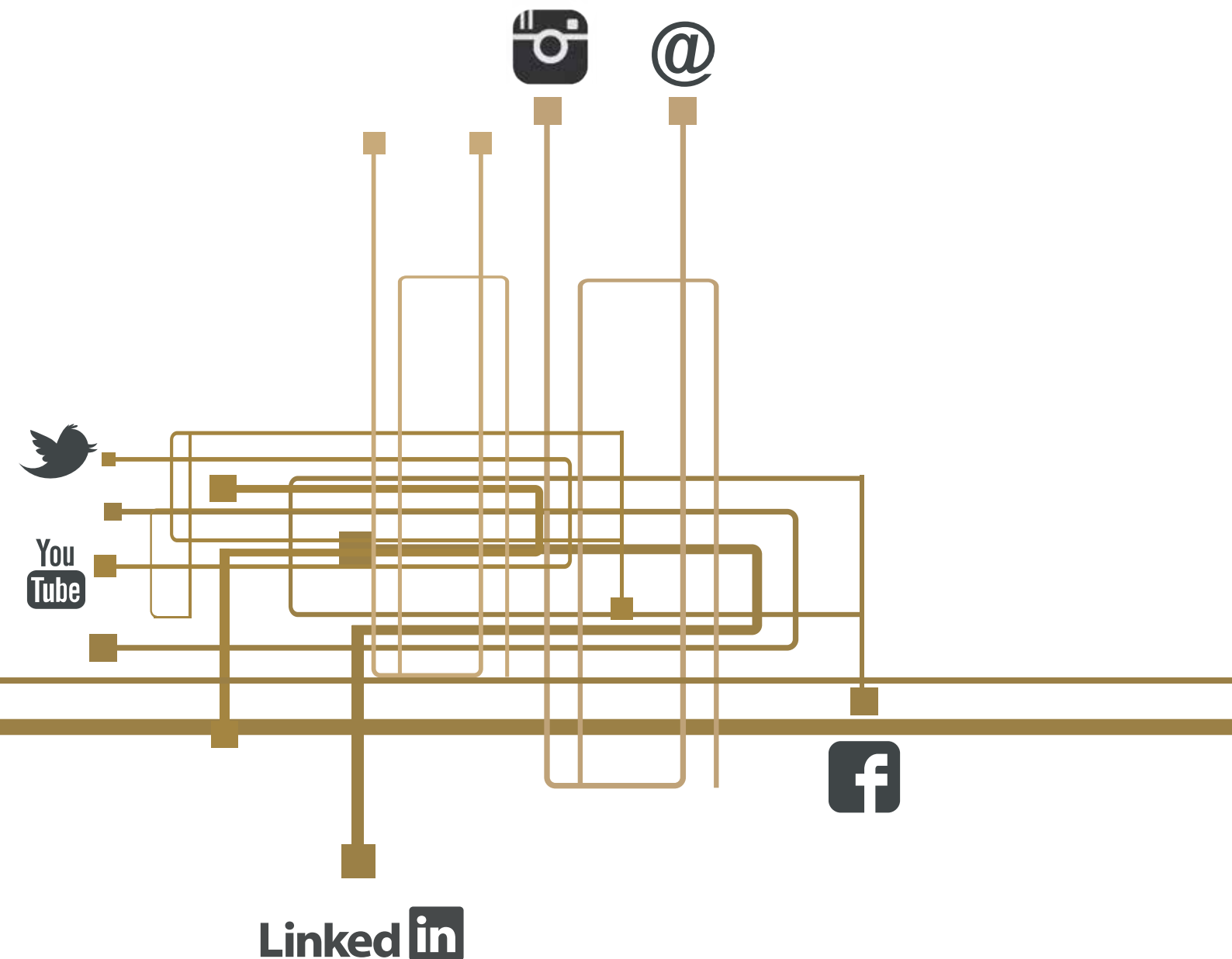


Emirati Women Perspectives on Work and Political Participation

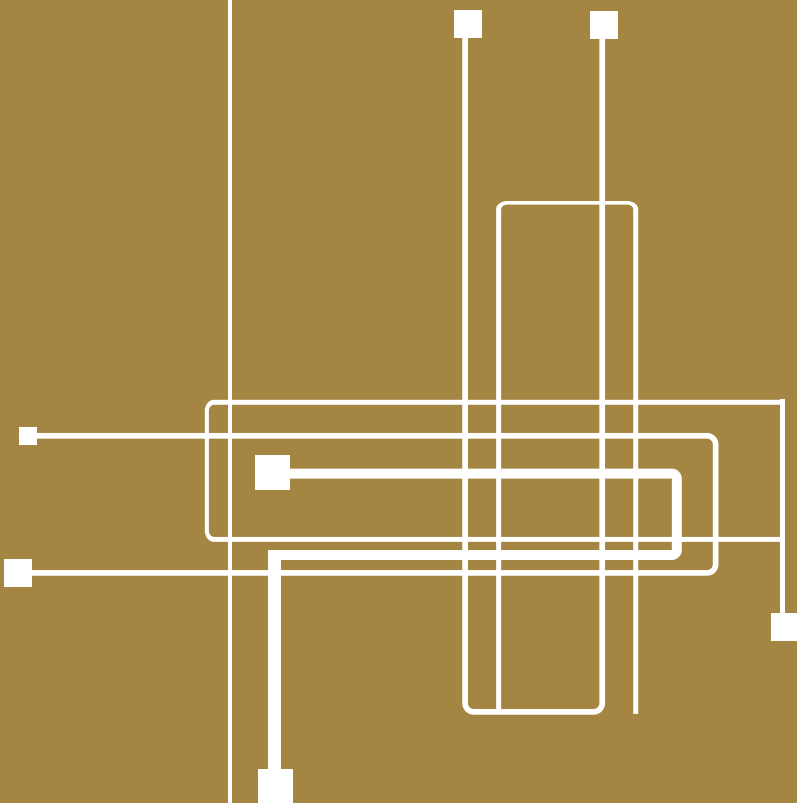
Social Media

Poll Analysis Report 2012

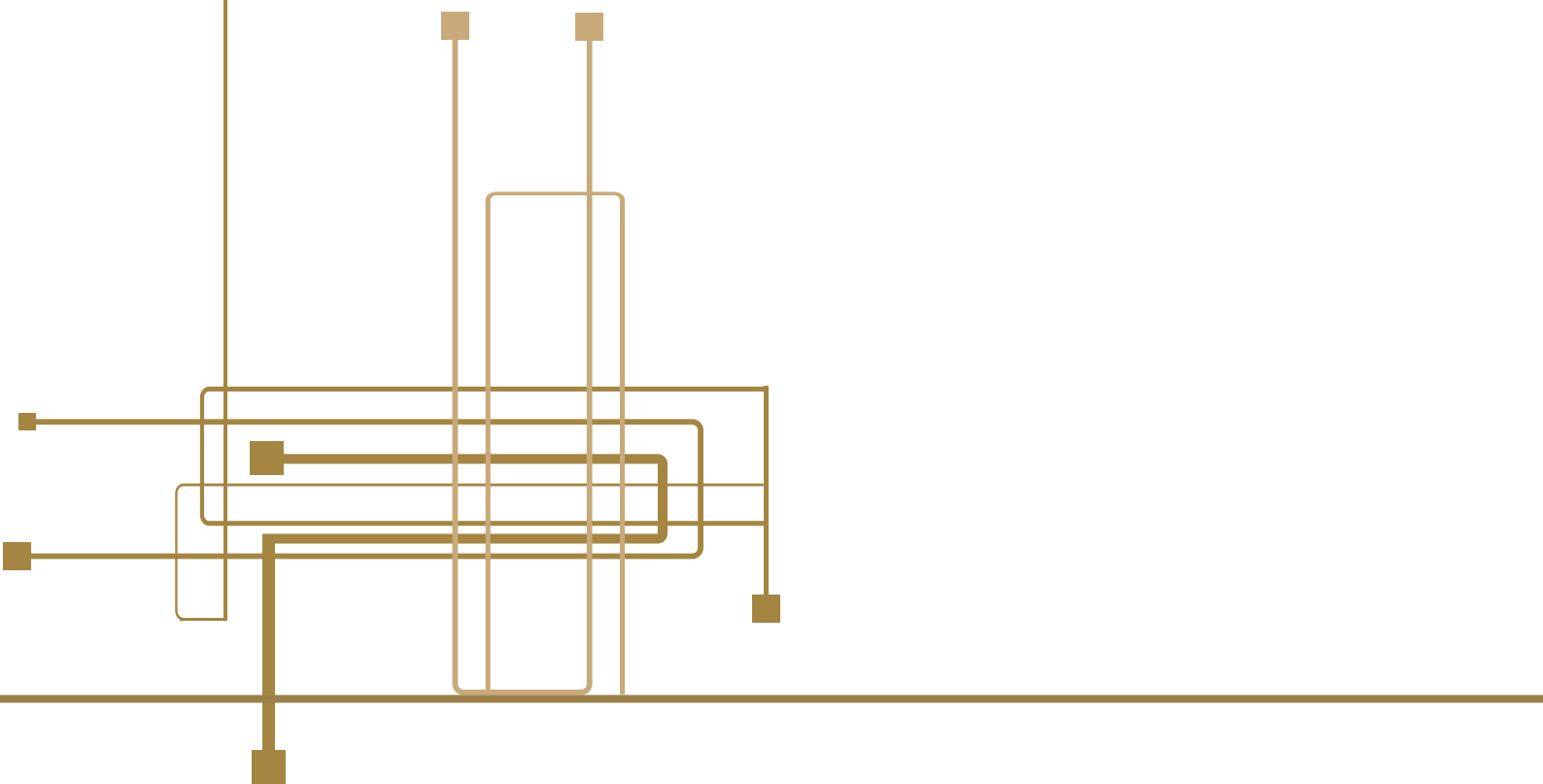


Introduction

In 2012, the research team in DWE conducted a number of polls on the subject of women's participation in the economy across UAE. The polls were conducted through social media websites in order to get a wider range of opinions. This report is a conclusion of women's views on the matters of flexible work options, what draws women to joining the workforce, the obstacles they face to reach decision making positions and what limits their political participation. On each topic additional information is added to give the reader an informative background of women's progress and current situation in the local economy.



