely impartial but rather about striving for fairness, accuracy, and openness in our thoughts and actions.

To maintain a high standard of objectivity, the best leaders insist on the highest possible analytic and information gathering tradecraft and rely on structured analytic and decision-making processes to filter out actual or unconscious biases. While there is no single leadership trait that guarantees success in any profession, this fierce commitment to objectivity should be prized by all and leaders should work every day to preserve it.⁵

Understanding objectivity is a principle in the UOPP framework that underscores the professional stature of corporate professionals. In a professional corporate environment,

maintaining a professional demeanor and approach in business practices is key. Specifically, the principle of "understanding objectively" pertains to the necessity for corporate professionals to engage with information, situations, and colleagues without bias or preconceived notions.

b) Delivering Proactively

According to Merriam Webster dictionary, proactive is an adjective that has two standing out meanings: Acting in anticipation of future problems, needs, or changes- this is the first definition. The 2nd definition is domiciled in the wider psychology of learning- relating to, caused by, or being interference between previous learning and the recall or performance of later learning.⁶

Cambridge University defines proactive as taking action by causing change and not only reacting to change when it happens. And that is where the discourse is going to be skewed. In both Webster and Cambridge definition, we are invited to the component of future while we are operating in the now. Anticipation, in a professional context, refers to the ability to foresee potential events, trends, challenges, or opportunities before they occur. This forward-thinking approach is crucial for effective decision-making and strategic planning in any organization.

Humanity wants to know how the future will look like. Businesses that break even all the time are the ones who have invested so much in understanding the future and devising mechanism of controlling the future. Innovations around this component have emerged spanning from foresight maturity models that strategically points out solutions that can give a glimpse of corporate future through forecasting, strategic visioning, future scanning, future framing, future planning, and leadership strategies.

Organizations have a strategic intention- that every output from work done at any level of corporate standing must result to full potential benefit of strategic decision making. Anything short of that will be blamed of lack of foresight or complete disregard to proactive thinking.⁷

According to Foresight Maturity Model (FMM): Achieving Best Practices in the Foresight Field, practice of foresight in the measurement systems that are aimed at shining light to the future dynamics that affects and influence work, decisions, businesses, and all elements of micro-economics has been strategically ignored. I want to assume this has been strategically put to silence due to the immense power it holds and the level of freedom that it can give to many corporate players. Those who know how to read the future, have kept the science under lock and key, and will only dispense just enough based on what you pay for, and give you a glimpse for a short time at a price. Maybe it is due to the complexity of the existing variables that defines the future. Practitioners will tell you that it is difficult to evaluate futures work because the results are too far out in the future that there are variables that cannot be controlled and that often the result of good futures work is to avoid an undesirable outcome, a "non-event" that often goes unnoticed. Avoiding the issue of measurement, however, leaves us unable to answer key questions about futures work and or even simple attribute of foresight.⁸

The Foresight Maturity Model (FMM) is developed on a wider pedestal than just a mere proactive thinking on a strategic assignment in a corporate environment. To fully understand FMM, you must apply the existing disciplines that defines and elaborates the basic makeup of the model:⁹

- a. Leadership. Helping organizations to translate foresight into action...on an ongoing basis.
- b. Framing. Helping the organization identify and solve the right problems.
- c. Scanning. Helping organizations to understand what's going on in its immediate environment and in the world at large.
- d. Forecasting. Helping organizations consider a range of future possibilities.
- e. Visioning. Helping organizations decide what they want in the future.
- f. Planning. Helping people develop plans, people, skills, and processes that support the organization's vision.

Tom Conger, known as the Futurist, in His extensive research and experiences as adjunct professor in Studies of the Future, and from consulting with futurists at Social Technologies ("Social Technologies," 2009), indicates that there are 3 to 5 practices defined for each of the disciplines. His contribution to FMM model helped in outlining below maturity levels:¹⁰

- i. Ad hoc (level 1). The organization and or the employee is not or only marginally aware of processes and most work is done without plans or expertise. This is the initial state for any practice.
- ii. Aware (level 2). The organization and or employee is aware that there are best practices in the field and is learning from external input and past experiences.
- iii. Capable (level 3). The organization and or employee has reached a level where it has a consistent approach for a practice, used across the organization, which delivers an acceptable level of performance and return on investment.
- iv. Mature (level 4). The organization and or employee has invested additional resources to develop expertise and advanced processes for a practice.
- v. World-class (level 5). The organization and or employee is considered a leader in this area, often creating, and disseminating new methods.

These levels are developmental and cumulative. In other words, organizations and or employee can only achieve higher levels after they mastered and passed through the lower levels. As with any developmental process, there is no short cut. If an organization or an employee is performing at an Ad hoc level, it needs to mature with experience and guidance to grow through the Aware level towards the Capable level.

Every organization need not immediately attempt to become world class. For each discipline and for each practice within the discipline, an organization needs to assess how important that practice is to the success of the organization and how much investment should be made. The matrices are designed so that the capable level is usually the optimum price / performance point. Below that, ad hoc or aware level performance does not achieve what is needed for the practice. Above that, mature and

world class levels require investments and should be considered only if it is critical for an organization's success.

Example of Organizational Scorecard	Level 1 AdHoc	Level 2 Aware	Level 3 Capable	Level 4 Mature	Level 5 World Class
Leadership		Today		Goal	
Framing	Today		Goal		
Scanning		Today	Goal		
Forecasting	Today			Goal	
Visioning		Today	Goal		
Planning			Today		Goal

Illustration 1: assessing where you are and what you want to achieve.

In a customer/client centric corporate environment, proactive deliver can never be done away with. There exists numerous citable examples of how different organizations have taken this as a strategic concept and deployed it fully in their area of operations for their corporate advantage.

In his book Building a Storybrand, New York Times bestselling author Donald Miller says, "The key is to make your company's message about something that helps the customer survive and to do so in such a way that they can understand it without burning too many calories." eBay took that philosophy and ran with it. This has made eBay's sell page become a masterclass in proactive clarity. They first outline the basics in a three-step process starting with listing your item, then to what protection you get, and finally selecting how you want to get paid. They then take you through how to create a great listing to help you sell your item, followed by an FAQ section with helpful

answers to commonly asked questions. They've essentially laid out everything you need to know so you don't have to wait for them to provide you with customer support.¹¹

Honeylove Sculptwear loves communication and uses it as the basis for their company-customer relationship. They communicate in a way that anticipates what information their customers need when they do require support and as a way to reduce repeat call volume. And this proactive approach has helped them grow to where they are today. Ebony Hope, CX Team Lead for Honeylove Sculptwear, gives this example: "When a customer reaches out for help, to exchange their order for instance, I set them up with exactly what to expect next. I explain how the process works, what they have to do, any relevant ETAs, and the final outcome. This creates a one-touch resolution and removes the need for the customer to reach out again. Empowering customers with the information they need gives them a stellar experience and reduces inbound volume. It's a win-win situation!"^{12, 13.}

