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**Expatriate Managers Decision-Making Practices within the UAE:  
A Qualitative Study**

**Article Classification** – Research paper.

# **Expatriate Managers Decision-Making Practices within the UAE: A Qualitative Study**

## **Introduction**

Expatriation and participation in global work experiences are an ever-increasing reality for modern businesses (Chen, et al, 2010; Thomas, Lazarova and Inkson, 2005). While corporations have been expanding internationally at a rapid pace for the past few decades, many managers continue to fixate on the core aspects of their business, with minimal consideration of the cultural differences that affect business operations overseas (Miroshnik, 2002). In addition to navigating a challenging, foreign context, expatriate leaders often suffer from low levels of adjustment to the host country culture (Chen et al., 2010). Thus, leaders possessing the ability to manage complex cultural differences effectively in an effort to achieve their organizations' objectives are increasingly in demand (Tarique and Schuler, 2010). In fact, multinational corporations indicate a dire need for leaders with strong cross-cultural management skills to fill the current global talent gap (Caligiuri and Tarique, 2012). In order for leaders to execute their roles in international business successfully, these practitioners are obliged to navigate the various challenges that adjusting to an unfamiliar culture presents (AlMazrouei and Pech, 2014). At the same time, research has demonstrated people from different cultures utilize different decision making processes (Chu & Spires, 2008) and arrive to different conclusions (Ji, Zhang & Guo, 2008). Thus, ineffective decision-making by expatriate leaders may frequently derive from inadequate intercultural understanding (Deresky, 2002; Hofstede, 2011). Studies also indicate that expatriate assignments frequently result in failure and early return prior to the completion of overseas assignments (Johnson,

Lenartowicz and Apud, 2006). Furthermore, over 80 percent of these failures result from ineffectively adapting management practices to the local culture (AlMazrouei and Zacca, 2015; McFarland, 2006). The challenges faced by expatriate leaders include overcoming language barriers (Ko and Yang, 2011), navigating marked differences in workplace attitudes, values and norms (Zander et al., 2012), adjusting leadership approaches (Steers et al., 2012), managing culturally diverse work groups (Caligiuri and Tarque, 2009) and supervising subordinates from a wide range of cultural backgrounds (Caligiuri, 2013). These findings highlight the myriad of obstacles that can arise when expatriates are required to manage local employees and develop productive working relationships in a foreign cultural setting. Finally, the stakes for achievement in these positions are high and losses associated with poor decisions are costly (Scullion and Collings, 2006).

A prominent aspect of expatriate management practices is their decision-making capacity, and managing across cultures is vital for international business success. Therefore, expatriate managers need to make decisions in a manner that reflects the local culture of their assignment. Furthermore, managers who possess the ability to successfully achieve their organization's goals through effective management across cultures can enhance their organization's performance (Caligiuri and Tarique, 2012).

While the topics of culture and leadership in Western nations have been researched extensively, there has been scant attention to expatriate leadership in Middle-Eastern countries in general and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) in particular, largely due to a variety of barriers to accessing random samples and low response rates (Sidani and Jamli, 2010; Zahra, 2011). Thus, the current study seeks to fill a gap in the literature by investigating how expatriate managerial practices are

influenced by Emirati culture and the UAE work context in particular. More specifically, this article explores how expatriate managers in the UAE adapt their decision-making processes in response to their contextual environment. Additionally, the study investigates particular approaches expatriate managers use to adjust their decision-making to the local culture, and how they manage local staff differently from how they would manage employees from their home countries. Finally, the study explores the factors that contribute to the situation-specific environment of the expatriate managers' experience. In this study, an exploratory non-probability purposive sampling method was employed to focus on organization with particular characteristics of the population that best enable us to answer the study's research questions. While these cases cannot be utilized to make reliable statistical generalizations, they can help in reaching logical generalizations.