Workforce Decisions



Balancing between work and life is one of the main reasons that make women reluctant to join and stay in the workforce. 62.5% of our poll respondents affirmed the same. Despite the fact that many organizations succeeded in dealing with work-life balance issues through providing child care facilities, implementing flexible work schedules, longer maternity leaves; women still seem to struggle. Locally not all the government and private sector entities provide child care services for their employees, yet that is not the only issue female employees face at their workplaces. 15.6% believe that women tend to switch careers or gradually stop working due to organizational and individual mindsets. Additionally, 12.6% of the responses varied with reasons highlighting that financial stability in the local economy is one of the many reasons that hinders women from joining the workforce.

However, to know whether financial considerations play a role in women's decision in joining the workforce; our study aimed at pointing whether a woman should work if her husband could support her financially. 58.9% think a woman, being single or married, should hold a job whether she has financial support or not. For many Emirati women, having a job is not considered a way to gain material needs but a method of development and attaining necessary leadership and motivational skills. Nevertheless, the rest of the respondents think that a woman's role should focus on her responsibilities as a mother and home caretaker and contribution to society by ensuring that the next generation has the best start in life.

While a reasonable amount of women choose to pursue a career while building their families, our poll questioned whether the number of children affects how high a woman can reach on a corporate ladder. The poll response rate was equal for both cases. Many women view that it all goes back to having a high personal commitment and productivity level, in addition to maintaining a healthy balance between work and life. On the other hand, the rest believe that even while some women maintain a work-life balance, organizational mindsets of viewing a female employee as a mother with children affects how high she reaches in her career.

The status of Emirati women in the workforce has witnessed a significant increase and currently their participation reached a 66% of the government's workforce, 30% being in senior positions, 15% in technical jobs (medicine, nursing and pharmacy) and the rest in armed forces, customs and police,

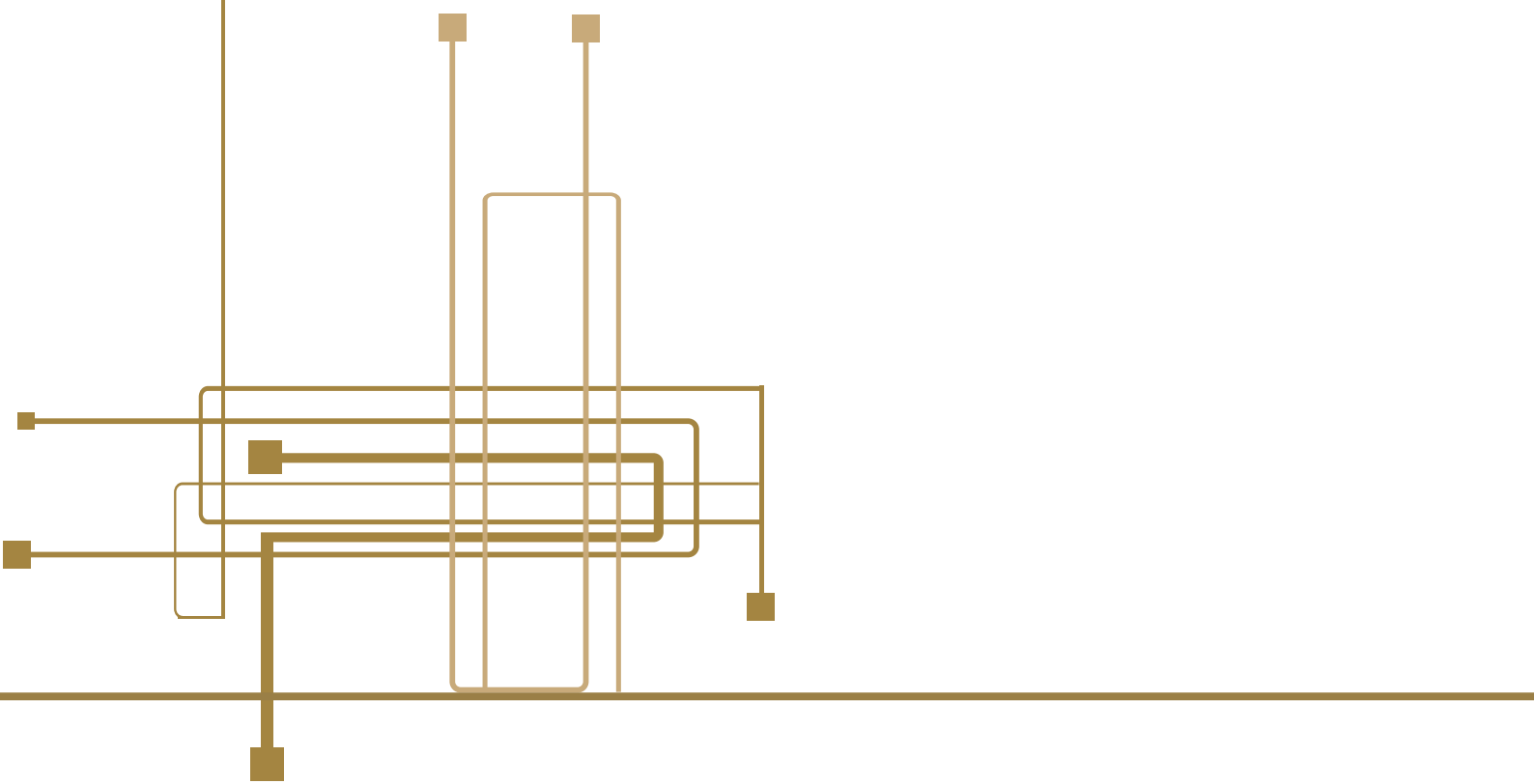
additionally they now account for 37.5% of the banking sector.