Cars.com puts a strong emphasis on internal teams working together. Jared Hamby, Senior Manager, Inventory Operations at Cars.com has this to say: "It's important to develop strong relationships between your Customer Support and Engineering/Product teams to partner in identifying and solving customer issues proactively before the Customer needs to worry about it." Cars.com uses this strong sense of camaraderie to create system alerts and identify global issues that could affect many of their almost 20,000 car dealership customers and potentially disrupt the livelihood of so many in the industry. Hamby adds, "Nothing is better than being able to reach out to a customer and let them know you found an issue and resolved it for them providing them added trust and peace of mind." Cars.com focuses on cross-collaboration and inter-departmental relationships to achieve a proactive business environment.¹³

Texas de Brazil focuses on the little details in proactive service. US-based Brazilian steakhouse restaurant company Texas de Brazil puts a tremendous amount of effort into anticipating your needs as you're eating. For the uninitiated, a Brazilian steakhouse provides you with all-you-can-eat steak, chicken, lamb, and Brazilian sausage carved

right at your table by expert carvers called gauchos. It's an experience, to say the least. Part of what makes that experience so special is how well they take care of their customers. They specialize in the finest details. When you get up from the table, they neatly refold your napkin. If your water is almost empty, they always refill it before you have a chance to ask. Their servers even come by and proactively ask what cuts of meat you'd like so they can send it around for you. The key is they anticipate your needs and don't stop at the big, obvious details. They get down to the nitty-gritty of taking care of their customers and that can be carried over into any industry.^{13, 14.}

Qatar Airways is undoubtedly one of the biggest airlines in the world. Its website is recognized as the best airline website in the world. The main reason is the principle of understanding their customers' needs and delivering them precisely. Qatar Airways Chief Commercial Officer, Thierry Antinori, said: "Qatar Airways is helping push the boundaries of what to expect from the travel experience of the future. When it comes to digital innovation, our approach is to always focus on the ways in which we can gain advantages for our passengers and employees along with operational efficiencies by using technology."^{15.}

Anticipating customer needs and deploying strategies that will help organizations meet them, that is the game changer in the corporate world. In customer and client management environment, you are expected to sense a customer might need your help, and reach out to them proactively, instead of waiting around for them to contact support. This kind of proactive customer support is not just a nice-to-have, it's something customers have come to expect. In fact, according to a survey by Microsoft, about 70% of consumers have a more favorable view of brands that offer proactive customer service notifications. According to a research report by Forbes, 57% of companies said they were able to drive higher conversion rates as well as greater ROI for marketing activities after investing in predictive marketing. 53% of companies reported improved performance across the entire customer journey, right from brand

awareness to conversions.¹⁶

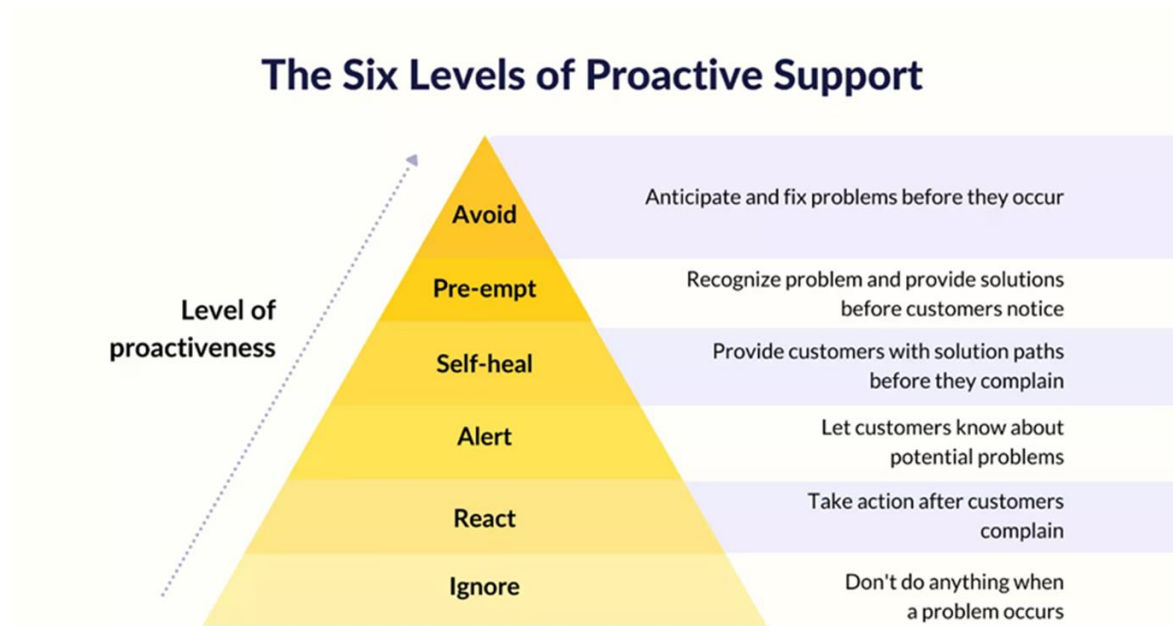


Illustration 2: the six levels of proactive support, Source: Temkin Group

According to Wikipedia, Proactivity or proactive behavior refers to self-initiated behavior that endeavors to solve a problem before it has occurred. Proactive behavior involves acting in advance of a future situation, rather than reacting. It refers to taking control of a situation and making early changes, rather than adjusting to a situation or waiting for something to happen. Waiters have no space in a corporate environment. Proactive anticipators run the world.¹⁷

c) Operating Purposively

Only 7 percent of Fortune 500 CEOs believe their companies should “mainly focus on making profits and not be distracted by social goals.” And with good reason. While shareholder capitalism has catalyzed enormous progress, it also has struggled to address deeply vexing issues such as climate change and income inequality—or, looking forward, the employment implications of artificial intelligence.

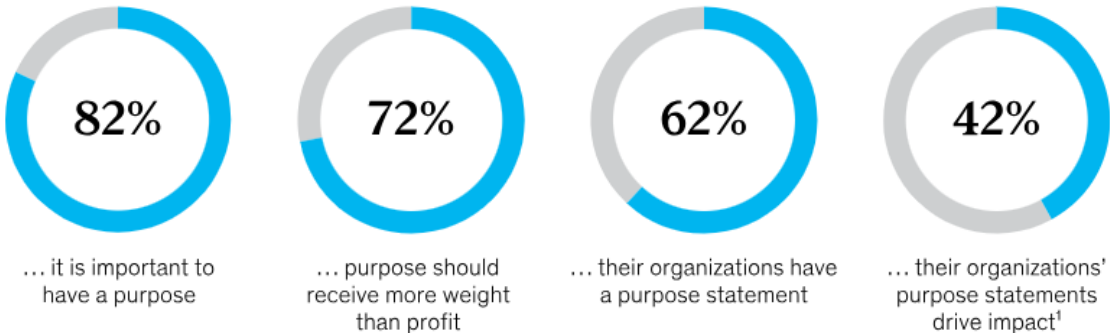
The August 2019 Business Roundtable Statement, which elevated stakeholder interests to the same level as shareholders’ interests, represents both a reappraisal of purpose

and a reflection of tensions that have been boiling over. Customers are boycotting the products of companies whose values they view as contrary to their own. Investors are migrating to ESG funds. And the majority of employees in the corporate world feel “disengaged”; they are agitating for decisions and behaviors that they can be proud to stand behind and gravitating toward companies that have a clear, unequivocal, and positive impact on the world.¹⁸

The biggest disservice is the understanding of the need to have a strategic corporate purpose and lack it at a personal level to help you as a corporate in engaging in strategic delivery of your mandate at the workplace. Employees have confirmed that purpose is important, purpose should be projected more than the financial bottom-line and the fact that they agree that their organization have a purpose driven statement that is incorporated in the objectives. But at the same time, there is a gap when it gets into the practical element of showcasing purpose in the way employees act and perform their functions at the place of work. Purpose will not achieve its corporate objective if employees at their individual capacity delinks themselves from the basic tenets that guides its implementation.