The structure of paper is as follows: Firstly, we provide the motivation of examining cross-cultural management practices in the UAE. Secondly, the theoretical background on global leadership, cross-cultural management and decision-making is presented. Third, the methodology undertaken to examine expatriate cross-cultural decision-making practices within the UAE is explained. Fourth, the findings from structured interviews with expatriate managers in the UAE are summarized and tabulated. The findings are then discussed and lastly, the practical implications, the research limitations and future research opportunities are outlined.

### **Why examine expatriate decision-making practices the UAE?**

The UAE culture derives from a combination of its traditional Arabic values and the influence of Western and Eastern cultures. The increase in Western influence has increased dramatically in the last few decades due to the surge of migration in support of the booming oil industry in the country. As well, the UAE legal

framework relating to employment tends to support large corporations and facilitate a transitory workforce (Forstenlechner et al., 2012). As a result, it has been necessary to employ expatriate workers with qualifications, aptitude and experience that Emirati nationals may not possess to meet organizational and societal demands (Al-Khazraji, 2009).

The population of the Gulf States consists overwhelmingly of expatriates. The multinational population in the Emirates consists of almost eighty percent expatriate citizens from a wide range of nationalities (Central Intelligence Agency, 2016), including, Australian, North American, Indian, Chinese, Pakistani and Iranian (Butler, 2009). Thus, the UAE represents an oil rich state, suffering from a dearth of local talent. Consequently the nation's ambitious goals for economic development have required the large-scale import of expatriate workers to fill the labour gap, particularly for knowledge workers (AlMazrouei and Pech, 2014). Therefore, the UAE epitomizes a society rich in cultural diversity and abundant in expatriate managers, which makes it an ideal context for a study on this topic.

Furthermore, expatriate leaders report many challenges associated with cultural differences that impact their performance and effectiveness (Cermagic, 2010). They note that the US management model is applied sporadically in some arenas but has been adapted to suit the local UAE culture, which emphasizes different organisational perspectives. The literature supports the idea that Emirati and US organisations differ markedly in their leadership styles (Randeree and Chaudhry, 2012). and thus Western expatriate managers often bring opposing national and corporate cultural perspectives, business values and norms to their jobs (AlMazrouei, 2012), fuelling potential for cross-cultural conflict and discord. Therefore, the UAE work environment is ripe with the potential tensions associated with cross-culture

management and decision-making. Within this complex and dynamic cultural context, the significance of expatriate managerial decision making presents a fascinating ground for study.

Thus, this paper will contribute to the body of literature on decision making in two fundamental ways. Firstly, the study explores the impact of local culture on managerial decision-making approaches, with special attention to adaptive measures taken by managers to adjust leadership styles and behaviour to local expectations. Secondly, the study examines this phenomenon in a vastly understudied context that provides insights to the particular impact of Arabian and Emirati culture on expatriate managers.

## **Literature Review**

### *Global leadership*

Leadership has been an enduring topic of study for management scholars over that past half century, and interest in various aspects of leadership show few signs of abating. Research in the field has shown that the effectiveness of different leadership behaviours is influenced by and related to the cultures of both societies and organisations (Javidan *et al.*, 2004). In brief, leadership is culturally contingent, thus, 'the status and influence of leaders vary considerably as a result of cultural forces' (House, *et. al.*, 2004: 5). In the context of this study it is necessary to define culture and cultural values. While there is no commonly agreed upon definition of culture, for the purposes of this study, we will understand culture to mean, 'the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another' (Hofstede and Hofstede, 2001: 9). Integral to the study of culture is the examination of cultural values, which we will define as, 'a broad

tendency to prefer certain states of affairs over others' (Hofstede, 2001: 5). Additionally, research conclusively demonstrates that culture plays an influential role in the decision making process (Galanou & Farrag, 2015; Weber & Morris, 2010).