As our study revealed, most Emirati women do not join the workforce seeking financial support, but more as a means for contentment and to have a productive role in the country's development. But yet having a productive role in society is not limited only to joining the workforce, to many, traditional tasks -as a mother plays- is an equally important role.

The support given by the government is the one of the main reasons to where Emirati women have reached today. As more flexibility options could be introduced and followed by local organizations, women's economic participation could increase and make them reach higher levels in their careers. However, cultural and societal reasons may also be barriers to Emirati women's career progression, as they do not only affect her mere decision to enter the labor market but also how she is viewed as a potential employee in a workplace. Factors such as marital status and number of children are usually considered as a matter to be cautious of when hiring a female employee and also when it comes to promotions.

Policies and legislations that promote work-life balance for women at the workplace are currently being considered by the government. Recently a session was conducted by Dubai Women Establishment, hosting a number of members from the Federal National Council and prominent leaders in the government, where the gaps in the existing legislations and policies were discussed and recommended policies, such as "flexi-timing", enforcing the UAE Cabinet Policy on Corporate Child Care Center Law (19) 2006, and other set of recommendations which all aim to build-up women's role in the society and workforce.

Women Barriers



Emirati women began entering the workforce over 30 years ago, going from 3.4% in 1975 to 5.3% in 1980, rising slowly to 11.7% in 1995. The “Intelaq” project initiated under the directives of H.H. Sheikh Mohammed Bin Rashid was launched in order to encourage the participation of women in the governmental sector, and now women attain more than 50% of the government’s jobs with 30% being in decision making positions. However, while their advancement to managerial positions is fairly acceptable in accordance with the rate of their economic participation in the government sector, Emirati women’s presence in the private sector remains low in both executive and managerial positions. According to recent statistics from the Ministry of Labor, Emirati women only constitute about 5% of the private sector.

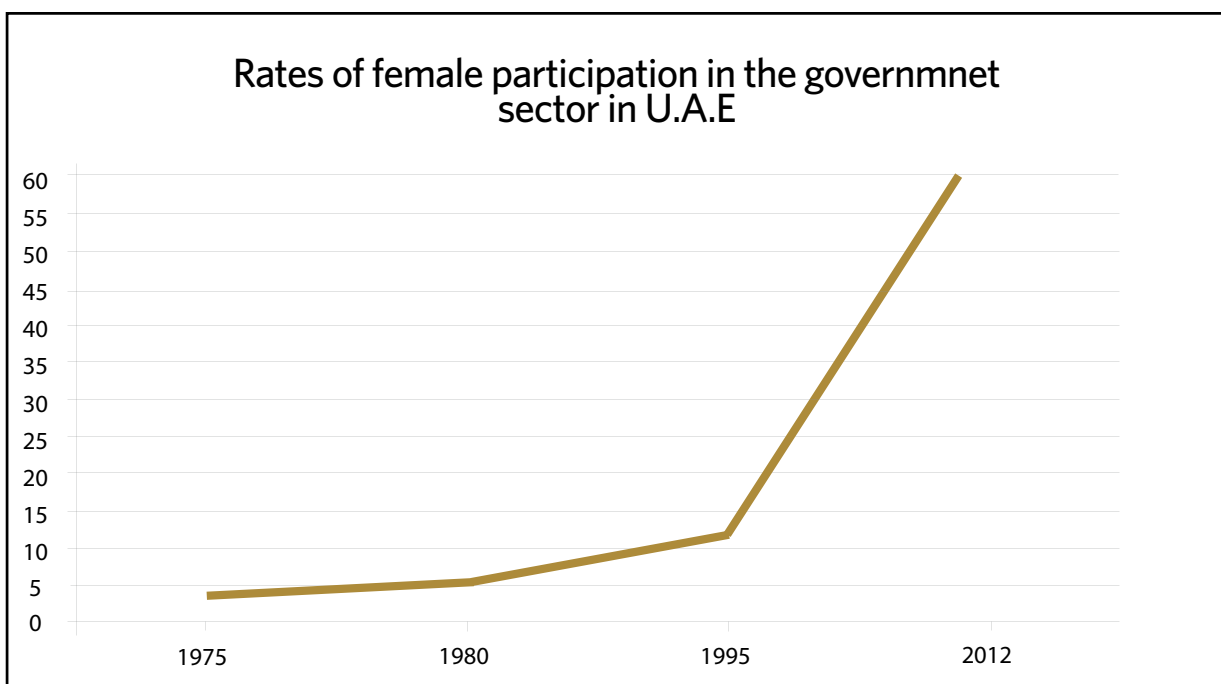
A study conducted by our research team focused on highlighting women’s view on barriers to top levels of management. 30.4% of our poll respondents believe that the support given to women by the government removed all barriers and Emirati women are now present as ministers, ambassadors and in high positions across different fields. On the contrary, more than 50% see that barriers still exist for women’s advancement to decision making positions. According to the results, organizational mind-sets are a primary reason to why women have limited opportunity to reach higher management. Managers usually, whether male or female, continue to take viable female candidates out of the running, often on the assumption that women cannot handle certain jobs and also discharge family obligations. What also limits women’s progression to senior levels are limiting beliefs that stand in their way such

as lack of self confidence in her capabilities, awaiting the opportunity to be asked to step higher, lack of support from family or inability to maintain a work-life balance.