Employees feel that purpose is important—but many say their companies don’t have one, let alone one that makes a difference.

Respondents reporting that ...



Note: segments displayed in gray reflect respondents who were neutral, disagreed, or strongly disagreed.
¹Impact score, which is based on subset of respondents reporting presence of organizational purpose, derived on basis of responses to questions about achievements of purpose and positive change associated with purpose.
 Source: McKinsey Organizational Purpose Survey of 1,214 managers and frontline employees at US companies, October 2019

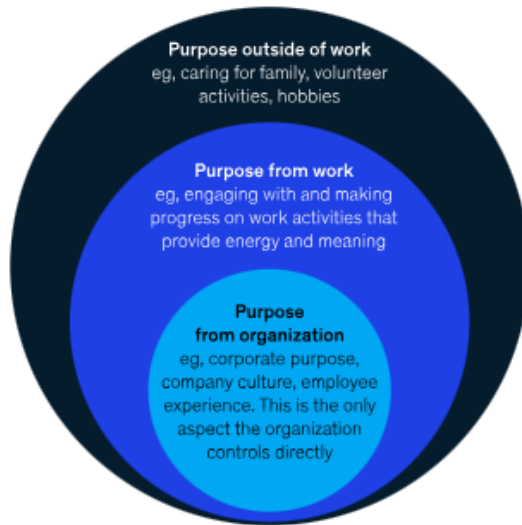
Employees must find meaning in what they do, this is the gateway for corporates to start delivering purposively. According to Jacob Morgan, in creating a meaningful work environment, there must be unreserved understanding what you are doing, the intention (the purpose), the impact that job will make and the reason or why you are doing that job. Understanding this framework in totality allows you as an employee to have a blueprint that will guide in connecting your individual presence at workplace with the objective expectation of the role you play.¹⁹



To better understand how to the difference between purpose in and out of work, Naina Dhingra, Andrew Samo, Bill Schaninger, and Matt Schrimpe developed a concept that outlines relationship between an individual's purpose and their work. This is outlined in three concentric circles. Everyone's purpose may be unique, but some part of it—large or small—comes from forces outside work, just as some part comes from the daily work itself. These are the outermost and middle circles, respectively, and they vary in proportion to each other from person to person.

Meet employees where they are to help them achieve fulfillment at work.

The relationship between individual purpose and work



Three scenarios

Nicole's purpose from work is aligned with and fulfilled by her company's purpose



Although she's aligned with the company's purpose, **Nancy** isn't feeling fulfilled by it in her work



Katherine's purpose is misaligned with—and unfulfilled by—the company's purpose



McKinsey & Company

The extensive deep dive into this concept by Naina Dhingra, Andrew Samo, Bill Schaninger, and Matt Schrimpe reveals that if an employee gets very little purpose from their work, the size of the middle circle will be smaller. By contrast, if another person finds their work very purposeful, it will be larger. Intuitively, then, the size of the middle circle represents the portion of one's purpose that is accessible by work—and also how much purpose employees want from their work—and it may grow or shrink. Employers should view this middle circle as a target they strive to understand and meet. They should influence the expansion of this circle if they can.²⁰

The innermost circle (purpose from the organization) depicts the company's means of influence; it's the only aspect of purpose that organizations control. How so? By establishing a corporate purpose that considers the company's role and contribution to society, and by providing employees with meaningful ways to reflect on the company's

efforts and their impact. Companies can also exert influence by improving the underlying health of the organization and its culture, bolstering inclusiveness and the employee experience, and changing the work itself.

As a corporate leader, you want to see the organization's relatively small sphere of influence expand to match the size of the employee's own sense of purpose from work (the middle circle). The closer the company gets, the more fulfilled the employee is. Moreover, a closer match earns the company more opportunities for employees to seek—and expect—more purpose from work, and to feel more aligned with the organization's purpose.

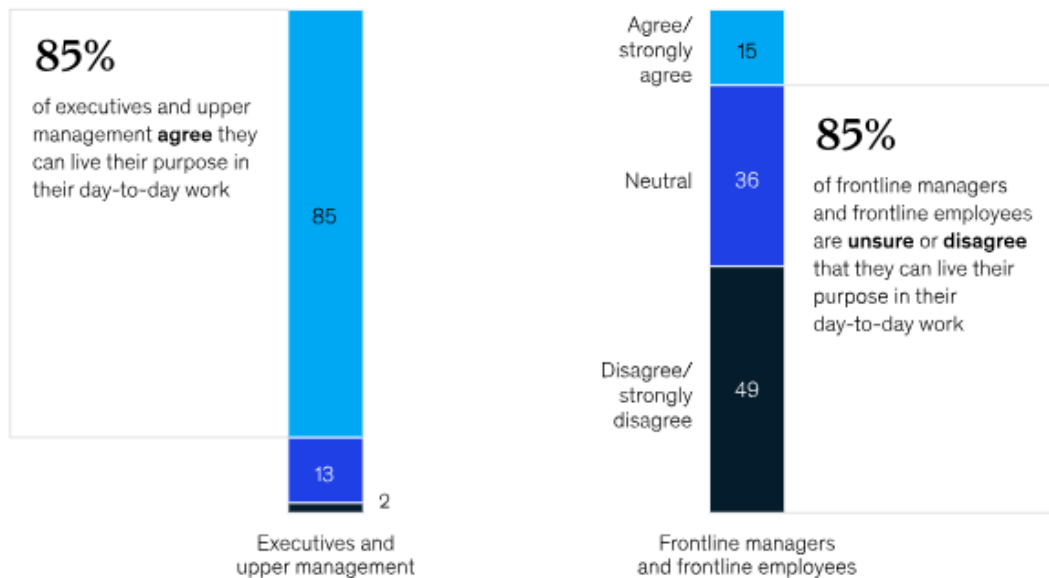
Chances are that your employees want more purpose from work than they're getting. For starters, we know that employees at all levels in the organization say that they want purpose in their lives. Eighty-nine percent of our survey respondents agreed, a proportion that tracks closely with academic research.