Effective global leadership is contingent upon an awareness of the need to adapt to the local context (Deng and Gibson, 2009). Furthermore, culture is interwoven in the context within which its members are entrenched (Hofstede, 2011), and this principle holds true across organizations, systems, and societies. Thus, international organisations increasingly demand leaders who can manage staff from a wide variety of backgrounds to empower their organisations in competing globally. Hence, it is imperative that managers possess the ability to interpret how staff from different cultures perceive their own behaviour and how they interpret their manager's actions. Harvey *et al.* (2011) claim that sensitivity to culture and the ability to recognise and act appropriately within the practices of local staff are critical factors to managerial effectiveness and success. Leadership techniques that prove effective in one country may enjoy limited to no success in another (Hofstede, 2011; Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner, 2012), due to differences in a wide variety of factors including culture, local politics, economic variables and legal systems. Therefore, managers must possess a nuanced comprehension of the cultural differences of their intended international destination to improve their chances of personal and organizational success (Adekola and Sergi, 2007). While the literature on this topic consistently demonstrates the impact of culture on organizational and leadership behaviours, there is insufficient attention to the impact of expatriate leaders on organizations and the shifting dynamics that presents.



### *Cross-cultural management*

Cross-cultural management has been defined as global management which takes account of differences in peoples' behaviour in organisations and trains their staff to work with other staff in organisations worldwide and cater for the needs of clients from other cultures (Burke, 1983). It is described as the comparative study of how people in cultures and organisations worldwide behave and of the relationships between people from different nationalities within an organisation or environment (Adler, 1983).

Managing across cultures can be understood as working with the behaviour within organisations, engaging across nationalities and seeking to extend an organisation's sphere of influence across various national and cultural environments (Adler, 2008). At the same time, research has shown that managing staff from different nationalities increases the difficulty of doing business due to the complex matrix of perspectives, methods and approaches involved (Adler, 2008).

Javidan et al. (2006) report that numerous comparative studies have confirmed the relationship between leadership and specific national cultures. Research on cross-cultural leadership has demonstrated that leadership styles which are effective in one culture may backfire in another (Rad and Yarmohammadian, 2006).

In order to understand the cultural context in which the expatriate managers of this study operate, we will describe several prevalent cultural dimensions that typify members of Emirati society. Firstly, on cross-cultural comparison studies, countries in the Arabian Gulf systematically score among the highest globally in power distance, indicating the enduring prevalence of this cultural phenomenon (Hofstede, 2010). Power distance 'reflects the extent to which a community accepts or endorses authority, power difference and status privileges' (Carl, Gupta and Javidan, 2004:

513). Thus, members of high power distance societies may be more inclined to prefer a top-down decision making style in management and defer to their leaders for direction and judgement. Therefore, a manager from a low power distance society (such as a Western expatriate) might find widely used management practices such as consultation and participative management less effective among Emirati employees operating at lower levels of the organization.

Collectivism (commonly juxtaposed with individualism) is another cultural orientation that typifies members of Arabian Gulf region. Members from collectivist societies generally show a strong inclination to maintain unity and cohesion among the in-group and value conformity over the expression of their individual inclinations (Hofstede, 2010; Brewer and Chen, 2007). They may be less likely to openly express disagreement or contrary opinions in a group decision-making process. Thus managers originating from a individualist society (such as the United States) may find it challenging to gauge the genuine opinions of Emirati subordinates in a group meeting. Furthermore, members of collectivist societies place a strong influence on "relationship building" and maintenance and may prefer working in teams over independently.

Finally, uncertainty avoidance presents a cultural dimension with potential impact on expatriate managerial decision making in the UAE context. Uncertainty avoidance is defined as, 'the extent to which members of an organization or society strive to avoid uncertainty by relying on established norms, rituals and bureaucratic practices' (House and Javidan, 2004: 11). In a high uncertainty avoidance context, such as the UAE, local employees may be more inclined to resist decisions which impose drastic changes to the established norms and practices.