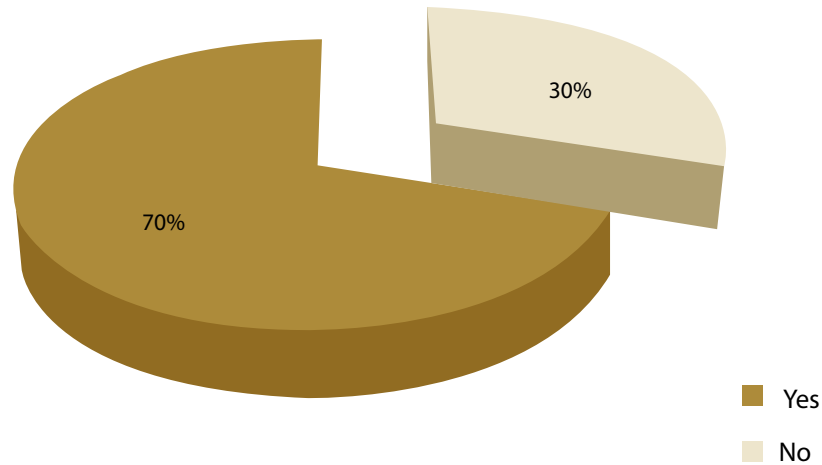
Furthermore according to our results, UAE being a multi-national diverse labor market, women find it harder to reach higher positions when their line managers are expatriates. Such barriers could have existed for women before the Emiratisation policies were introduced by the Ministry of Labor and before women were supported by the government as today. Moreover, women’s attitude towards their female peers could either be a limiting or a motivational factor for women’s career progression. Our survey respondents expressed that most women at decision making positions tend to have an arrogant attitude in the workplace. Such a notion could be overcome by setting up mentorship programs, coaching sessions or women networking events.

The participation of women in the economy and having equal rights is something which women enjoyed ever since the beginning of Islam. However, societal traditions in the gulf shadowed women’s active role in the economy, but nevertheless, women still had effective influence in their families and tribes. As women started attaining university degrees the more presence they had in the economy and today women graduates in UAE can be found in government, health, technology, education, oil & gas, media, military and many more.

The UAE’s achievements in the empowerment of women are such that it ranked thirty-eighth among 187 countries in the UNDP’s Gender-related Development



Do barriers still exist for women towards leadership?