Moreover, 70 percent of the employees we surveyed said that their sense of purpose is largely defined by work. Senior executives in our sample nudged that average upward, but even so, two-thirds of nonexecutive employees said that work defines their purpose. This signals a clear opportunity for employers and leaders—an open door to encourage your employees at all levels to develop and live their purpose at work.

Yet when we asked if people are living their purpose in their day-to-day work, the gap between executives and others mushroomed. Whereas 85 percent of execs and upper management said that they are living their purpose at work, only 15 percent of frontline managers and frontline employees agreed. Worse, nearly half of these employees disagreed, compared with just a smattering of executives and upper management.

A stark 'purpose gap' exists between upper management and the front line.

Living your purpose in day-to-day work, % of respondents



Source: McKinsey Individual Purpose survey, August 2020 (n = 1,021)

McKinsey
& Company

This "purpose hierarchy gap" extends to feeling fulfilled at work. Executives are nearly eight times more likely than other employees to say that their purpose is fulfilled by work. Similarly, executives are nearly three times more likely than others to say that they rely on work for purpose. Interestingly, the group most reliant on work for purpose—across roles—are parents (see sidebar, "Meet the parents").²⁰

This extensive research final output was to quantify the scope of the overall challenge for companies by comparing respondents' answers, regardless of their role, to questions about their desired and actual states. Two questions were asked to the respondents:

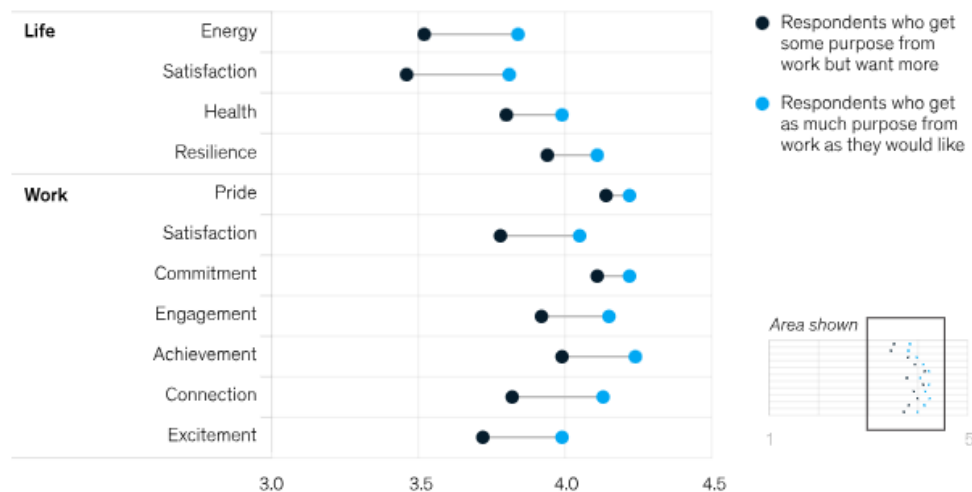
1. How much of your work needs to be aligned to your purpose?
2. To what extent is your purpose defined by your work?

This revealed that only 18 percent of respondents believed that they get as much purpose from work as they want. Sixty-two percent said that while they get some purpose from work, they want to get even more.

The less satisfied respondents reported lower average work and life outcomes than more satisfied peers did—everything from reduced feelings of energy and life satisfaction to lower engagement, satisfaction, and excitement about work. Negative work and life outcomes for employees inevitably translate to negative outcomes for the business.

Employees who get the purpose they want from work report better outcomes at work—and in life—than their less-satisfied peers.

Purpose in day-to-day work,¹ score (5 = high, 1 = low)



Note: All the differences shown between the 2 groups of respondents are statistically significant except for work pride and work commitment, although both are directionally consistent with the other findings.
¹Question: "To what extent is your individual sense of purpose defined by work?" vs "How much of your work needs to be aligned with your purpose?"
 Source: McKinsey Individual Purpose survey, August 2020 (n = 1,021)



3. Definition & Rationale

In the Middle East and North Africa region, the ways of working in the research environment is unique in various ways. My extensive experience in the region has opened my eyes to a wide new view of corporate engagement and way of working. The default sentimentalism in what shapes ways of working would highlight on attributes like culture, sense of meaning and purpose, work environment, opportunities, leadership, experiences, etc. All those factors that make up essential attributes that influence employee engagements as outlined by Blair Williamson can never be as far from the truth.²¹ My rationale will however be built largely on the cultural inclination that has a huge effect on behaviors and ways of working in this region.

Global negotiator blog gives us a better introductory context to MENA region- which makes up part of the Arab world. According to this blog, to successfully negotiate in Arab countries it is essential to take into account their protocol and business culture, in certain aspects so different from the Western world. The Arab countries constitute a traditional culture based on the principles of their religion -the Islam- which, however, is constantly evolving, adopting behaviour patterns typical of developed countries; this mixture is somehow difficult to understand for foreign businessmen who visit these countries. It is important to understand that when doing business in Arab countries, culture and religion are inseparable. Religion is a permanent force that has very significant effects on the way of doing business; hence, the importance for the foreign negotiator to know the Muslim religion and respect its principles, that have a notable influence on the Arab etiquette and business culture.²²

Business culture in Arab countries is based in a system commonly known as wasta, Wasta follows that well-known Western maxim of, "It's not what you know but who you know". In the Arab world this is a widely exploited system, and it is viewed as neither shameful nor underhand, but simply as part of the normal course of business and daily life. If you have high-powered contacts or friends in the right places, you are likely to find that bureaucracy and business run in a much smoother fashion. A system of

borrowed and returned favors is also prevalent. If you are asked a favor by a business partner, endeavor to fulfil it or at least give the semblance that you have tried your best. Never refuse outright to do something when it is clearly a case of wasta. Even if you are not able to get your contact what he/she needs or wants, your effort and enthusiasm will be remembered, appreciated, and surely repaid in time.

There has been extensive attempt to review the concept of Wasta and its implication in the micro-economics of the MENA region and the globe at large. Trying to understand it brought to the surface a myriad of complex dispositions based on the angle you take. A lot of literature has been published, trying to help shade more light in this concept that is deep rooted in the culture of doing business, engaging corporately, and assumed to be the right way of getting things done.

Weir's work in 2020 contributes to the understanding of wasta by presenting a holistic model that bridges the micro-macro divide. The study was cutting across different economic sectors in the region and it helped lay the groundwork for comprehending the broader implications of wasta across different sector. Alsarhan et al. (2021) investigated the gender dimension of wasta, focusing on how it influences Human Resources Management practitioners. It provides insights into the broader organizational context, which can be relevant when considering the tourism sector.

Alsarhan and Valax (2021) on the other hand contributes to the conceptualization of wasta and its implication in Human Resource Management. The insights attained from this work on HRM perspective can be extrapolated to give even a deeper understanding on the potential effects of wasta on HR practices in the tourism sector. Alsarhan (2022) proposed a change management roadmap for adopting wasta-free managerial practices in Arab organizations. The study of Alsarhan (2022) offers practical recommendations that can be applied across sectors.