Furthermore, the literature suggests there are several management styles and influences that are particular to the Middle East region. Randaree and Faramawy note the persisting influence of tribal values and Islam on management practices in the Arab Middle East (2011). This style is characterised by strong hierarchy, a lessened emphasis on efficiency, increased relevance of personal associations and a capricious approach to regulations (Kiazad et al., 2010) all of which impact decision making and can conflict with leadership styles of expatriate managers.

In addition to the marked differences in cultural values and leadership expectations that may exist between expatriate managers and local subordinates, several studies elucidate the complex and evolving nature of culture in the region. Partly owing to a sudden influx of Western influences brought on by rapid development, scholars have noted a "cultural discontinuity" characterized by "values in flux" (Ali, 1990). In fact, several studies in the region suggest that Arabs maintain dual and competing values stemming from both traditional and modern influences (Abdalla and Al-Homoud, 2001; Hammoud, 2011; Kabasakal and Bodour, 2002). The shifting nature of cultural values in the Middle East can be explained by several phenomena. Firstly, Western influence has had a lasting impact on the region dating back to colonial occupation. Currently, the region is witnessing a surge in Western economic and political interest, largely stemming from the petrochemical industry, which has expanded the Western presence in the Arabian Gulf (Branine, 2011). Finally, the Arabian Gulf in particular has borrowed heavily from American and British educational systems and business paradigms, sending tens of thousands to citizens to the US and the UK annually to study English, business and other disciplines in Western institutions. Managers who have been educated in Western institutions (whether expatriate or local) are increasingly being placed in positions of

seniority in UAE organisations (Anwar and Chaker, 2003) thus compounding the impact of Western thought on Emirati management theory and organizations. Likewise, American management practices and theory have spread rapidly worldwide bringing the influence of Western values along with them (Bronson, 2006; Fain, 2008). US management theories and practices have become commonplace and “the standard” in various countries outside the West (Cornuel, 2007).

As the UAE stands in the midst of this “transitional period of development,” research suggests it is frequently necessary for managers (both expatriate and local) to adopt a flexible managerial style to adapt to the various and at times juxtaposing expectations and cultural influences of local subordinates (Abdalla and Al-Homoud, 2001; Hammoud, 2011).

While the literature conclusively affirms the impact of culture on leadership expectations and the potential complexities in management decision making associated with it, little research has explored the extent to which managers observe these differences in their workplaces in general and in decision making scenarios in particular and if these managers deliberately adapt their management styles to fit local expectations. This study attempts to fill this gap.

#### *Culture diversity and decision-making*

Although there has been much research conducted on cultural diversity and its effects on the values and beliefs of organisational members, few studies have examined its effects on the decision-making process (Kumar and Yauger, 1995). Bazerman and Moore (2012) assert that decision-making is the management function that has the greatest impact. Thus, it is valuable to investigate the influence of national and organisational cultures on styles of leadership as the values and beliefs derived

from these cultures impact the manner in which decisions are made (Ayman and Korabik, 2010; Jogulu, 2010).

Research consistently indicates that individual managerial styles are influenced by their organisational and national cultural attributes. For example, Galanou and Farrag (2015) suggest that cultural background is the main influencing factor in decision-making styles. Likewise, Lung-Tan (2006) and Hofstede (2010) confirm the impact of national culture on decision-making styles. In addition, research shows that values play an influential role in the decision making process (Weber and Morris, 2010).

Research on decision-making supports theories that differences in culture are affected by organisational structure (Hofstede, 2011; Javidan *et al.*, 2006). Therefore, to manage local staff effectively expatriate managers must be aware of the effect that national and organisational culture can have on the effectiveness of their decision-making processes. Thus, there are connections between the cultural bases of making decisions and the way organisations are managed.

Building on this theory, cultural variations in decision-making styles are evident around the world. Decision-making is widely distributed among people in low power distance (PD) cultures while it is limited to a relatively small number of people in high power distance cultures (Harris *et al.*, 2006). For example, US decision-making styles are grounded in a method where members at all levels of the organization are involved in decision-making (Hofstede, 2010). Yet, this approach is rarely employed in UAE-based US organisations, where a more dictatorial style is preferred (Randeree and Chaudhry, 2012).