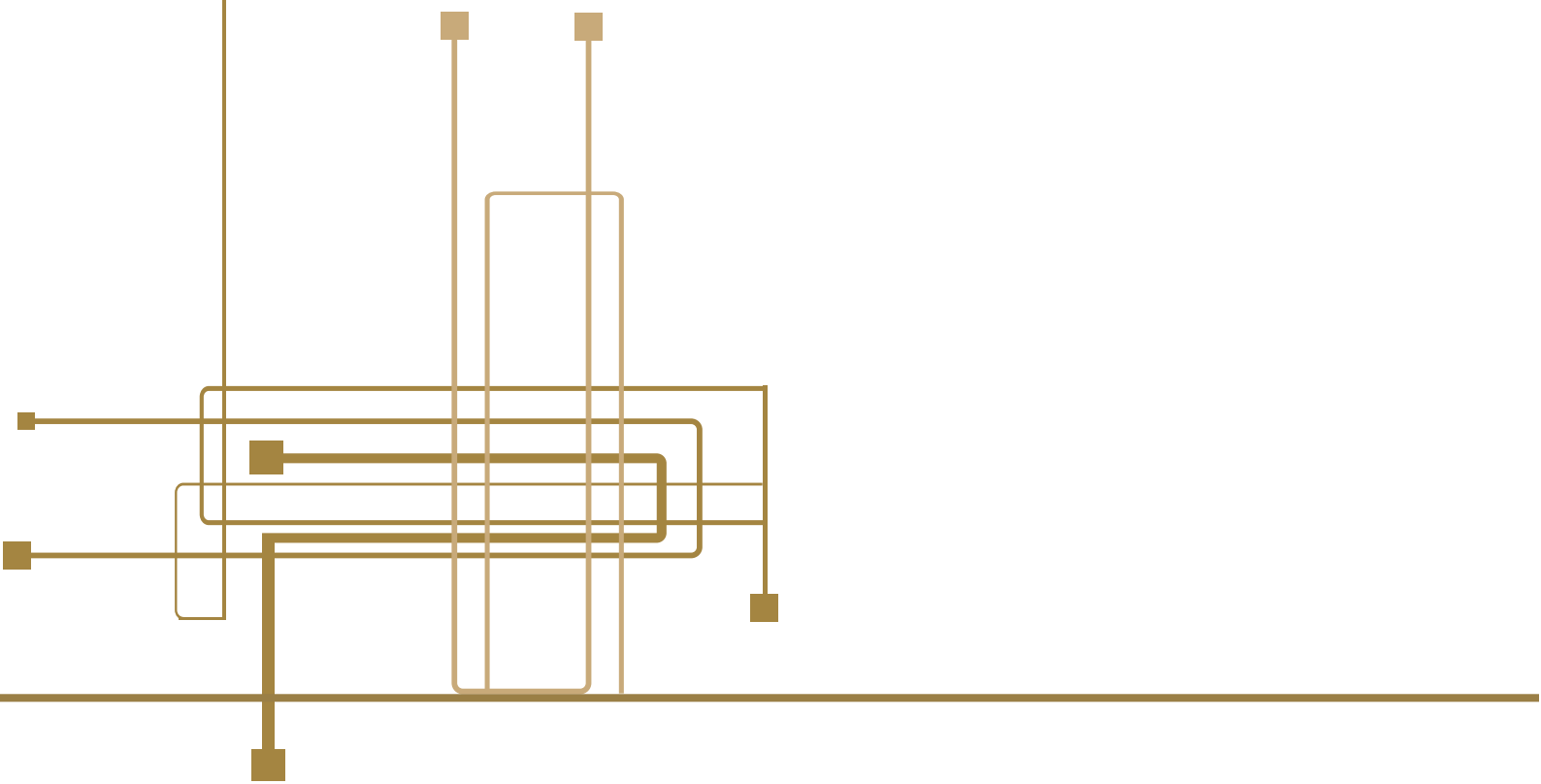


Index for 2011. Great efforts have been taken by UAE's government to promote women's participation in the economy and still more is being done to make them reach decision making positions. According to the results from our survey, women still are not able to break the glass ceiling in certain sectors. The sectors mentioned the most were the military, police and judicial sectors. When looking at each of these sectors we find that initiatives have been taken to increase the mere participation of women in these fields. For example, the Khawla Bint al Azwar Military School was founded in 1991 to prepare young women for careers in the military. Dubai police today has more than 1500 female police, with 93 being in leadership positions; though the number of women in leadership positions is low when looking at the number of women in the police service but yet having 93 women in leading positions is quite good when compared to the judicial and military sectors. The number of women across the judiciary system in UAE is very low. Dubai has three appointed female judges and 17 female prosecutors, while Abu Dhabi has one appointed female judge, 10 female deputy judges, and several female prosecutors.

Women reaching decision making positions is a dilemma which is not only faced by women in the UAE but by women on an international scale. Governments worldwide have been taking steps as quota systems, required HR measures and women friendly policies all for support of women's role in the economy and reaching higher positions. Helping managers take action to minimize gender barriers is

the new frontier to women advancement. Introducing policies on a government level would not be sufficient enough if no organizational policies were to follow on to maintain the support. Shedding a light through media exposure on existing leading female role models across the UAE will help create a more motivational environment for upcoming female leaders, help the community to accept more women leaders and cultural blockages will be diminished slowly.

Flexibility Options



Many policies have been introduced by governments and organizations to help sustain women's role in the economy. A trendy policy being followed worldwide is the flexible work arrangements policy. There are different types of arrangements to work flexibly-time and location related. Time related options vary between job sharing, part-time, compressed hours, flexi-times and staggered hours, while location arrangements usually relate to working from home or telecommuting. Flexible work arrangements, whether for men or women, helps promote a healthy work-life balance in an organization and retaining skilled staff. Following flexible schedules has many bonus points for employees and employers; it leads to higher employee satisfaction, hence higher productivity. Our study here focuses on getting the general perception of women in the workplace on flexibility schedules from a productivity, career ambition and best alternatives outlook.

From a scale of productivity perspective, we asked our poll respondents whether they think flexible work strategies makes employees appreciative of their work environment or would it make them neglectful of their job tasks. 91% believe that applying such strategies in a workplace would definitely increase employees' scale of productivity. The study conveyed that managers and employers who already provide flexibility for their employees notice a 30% productivity increase. Additionally, employees stated that having flexible options gives them a sense of loyalty to their workplace, gives them a chance to be more creative in their job tasks and how they invest their work hours and also gives them change in the daily routine. On the other hand, the rest had more neutral opinions, stating that it mostly would depend on the employee's level of commitment and scale of productivity from the start.

Implementing flexible arrangements requires building a work culture that is highly supportive. Employees usually would be reluctant to request for such arrangement feeling they might leave a negative impression of not taking their work too seriously or being less devoted towards their career. According to our poll results, about 20% think that asking for flexibility would make them seem less committed towards their job tasks and make them feel that they expect special treatment from amongst their colleagues. On the contrary, more than 50% believe that asking for such options only portrays a high level of commitment and career ambition. Moreover, being shy may not be the only reason holding back employees to ask

for flexible options; some managements would usually prefer implementing the traditional working hours as to have a busy looking work environment rather than considering the best schedules for their employees.