Baranik et al. (2023) explored the relationship between *wasta* and employment status and income in the Arab Middle East. It provides valuable insights into the broader socio-economic implications of *wasta*. Zhang et al. (2021) compared different informal interorganizational business relationships, including *wasta*, and their impact on customer loyalty. Their study offers insights into how informal networks may affect business relationships.

Helal et al. (2023) explored the navigation of *wasta* in business practices in Lebanon. It provides a contextual understanding of *wasta* in a specific geographic and business context that may have implications for the broader business environment, including tourism. Table 1 provides a comprehensive overview of the focus and relevance of each referenced study to the tourism sector.

Research on social networks and social capital has focused primarily on China, Russia, and India, while the Arab world has received relatively less attention. Recent research sought to measure the role of social capital in Arab countries, specifically through the lens of *Wasta*, an Arabic term that encompasses the constructs of reciprocity (*Mojamala*), empathy (*Hamola*), and trust (*Somah*). In-depth search into this reveals that the cultural foundations of *Wasta* are embedded in Arab societies as a result of historical and social influences. Goals are achieved through links with key persons, and the interaction typically involves one party who is structurally powerful, controls access to resources, or both. The root of *Wasta* is the Arab manifestation of social exchange theory in which respective obligations are specified and the parties are confident that each will fulfill their obligations based on social norms of exchange.

Ron Berge's in-depth review into the three reciprocity that creates the foundation of *Wasta* are as defined below:

- i. *Mojamala* (مجامج), the affective element of *Wasta*, is inherently connected to family and nepotism. This is a problem in the Arab world because it has become so widespread that norms have developed to justify it. Nepotism can lead to poor

performance in many Arab firms since it discourages hiring skilled management, which limits the size and scope of the firm. Essentially, nepotism is a mechanism for families to hoard power and resources over time.

- ii. Hamola (ةلوحم) is the conative component of Wasta, referring to the level of human empathy, benevolence, and favoritism one has with another through owing or being owed favors. Hamola is the largest politico-administrative unit, and belonging to a tribe involves more than successive generations of genetic relationships. Belongingness depends upon thinking the same way, believing in the same principles, assimilating the same values and ethos, acting according to the same rules and laws, respecting the same hereditary sheikh (an "honorific title for an Arab tribe or religious leader"), living together, defending each other, and even fighting together.
- iii. Somah (ةعسم), the cognitive component of Wasta, is intricately entwined with trust. In the Arab context, trust at the interpersonal level needs to be established before any business relationship can unfold. Trust depends on the length of the relationship, on how business is conducted, and how disputes are resolved.

If you are a new professional in this region, and especially if you are exposed to the west corporate environment, you will be hit by an instant corporate shock. The undoubted corporate reality that is in most cases projected higher than the normal strategic expectations for any corporate tenets of engagement is something that has started getting high level scrutiny, especially as we get to a level of global collaboration and streamlined legal frameworks that governs the ways of working.

Hannah M. Ridge, a postdoctoral Research Fellow at the Pozen Center for Human Rights, University of Chicago, Chicago, IL, USA, did an extensive online Publication on 31 Oct 2023 dubbed, "Wasta and Democratic Attitudes in the Middle East" in Middle East Law and Governance, an Interdisciplinary Journal that gave a vivid angle on the specificity of this topic. To examine the impact of wasta on democratic attitudes, Transparency international did a study that drew on five waves of the Arab Barometer (2007–2018). The study examined the effect of wasta usage on perceived corruption

and democracy in the state. It also looked at citizen interest in democracy. It found out that *wasta* was substantially linked to corruption (*fasad*) in the publics' evaluations. Those who saw *wasta* in use around them were less likely to view their states as democracies, but they were more likely to support democracy for their countries in this region. Among those who saw their countries as democracies, *wasta* made them less satisfied with their governments. Among those who recognized that they lived in non-democracies, prevalent *wasta* made them more interested in a democratic system. Theoretically, democratization equalizes political rights and access to state services and reduces the role of connections in accessing work or resources. *Wasta* users, on the other hand, are less interested in a regime change. *Wasta* is thus intimately linked with popular democratic attitudes.²⁵

Lisa Baranik, Brandon Gorman, and Natalie Wright confirms that in this region, the belief in reciprocity pervades despite the fact that rendering the service is part of your job. Debates about the relative importance of 'who you know' and 'what you know' stem from Turner's (1960) work on contest-mobility and sponsored-mobility. Turner argued that there were two paths towards upward mobility in society. Contest-mobility, or 'what you know,' suggests that mobility is a contest in which all individuals can fairly compete. Those who work hard and perform well are rewarded with success. Sponsored-mobility, or 'who you know,' suggests that some individuals are given preference by an established elite. Those who are given special attention and sponsorship by the elite will succeed.²⁶

Just as some researchers emphasize the positive, neutral, or negative aspects of *wasta*, people in the region themselves disagree about the nature of *wasta*. Cunningham and Sarayrah (1993: 13) explain the dilemma in the following passage: Distinguishing appropriate from inappropriate *wasta* is messy. From the protagonist's perspective, every *wasta* use is a legitimate attempt to cut through red tape or to level the playing field. As viewed by those who do not have access to strong *wasta*, the entire system is corrupt.

The findings from the wave I of the Arab Barometer study shows *wasta* is an important predictor of job outcomes in the Arab Middle East. This includes winning contracts, passing an interview, winning elective position, and getting promotions. Building on Berger et al.'s (2015) and Baranik et al.'s (2018) finding that *wasta* predicts individual-level performance, the current study provides additional empirical support the relationship between *wasta* and objective career success as indicated by employment status, individual income, and family income. Findings from the current study support the notion that gatekeepers are critical to career success and that in contexts such as the Arab Middle East, a lack of access to these gatekeepers can prevent individuals from succeeding. Using *wasta* provides individuals with access to a gatekeeper who can provide them with critical resources, sponsorship, and information necessary for objective career success (Caspi et al., 1998; Hamm and McDonald, 2015; Kwon et al., 2013; O'Connor, 2013; Paultny et al., 2019; Pedulla and Pager, 2019; Seibert et al., 2001).

Working in one of the biggest global insights company in this region, there is high level of expectations on integrity. Just like many other big multi-national organizations working across the globe, in order to mitigate the attendant risks, we have in place strategies that should be implemented in order to strengthen integrity by putting in place systems, processes and conducting extensive due diligence (in particular on agents, vendors and other third parties) when planning to do business in the region.

Conducting due diligence can, however, be challenging in a region that lacks transparency and accountability. The public domain is often limited and much of what would be considered public information in the US or Europe is not readily – or legally – available in the Arab World. Public information may also be unreliable or biased. It is not uncommon for the names of dead individuals to be listed as shareholders on corporate filings in some countries or for these documents to contain out-of-date shareholding information. Further, land deeds relating to ruling family members can be incomplete or missing, and property records are often decentralized or stored only in hard copy. While corporate and property records in certain countries like Lebanon and

Bahrain are generally accessible, they are restricted in others such as Algeria. Also, although there are limited exceptions, there are generally no credit bureaux throughout the region. With these limitations in mind, it is important to supplement available public records with thorough research of media and internet sources in the local language and, in some cases, other relevant regional or international languages including Kurdish, Farsi or French.²⁷

The infusion of Wasta in the working environment in this region has watered down the strategic focus to attaining a highly professional corporate environment. There is a high-level judgement that is directed right away to any outsider who doesn't come with any privileges that are bonified package that encompasses this culture. At one point, I pointed out the processes that is clearly outlined in managing projects and delivering objectively and I was dismissed by a junior executive who told me on email that they don't do that in the region. By following up further to establish where the audacity and confidence for disregarding the laid-out process and ways of working was coming from, I was informed that the junior executive was a close relative to one of the senior directors in the organization, and that I should drop any further discussions on the topic.