It is necessary to emphasize that much like the literature on cultural values, decision-making practices vary in the Gulf region thus mirroring the cultural

discontinuity theory of cultural values. In a study conducted by Smith, Achoui and Harb (2007), they suggest that diversity of leadership styles are prevalent across the Arab Middle East, in spite of evident and overlapping cultural values. Thus, it is important for researchers and practitioners to be cautious when making generalizations about Arab management. Interestingly, the extant literature on Arab management reveals several juxtaposing and competing approaches. For example, several studies have provided evidence that Arab managers typically employ a consultative approach to leading and decision-making (Hammoud, 2011; Randeree and Chaudhry, 2012). This finding is supported by the collectivist nature of Arab societies (Hofstede, 2010) and the desire to preserve in-group harmony. At the same time, other studies describe Arab leaders at highly autocratic and Arab organizations to be extremely hierarchical in structure (Hammoud, 2011). The authoritative leadership approach is noted for its dictatorial quality, which theoretically opposes consultation and consensus building. To illustrate, Hammoud explains, the leader turns into an individual possessing a dictatorial power and authority reinforced by followers' unquestioning loyalty and trust" (2011: 147). However, the unwavering allegiance to the leader is supported by the literature on high power distance, which is prevalent in the UAE (Hofstede, 2010). For example, Gregg (2005) notes that attentiveness to status and face-saving are integral to decision-making in the Arab world. In a study on leadership styles in the UAE, Randeree and Chaudhry (2012) suggest that Arab leaders tend to be more authoritarian and bureaucratic and promotions are often based on personal connections. By comparison, Western management is more consultative and decentralized and promotion is based on individual merit and achievement. Thus, while consultation is an important element of the decision making process among Arab leaders, in contrast to Western leaders, it

is employed predominantly at the uppermost levels of the organization. Thus decision-making is rarely delegated down the hierarchy.

Finally, it is important to mention the persisting influence of tribalism of Arab management (Lewis, 2006). Tribal values are mirrored in the collectivist culture, which strongly emphasizes in-group uniformity and allegiance (Hofstede, 2011). In addition, the leader may play the role of the “benevolent father”, by appeasing to subordinate requests in exchange for their unyielding commitment. Finally, nepotism, frequently referred to as “wasta” in the Gulf, continues to play a role in employment decision, particularly for high status appointments. Meanwhile qualifications and experience may be highly stressed among middle and lower level employees (Hutchings and Weir, 2006).

From the literature we can see a complex combination of cultural variables influencing the decision-making process among managers in UAE institutions and at times conflicting interpretations of the perceived and actual management styles being employed. Given the variety of variables operating in tandem, it is certain that expatriate managers would be confronted with decision making models that at times contradict or conflict with their own management styles and behaviour. Thus, the examination of expatriate managerial reactions to cultural forces in the decision-making process represents a relevant basis for study.

### ***Methodology***

#### *Sample*

The sample for this study was selected by using an exploratory non-probability sampling method. The intention was to collect data through interviews with people in

expatriate leadership roles in UAE organizations with greater than one hundred employees. The organizations were identified and selected from the UAE business directory (<http://uaebusinessdirectory.com/>). Participants were selected using purposive judgment sampling across organizations in both the public and private sectors. Structured interviews were conducted with expatriate managers across different organizations, vocations and industries within the UAE. An additional criteria guiding the sample selection was that the organizations employed a significant number of Emirate nationals. Organization types identified included commercial centres, hospitals and hotels (Table 1).