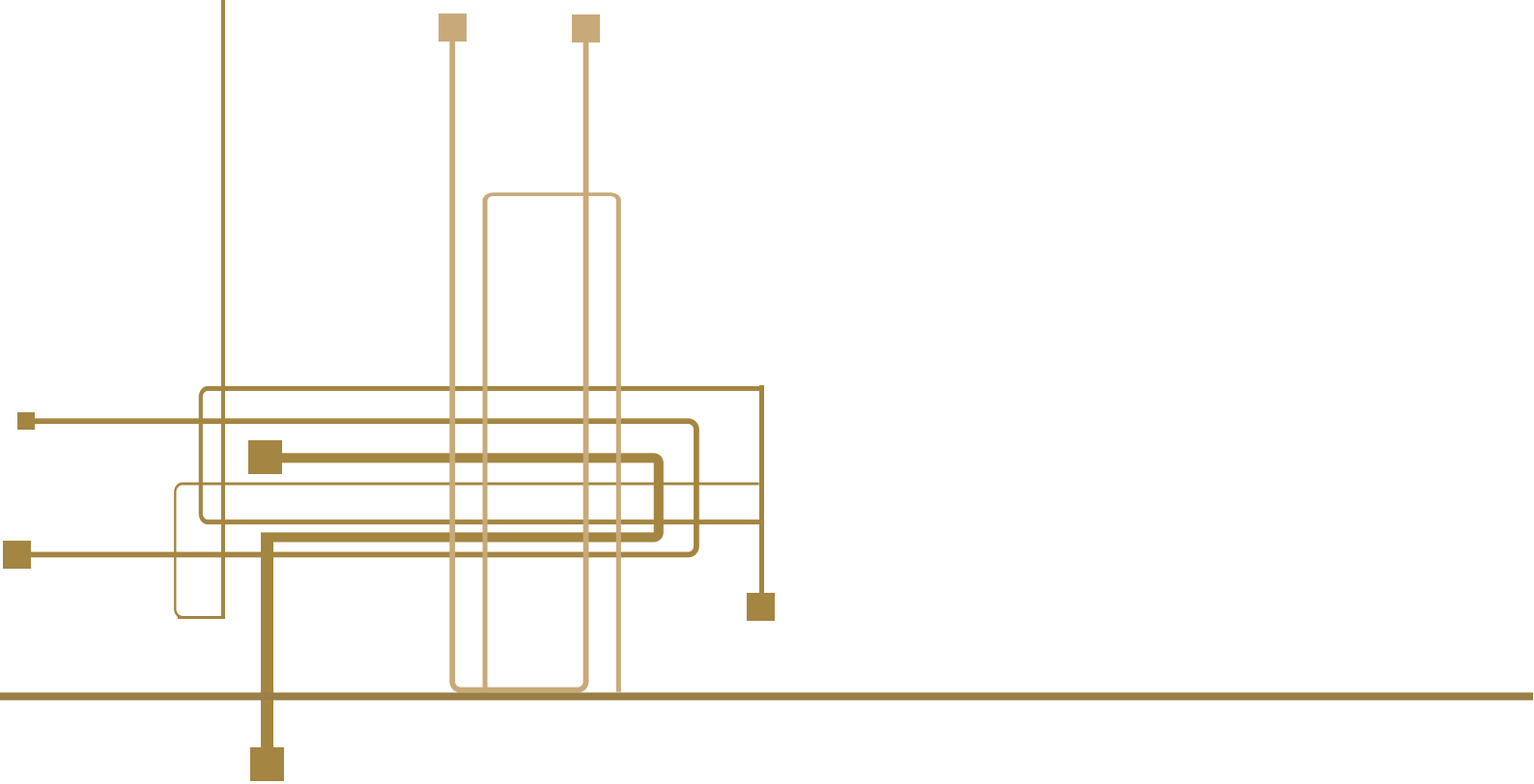
Although ever since 2007 the Dubai Executive Council has urged its government entities to adopt flexible working concepts, it is but followed across a few number of government entities and only as one option; staggered hours schemes, where employees are given the advantage of having arrival timings starting from 6:00 am till 8:30 am provided they complete 7 working hours. Other entities provide such options limited to employees who live in the far northern Emirates and others only provide flexibility limited to 30 minutes before or after official starting work hours. In November 2011, amendments were made to the Federal Human Resources law where it included an article allowing flexibility arrangements to be implemented in the federal entities in UAE but yet also limited to staggered hours schemes option.

As flexibility options in the UAE federal and government entities are only limited to one option, we asked our respondents of what they think would be the best alternative. More than 30% think that having location flexibility is a better option than flexi-times. Providing telecommuting arrangements and online jobs is a more practical option for mothers and for employees who have social or family responsibilities. Another 30% suggested other flexible schemes such as compressed hours, job sharing and part-time options. Other opinions varied upon having special requirements for mothers such as longer maternity leaves, extending the breastfeeding hours and lessening the number of average worked hours for mothers.

On the other hand, the private sector across UAE is more accommodative of flexible options for working mothers. 10 leading private companies have provided their employees with flexibility schemes such as job sharing, telecommuting and flexi-times. Microsoft Gulf FZ LLC tops the list and ever since 2011 they proposed extending their flexibility options to include compressed hours schemes.

Flexible working hours may have many apparent outcomes, but yet it comes along with risks. The success of such schemes depends highly on the maturity and understanding by the employees of their responsibility. Moreover, having flexible arrangements may work only in certain business environments and specifically limited to certain executive levels. It requires a high level of commitment, trust and flexible mindsets.

Political Participation



In 1975 Sheikha Fatima Bint Mubarak, the wife of the late Sheikh Zayed Bin Sultan, played a major role in establishing the UAE Women's Federation (currently known as the General Women's Union), which aimed at creating opportunities for women so that they may achieve their fullest potential. This initiative was highly supported by Sheikh Zayed Bin Sultan who wanted women to have a vital role in building the country's economy. As women in the UAE started having more dominant roles and wider chances in decision making positions, their political advancement was a serious step in bringing women to the forefront in the sustainable development of the country. In November 2004, Sheikha Lubna Al-Qasimi was appointed as the Minister for Planning and Economy, making her the first woman in the country's history to assume a cabinet position. Today the total number of women in the council of ministers adds up to 4.