At one point, I was also surprised by some discussions that I was looped in by a team of executives working on one of the key accounts in the region. There was an eminent change of key contact from client side, who was not close to the internal structure. And the account was at risk of going away since it was won on the premise of Wasta. The new face from the client side had also their own people and organization who they were planning to transfer the account to, not on the basis of competence but by the same wasta matrix. That wasn't the big issue, the glaring issue was the basis under which the account was won in the first place. The fact that there was a cheaper option and methodology that was ignored, which came out as the main point of discussions to try save the project from being transferred to another agency. I came to realize that there were other side discussions that were considered during the arrangements and

negotiations which didn't necessarily follow the process of negotiating for corporate engagement and contracts.

I was one day informed by one of the directors in one of the project financial reviews that for them, they focus on commercial elements and not necessarily on the processes of how things are done. For them in their strategic expectations, as long as they are able to make a sale, it matters less how that contract has come in. The focus is put more on bringing the pie home, the complications of ensuring the sanity of the process is ignored and not taken in high regard.

Trying to be objective in such an environment is very laughable. A survey conducted by the social and economic survey Research of Qatar explains the construction of Qatari society and explains how *wasta* became a social constructive norm among Qataris. Furthermore, it examines the impacts of *wasta* on employees and organizations in Qatar. The research finally confirm that *Wasta* has become a cultural paradox that intersects with classes as a social construction that reinforces discrimination and social inequalities.²⁸

Having worked for some times in this region, I have firsthand experience on how this concept makes working in the region for outsiders very difficult. Complacency and uttermost disregard to processes and laid down procedures is a norm in this region. I was shocked when I first join the region to see the level of quality misses in the commissioned jobs in the region. The global threshold for quality misses is below 5%. I was informed and guided to understand that it is a normal occurrence to see over 25% quality misses in this region. In other regions, that would outrightly disqualify a supplier from ever engaging in any contract with a reputable global organization. Coming in the region and trying to straighten things by following the textbook expectations on matters of quality can only lead to more stress and high-level disappointment.

In a research setup, when we have commissioned a job and identified the right data collection partner to engage, mostly based on the fact that they have been accredited

and passed the accreditation reviews laid down by the commissioning party, they are given all the required briefs including the expectations for the project. The most shocking thing is the level of engagement you encounter once the project has been approved to proceed with the selected and approved fieldwork partner. In project planning, we look at the sample of the data that needs to be collected, we look at the daily achievement rate by research assistant, we then look at the deadline for the data collection phase, and that should tell us how many people we will engage in a job. There was one time a sample size of 500 in one of the countries in the region, a simple target group, they assigned over 50 data collection interviewers, and they wanted to be given over 27 days to collect data. Now when you ask the rationale of the number of interviewers deployed against the sample target and the time requested, it comes vivid that they do not have any idea what it means to manage data collection processes.

As if that is not enough, when it comes to collection of the data, there is always specifications in terms of expected demographics based on the research design commissioned. It is a simple planning process where the expected demographics are supposed to be distributed across the team for easy management and execution. In this region, it is not a surprise when you commission a study and you have a gender demographic expectation of 30% males and 70% females, you will end up getting 100% males and 40% females.

There exists accreditation process that is a standard process used to select the best qualified partners across the globe. One would expect that this is applied in equal measure in this region to help get the best partners who have both the skills and the corporate qualification that are desired for a high caliber strategic research work partner. But until now, bare minimums sound like a big ask. So how is accreditation happening in this region? I wondered for long until the element of Wasta was opened up to my understanding- this is a culture that will be difficult to break.

It is important to note that due to this culture, people are not so much open for scrutiny. Positive feedback and an extra question on the process can be taken out of

context at any time. A colleague once chatted me on the side and asked me why I keep on asking questions instead of just letting it go. If you are not familiar with the region, you will feel you are following up on a strategic item, but it may just strike people in a wrong way. In most cases, when you ask a question and make a request, they may not respond to you, what will happen is they will go and raise the same question with their sponsor and leave you hanging. It is a common practice to see side talks that delinks from the objective main trail of discussions, in most cases, it is done to show you that you may be objective, yes, but its not just objectivity that takes the day in this region. I once gave out a directive to a collaborator and instead of following the directive given in an objective manner, she went ahead to write to a manager requesting to follow a different route from what I had directed, because the route she wanted was a fair route that falls within the safeguards of working culture they are used to.

At one point, while dealing with glaring quality issues with one of fieldwork partners, the director of that organization was busy trying to find ways of meeting our senior management teams for a cup of coffee. He had even planned to travel for an office curtesy call, ignoring the questions we were raising on the quality of work they were doing. Not even once did this senior director from this fieldwork company tried to respond to quality issues raised or offer a way out on how to deal with them, but what he was adamantly pursuing is to meet decision makers from our side so that he can talk, and the talks I suspected weren't anywhere near to what we were dealing with. Gladly his wishes were thwarted when I escalated this to a team outside the region that is responsible in managing the engagements with our partners.

Even in open forums, where feedback is shared, there is visible understating of facts and over stating of theories that do not paint out the status of things. The glaring quality struggles and huge gaps in the ways of working are hushed while the tone on the general benefits of visible engagement is projected. Fancy ideas are well articulated in strategic meetings and gathering, with visible gains that translate to healthy balance sheets, negotiated engagement costs which in most cases is arrived at based on the same culture of Wasta is brought forth to help propagate the narrative of financial

growth and strategic ownership of the corporate focus, which is mainly money first and the rest may or may not come later.

The region has huge potential in all micro-economics spheres. All corporates globally who are interested with creating healthy balance sheet will definitely try their best to see how to get business. Trust plays a primary role in the Arab context. For Western firms seeking to build ties in Arab countries, the chief stumbling block to building effective social networks and alliances is the absence of trust. Therefore, building relationships that include reciprocity and empathy is important in negotiations because it creates a sense of trust and understanding. This can make the negotiation process go more smoothly and can help to resolve conflicts. However, building relationships takes time and effort, and may not be possible in all situations. The shortcut to relationship building in the region- WASTA.²⁹

4. Actualizing UOPP in MENA

Corporate environment in MENA region has its expectations well cut out. It is a bargain pegged on intense sense of gamble that may pit organizational bottom-line expectations against the opportunist competitors who have no regards to ethical ways of doing business. We may argue on the cultural inclinations of the regions that waters down the glaring description of what Wasta means and stands for, by focusing on the strategic benefits it brings on the table, and ignoring the fundamental disorder it generates in the professional world which is enroute to a unified global way of doing business.