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Insert Table 1  
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There is a significant risk of researcher bias in the use of non-probability judgment sampling. Samples chosen and the findings based on the responses of those interviewed may not always represent the wider perspective (Zikmund, 2003). However, our main goal of utilizing purposive sampling was to focus on organizations with particular characteristics of the population and that best enable us to answer the study's research questions. While the sample studied is not representative of all organizations within the UAE, this should not be seen as a weakness but rather as a choice. The specific type of purposive technique employed was the critical case sampling technique, which is useful in exploratory qualitative research studies, where a small number of cases can explain the phenomenon under study. This suggests that if the phenomena is witnessed in these cases it will happen in other cases. Conversely, if the phenomena is not witnessed in these cases it won't happen in other cases. While these critical cases cannot be used to make statistical



generalizations ‘it can be argued that they can help in making logical generalizations’ (Purposive Sampling).

Interviews were conducted with 25 expatriate executive managers to determine if cultural factors affected their decision making practices in UAE organizations. Fifteen of the respondents were males and ten were females. Of the 25 respondents eleven fell into the 25-34 age category, five were in the 35-44 age group, seven were aged from 45-54, while the remaining two were in the 55+ age group. Levels of education included eleven with bachelor’s degrees, six holding master’s degrees, and one with a doctorate, while the remaining seven held no tertiary qualification or had non-tertiary qualifications. Nationalities represented included India, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Nepal, Iran, Britain, Australia, the United States, Russia, the Philippines, and Indonesia (Table 2). Those interviewed had held positions in the UAE for anywhere from two to 25 years. Tenures in current positions were nominated as ranging between one month and 25 years. Three years was the average length of current tenure. Positions held when the interviews were conducted included assistant outlet managers, assistant training managers, assistant operations managers, quality coordinators, HR heads, facility managers, training managers, store managers, project managers, security chiefs, supply chain directors, CEOs and presidents.

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 Insert Table 2  
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### *Procedure*

The qualitative procedure of gathering data employed face-to-face interviews.

The most senior manager from each organization was provided with a participation

form and was contacted later to confirm their participation. This was done via telephone. Participants were advised of the researchers' intention to voice record the interviews to assist with transcription of the responses. It was expected that each interview would take between sixty and ninety minutes to complete.

Structured interviews were held to gather information relating to interviewees' home country pre-departure expectations. Each interview started with a general question (Were your first impressions of the country different to what you were expecting?) This was followed by more particular questions. These included: *How do you make decisions differently in your current UAE job compared to your home country? Can you identify approaches you have used to adjust your decision-making techniques since beginning work in the UAE? How do you manage local staff differently to those in your home country?* This was followed by a general question about managing UAE based organisations that is, *What factors do you believe contribute to the situations you face in managing UAE organisations?*

### *Content analysis*

The inductive approach to data generation and analysis was used in this study. Firstly, this approach involved a review of the literature to study what is known on global leadership, cultural diversity and decision-making. Secondly, we developed the general research topic of how expatriate managers in the UAE make decisions in respect to their contextual environment. This general research topic was further developed and refined into more specific research questions as listed in the *Procedure* section above. Thirdly, an exploratory non-probability purposive sampling method was employed to focus on organization with particular characteristics of the population that best enable us to answer the study's research questions and whose

information were anticipated to add to the existing theory. Fourthly, data was generated from these sources and following the procedure advanced by Ramaswami and Dreher (2010), all comments related to each research question were identified, selected and grouped into themes ‘that reflected the comments’ underlying meaning’ (Goulding, 2005; Ramaswami and Dreher, 2010: 506; Starks and Trinidad, 2007). Repeated comments by respondent, were listed only once. Using the inductive method approach, comments for each respective research question were then aggregated into dimensions using keywords as dimension labels (Krippendorff, 2004). These themes along with their dimensions allowed us to synthesize the data for interpretation. We then tried to identify patterned relationships within the dimensions. After these dimensions were developed we described the most important themes and then entertained possible theoretical explanations for the data. Finally, we identified practical implications and suggested the most promising theoretical direction. (Smith, 2008; Thomas, 2006).