In December 2006, the first ever elections for the Federal National Council (FNC) awarded women with the right to vote and run as candidates. Of the eligible citizens, 456 presented themselves as candidates, 65 of whom were women. In this round of elections one woman - Dr. Amal Al-Qubaisi from the emirate of Abu Dhabi - was elected and 8 others were appointed by the rulers of the various emirates, bringing the total number of women in the FNC to 9, constituting 22.2% of female representation in the council. Moreover, four years later, in 2010 in the second elections 468 citizens nominated themselves as candidates, including 85 women. Despite the slight increase in female's turnout as council candidates, again only one woman was elected - Shaikha Al-Ari from the emirate of Umm Al-Quwain - and 6 were appointed additionally from each emirate, having a lower presentation than in the previous council of 17.5%.

The fact that women were given the opportunity to engage since the first elections of the FNC, in addition to being appointed under governmental influence, reflects the government's on going efforts to advocate women's presence in the political field. These efforts were a natural consequence and result of the economic evolution and the achievements accomplished by women since the constitution of the UAE federation.

It is quite evident that women's political participation is considerably low in the UAE; more than 60% of our poll respondents believe the same and the rest who oppose this view compare Emirati women's rights and economic role to the neighboring GCC countries. Generally, women in the Middle East

undergo political, social and cultural conditions that limit their ability to easily engage in the political sphere. Women may also be less experienced in public affairs, and as a result, the voters - male and female - are less likely to vote for them. As a result, women either refrain from electing themselves for a political post or drop out early due to lack of local support. For example, a study done by Dubai School of Government on the first FNC elections conveyed that 57% of women candidates reported to have experienced negative, culturally based attitudes regarding their participation.

The nature of how women were introduced into the political scene in UAE might have been too fast for comfort. In order to advance effective political participation and representation of women, raising awareness of their roles and training them to assume public posts would have been the first necessary steps to take. It is true that Emirati women were highly supported to reach decision making positions in the economy, yet their political leap needed higher pre-considerations to change local perspective on women's presence in the public domain as political players. Just as it was a matter of time to how Emirati women reached leading positions now across the economy, judging by the age of UAE as a federation, higher political involvement in the upcoming years might be easily in their reach.

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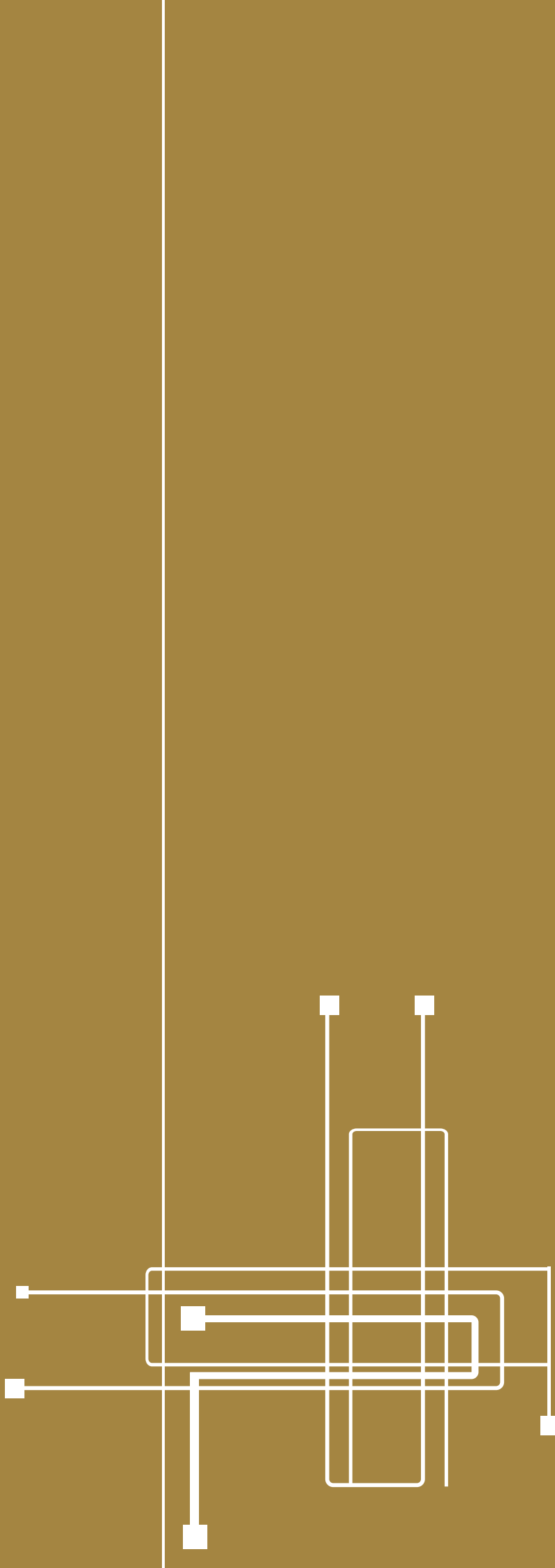
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