According to Loewe et al. (2007), despite the development in indicators for corruption, there are many limitations associated with these indices. Most of those indices are subjective in nature as still there is no one universal index to measure corruption or wasta. It is also vivid that these indices do not measure corruption as an absolute value, which means these indices only rely on comparison and they do not consider the intensity of corruption or the fundamental attributes that defines corrupt practices. They

just highlight whether corruption is more or less widespread in one organization compared to other organizations. Additionally, these corruption indicators provide little or no information at all about the phenomena of wasta in business settings because they do not differentiate between different forms of corruption.³⁰

Findings from an extensive research Alsarhan and Valax (2021) indicate that wasta has negative consequences on the overall performance of organizations, through the influence it exerts on employee motivation, morale and job satisfaction, frustration, workplace diversity, turnover, brain drain, as well as its effect on the image and reputation of the individuals and organizations alike. Especially those who are from outside the region, they will find it very difficult to break even in a space that has an already established culture of Wasta, that may give undue advantage at the expense of objectivity and professional competitiveness.³¹

The research resulted to development of an 11-point framework to help guide organizations on how to foster a Wasta free environment. It captures key elements identified through critical examination, offering a strategic roadmap for managers and leaders to navigate the challenges associated with informal connections and wasta in the workplace. The proposed 11 steps framework that was based on extensive work by Alsarhan and Valax included:³¹

- i. Initiation: The current status of wasta should be established along with the required changes. This as two sides of the same coin: admitting the present reality and the potential outcomes of changes on the other side.
- ii. Assessing the environment for modification: It explains the nature of organizations in the Middle East; the operation process for organizations in a region full of wasta.
- iii. Planning for change: A clear plan for change is developed to show the main purpose for change and the roles and responsibilities for all parties involved in the change. An example of a change plan would be developing a merit-based HRM structure

- iv. Sponsors' support: The involvement and support from sponsors are critical for success for this change. Sponsors could be for example leaders or policy makers.
- v. Preparing the people for change: People concerned in this case are mainly staff in the tourism sector in the region and candidates in the same area.
- vi. Creating culture to make change last: Start changing structures, regulations, and laws at both organization level and employees' level, to make the change last.
- vii. Imitating leaders for the change: Leading by example inside the organization is essential for such change.
- viii. Winning starts small: Staff inside the organization need to see early winning signs for such change, which will help the change to last.
- ix. Effective communication: it is clear that effective communication is critical for the success of the change plan. This could be carried out through training, monitoring, coaching and meeting. This helps the change to last as more and more staff would be aware of it and commit to contribute to the success of the change.
- x. Measuring and controlling the change: For lasting impacts for the change, it is essential to implement a robust monitoring and control process to make sure the effectiveness of the plan and its implementation.
- xi. Registering the lessons learned: Gathering the lessons learned from different organizations working in the Middle East, would help in updating the current framework on a regular basis.

Ramady M (2016) confirms that there is a clear agreement that to minimize waste in business environment, any types of favoritisms should be avoided at all levels inside the organizations. In addition, the significance of the current work lies on providing potential solutions for HRM practices regarding hiring and training. Another important contribution is for HRM by highlighting the warning signs for employees may involve in corruption, human resource department develop additional efficiency, in addition, applying these kinds of proposed solutions would increase the organization's competitiveness. Moreover, reducing corruption inside the organization will increase the

employees' commitment, leading to higher production rate and better organizational growth.³²

The easiest way is to adopt the UOPP framework and guide the employees to pick it up and make it the new culture within the organization. Based on my own UOPP framework and having worked in the region for some time, I think getting organizations to put more emphasis on delivering results based on merit and not undue advantage should be celebrated. My matrix is built on the three main framework attributes (Objectivity, Proactivity and Purpose). The intertwine attributes gives us a three-pronged behavior map that can help us quickly achieve this concept. The behavior maps generate a consolidated triangle that contains the basic expectations or working assumptions that make us the framework.

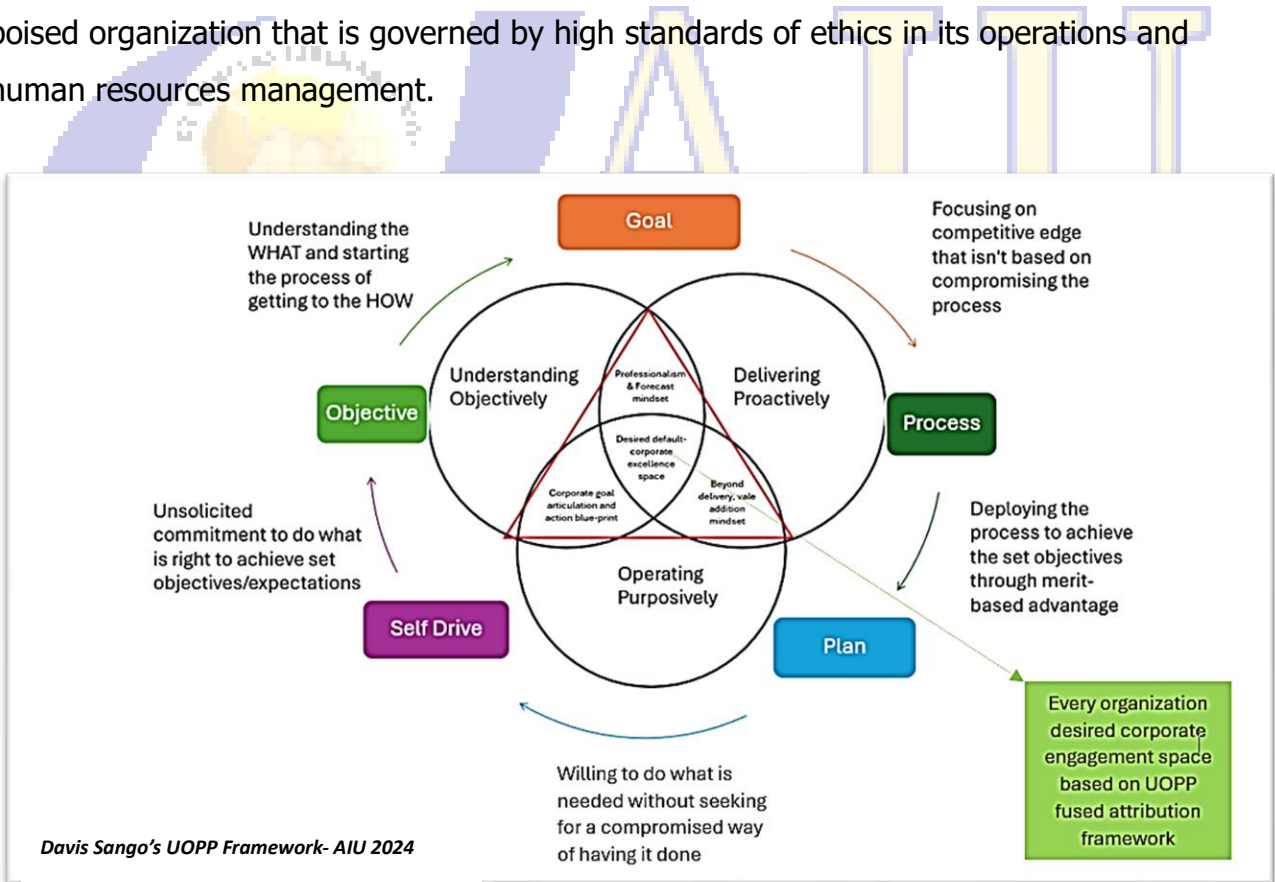
Understanding objectively is based on corporate goal articulation and action blueprint, professional and forecast mindset and they both intersect to land on the desired default corporate excellence space. This is pegged on a journey of understanding what needs to be done (represented by the objective on the journey map) and defining means of ensuring it is done in a manner that doesn't invite compromise of both the corporate image and or the professional expectation of an employee (represented by the goal on the journey map).