## **Findings**

*How do you make decisions differently in your current UAE job compared to your home country?*

*Al Ain respondents*

Ten of the thirteen Al Ain interviewees agreed that their decision-making was different in Al Ain to their home country due to the increased need to use consultation and participation, unlike their home country. One interviewee stated:

“Back home decisions are very easy to communicate with the staff because they are local but if you try to communicate here, there are so many

nationalities working here from everywhere, it is a quite difficult task because everyone has their own ideas so we have to explain to them what the right and wrong things are for this culture. When we have a function we have to tell them how to do things in a way that is acceptable and we have to clearly communicate with them to explain these things to them.”

On the other hand, a couple of respondents mentioned that their decision-making in Al Ain was not different to their home country:

“Nothing different. Almost the same because I worked in a similar accounting position in Pakistan.”

“There is no difference in decision-making. If we talk about management, I think it’s all the same. It’s only the product which is different.”

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#### *Dubai respondents*

Similar results were indicated by eight of the twelve interviewees in Dubai in that consultation and involving staff in decision-making were different in Dubai to their home country. It is interesting to note that openness and understanding local people were also mentioned by three of the respondents. Remembering how local people function and trying to appreciate how they think will help make decision-making easier. One Pakistani manager said:

“In Pakistan we don’t have the power to make decisions but here we have the power. We can make the decisions. In Pakistan, there are many managers at

the top of organisations so, if we want to make a decision, we have to get their permission first.”

A Filipino manager observed that there was little variation, saying:

“There is not much of a difference because Dubai culture is similar to what we have in the Philippines because this is a multicultural place and we just make the decisions ... so I don’t have a problem managing them as I already have experience of this. We also use a similar decision-making style. The UAE is a multicultural place.”

By contrast, another Filipino manager stated:

“The best thing was to use company standard operating procedures. You need to adjust your decision-making to suit the UAE culture. In Manila the decision-making style is American while in the UAE it’s more British.”

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 Insert Table 4  
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*Can you identify approaches you have used to adjust your decision-making techniques since beginning work in the UAE?*

*Al Ain respondents*

It was found that consultation helped Al Ain interviewees to adjust their decision-making techniques working in the UAE. Some respondents felt that attending training assisted them to adjust their decision-making style working in Al Ain. One manager said you need to know the right person in order to make the right decision:

“Since we are working with, again, so many nationalities, we need to know the right person in the right position at the right time.”

However, another did not find the need to adjust their decision-making:

“Not many differences. I am continuously learning and enhancing my knowledge. It’s not because I want to change, it’s more about my career. I did not feel I needed to adapt my decision making style.”

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 Insert Table 5  
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*Dubai respondents*

Six of the twelve Dubai interviewees adjusted their decision-making by attending training courses. One manager mentioned:

“We have done a lot of training in the hotel. We have done one of the most important training courses, known as the Zodiac training which is basically 12 modules of training which help us, you know, in the decision-making role. Now these 12 modules focus on everything such as leadership skills, your salesmanship skills, your financial abilities, also on how well you can communicate with your staff, decision-making when it comes to, you know, handling guest complaints or queries, so there is a whole variety of training involved in this. Besides that, of course, we’ve got external training and we have a lot of internal training as well, and these tools help us in making decisions and in passing on the everyday managerial life ...”

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*How do you manage local staff differently to those in your home country?*

*Al Ain respondents*

Eight of the thirteen Al Ain interviewees mentioned participative decision-making helped them to manage staff differently to their home country. Five of the thirteen Al Ain interviewees found that understanding the local staff helped them to manage staff differently to their home country. One Sri Lankan manager indicated:

“It’s a bit different. It’s a bit tough explaining things to Arabic staff because at first you feel like telling them to do something but this creates problems. They can be very high-minded sometimes so we have to remember this and politely explain our requirements to them. In Sri Lanka this is not necessary.”