Delivering proactively brings into focus the value addition mindset, an attribute that focuses on beyond just delivering what is expected. Together with the shared professionalism and forecast mindset, they are able to drive move the employee closer to the desired excellence space. The journey map is branched from the goal towards the process on the premise of focusing on competitive edge that isn't based on compromising the process.

Operating purposively is founded on two main elements: a plan and self-drive. This is defined by fully articulating and understanding the corporate goals and going beyond

just delivery. The journey map is premised on willingness to do what is needed without seeking for a compromised way of having things done- like taking shortcuts.

The framework is supported by extra attributes in its journey to achieve a desired corporate excellence space. There is an element of deploying the process to achieve the set objectives through merit. This journey attributes are domiciled within the process and plan gap. Between self-drive and objective, there is a journey of getting to unsolicited commitment to do what is right to achieve the set objectives. By linking the gaps, i.e. between goal and process, between process and plan, between plan and self-drive, between self-drive and objective, then finally between objective and goal, we repeatedly build a corporate argument to support new ways of doing things in a corporate environment that doesn't contradict the basic principles of a strategically poised organization that is governed by high standards of ethics in its operations and human resources management.



My UOPP framework can be formatted to fit into different strategic outlooks in different work environment. I have skewed this to help build a strategy that can be adopted to

bring about an alternative way of winning in MENA region, which is not going to be premised on the acts of *wasta*, which derails the corporate beliefs of many professionals especially from outside the region and who are willing to work in this region as uncompromised executives.

5. General Recommendations

A default fact is that company culture has always been something that underpins successful business but integrating it into a global corporate company holds several challenges. The concept of attaining an integrated company with universally acceptable culture that fits its diverse definition of ethics, integrity and corporate standing is completely subjective. From country to country, even region to region, the perception of what a global company culture should look like will always differ. Therefore, building and managing such a company, or even working in the same diverse culture environment can be difficult for any business that operates internationally and from various central hubs.

To safeguard global companies from being affected and infiltrated with social cultures, there is a need to develop an alternative culture, a company culture that will be projected to stand in place of the negative culture that upsets the basic principles of doing business. Company culture represents the character, attitudes, and approach of your company. When measuring it on a global scale, it shows a cohesive company culture that is apparent and accepted at all global operations and sites. A clear vision of your company culture solidifies your company's identity, promotes a positive image to the public and increases employee retention.

Not belaboring on the components that defines a good company culture that are not limited to company values and ethos, employee expectations, business conduct, working environment and company goals and aspirations. Those are basic tenets that a great company culture can be founded upon. If *wasta* is a way of doing things and it has been infused into the working culture of many corporations in MENA region, it

means we can develop an alternative culture that may be acceptable globally. Not easy, but we cannot kill wasta and leave a vacuum- nature abhors vacuum.

According to research, a growing number of C-suite and board members view culture as a critical strategic topic: in fact, 71% say culture is an important topic on their agenda, a notable jump from 64% in 2013. But for the influence of culture to translate into real business results, culture, strategy and operations must be aligned. Achieving this alignment demands a deep understanding of where your culture is today, and then envisioning its ideal state. Ask yourself: how is the current culture supporting our intentions/image? What needs to change? This is done by focus first on adopting the few critical behaviors that matter most — tangible actions that, if practiced more often at every level, can help shift the culture. Cultures don't change quickly, but a disciplined focus on these "critical few" can accelerate and catalyze a purposeful evolution.³³

There should be a robust accreditation process in place, one that would clearly outlaw anything that doesn't follow due processes in the ways of working. As indicated previously, due to shortcuts and disregard to the clear expected business ethics, corporations have found themselves engaging with local suppliers who don't have what it takes to help drive the objectives of their businesses. Selection of business partners and collaborators should be based on merits and not who you know and are affiliated to. There is a lot of efforts and time invested in managing working relationships that were developed on the basis of nepotism and wasta.

There is need to serious capacitation training in this region. Training on ethical ways of doing business and skills required in managing different businesses. Getting competitive advantage based on who know may not be such an issue as long as you also have knowledge on how to do the task hired for. There are collaborators who get the jobs, and they have no skills, they have no understanding and they do not have any idea how those jobs are supposed to be done. Surviving in a collaboration ecosystem barely because there exists a godfather watching over their interest is the only focus, they have. Business leaders should be trained how to manage businesses and delink their

focus from over reliance on godfathers by having very clear business objectives and well elaborated goals that will guide the way of doing business which should include demonizing any element of operation that is unethical.

6. Conclusion

It will be unfair to state that wasta is exclusive to the Middle Eastern countries as there are several activities in different nations which resemble wasta to great extent. In addition, wasta in MENA is related with social relations, and it effects working conditions in business situations and social environment. An avenue for future research could involve qualitative studies aimed at attaining a deeper comprehension of the wasta phenomenon within the region and the implication of replacing it with other ethical business norms. This approach could encompass conducting interviews with individuals possessing extensive expertise in different economic sectors in the region, including expatriates from different parts of the world domiciled in the region for the purpose of business or corporate engagements.

We have established that the would-be glaring definition of wasta has been watered down due to its deep-rooted connection with the culture of doing business in the region. Culture takes time to create and adopt. Changing it takes even more time and it may direct the intents of people in uncharted waters, and businesses do not like stepping in the future of uncertainty. It is hence imperative that application of the UOPP framework can gradually start aligning the blueprint for culture change by introducing attributes that will help define a better alternative way of working and doing business in this region.

Moral disengagement refers to ways in which we convince ourselves that what we're doing is not wrong. It can upset the balance of judgment—causing us to prioritize our personal commitments over shared beliefs, rules, and principles—or it can skew our logic to make unethical behaviors appear less harmful or not wrong. Moral disengagement can also lead to questionable decisions and can make working difficult.

In highly developed corporate environment, unethical behavior can carry severe legal consequences and negatively impact your company's bottom line. This is reflected in over half of the top 10 largest bankruptcies between 1980 and 2013 that resulted from unethical behavior. As a business leader, strive to make ethical decisions and fulfill your responsibilities to stakeholders in an ethical manner.³⁴



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