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Insert Table 7

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*Dubai respondents*

Five Dubai interviewees mentioned managing local staff differently to their home country by showing them appreciation. Four mentioned that individual understanding and thinking like locals were useful ways to manage the local staff differently to those in their home country. A Filipino manager described how they dealt with local ladies:

“As I work in HR, we have one local lady working with us, not in HR, but in the government office but she works closely with us in the same office. At first there will be a wall because you are still learning [about] each other’s culture but now we’re working like one family. That’s a very good thing for us

because probably for the respect for each other's culture and because this country is a family-oriented culture, which is similar to the Philippines.”

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 Insert Table 8  
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*What factors do you believe contribute to the situations you face in managing UAE organisations?*

*Al Ain respondents*

Nine of the thirteen Al Ain interviewees found the Arabic language contributed to the situations they faced in managing in Al Ain organizations. Being unable to understand conversations in Arabic forced them to rely on other local staff to translate for them. Six identified communication as a factor affecting their management.

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 Insert Table 9  
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*Dubai respondents*

Seven of the twelve Dubai interviewees indicated that supporting their staff and trusting them was a major consideration in how they managed in Dubai. Six of the interviewees emphasized the importance of understanding the local culture. One Nepalese manager indicated that language and cultural background were barriers:

“Not much that I can think of. The only factor which, if you're looking at it this way is the factor which I mentioned before which is the language barrier which is always there. Besides that, to a certain extent, it's a little bit of the cultural background also which comes into play, you know ....”



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Insert Table 10  
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## **Discussion**

The findings show that decision-making practices by expatriate managers in the UAE differ from those employed in their home country. A large majority indicated that they needed to change their decision-making style to suit their new circumstances. This supports the findings of Pagell *et al.* (2005) who found that national culture has an effect on decision-making styles. In 18 out of 25 instances, the consultative management style proved to be the key to a successfully managing in the UAE. Research by AlMazrouei (2012) found that a consultative style is ubiquitous in the UAE context and should, therefore, be used when making decisions there. In Al Ain, a more conservative city than Dubai, the consultative style proved to be closely aligned to traditional Arabic cultural methodology with ten of the thirteen interviewees mentioning this as a factor, while in Dubai the prominence of involving the local staff in the formulation of decisions indicated by eight out of the twelve respondents may be due to the understanding that ownership of decisions fosters greater engagement and support for those decisions.

The results identified different approaches in adjusting decision-making techniques for interviewees in UAE. Training was identified as a key factor by eleven of all the 25 interviewees with 5 Al Ain of the thirteen respondents and six of the twelve Dubai interviewees citing this. Training in decision-making to suit the local culture was identified as valuable as was training in broader cultural considerations generally. Training in cultural differences, especially that relating to decision-making,

is important given the strong traditional methods of making decisions in UAE organizations. Expatriate managers who are able to adjust their decision-making styles so they are more closely aligned with the local culture stand more of a chance of meeting with success. Those who were able to successfully combine the strongest aspects of their management and decision-making styles with the local styles met with much success as the resultant approach, combining the best aspects of both styles rather than a direct competition between different styles, produced the most robust outcomes. This result supports the work of Robey, Ross and Boudreau (2002) who described the creation of hybrid ideas resulting from a combination of different approaches. When a new view is robust enough to provide a realistic option, more reliable results develop (Van de Ven and Poole, 1995). For example, it has been noted that US human resources practices, styles of decision-making and socialisation interface with Arabic management styles and culture (Anwar and Chaker, 2003). It is through this interface that adaptation of styles occur (AlMazrouei, 2012).

The expatriate respondents recognized the need for a different style of managing local staff in the UAE in comparison to that used in their home countries. Eight out of thirteen expatriate managers in Al Ain spoke more about the need to conduct their management using a participative style. This approach is more likely to meet success given Al Ain's more conservative and traditional culture. In addition, five of the twelve Dubai interviewees nominated this factor. This observation is confirmed by previous studies on leadership conducted in the region (Hammoud, 2011; Randeree and Chaudhry, 2012). In contrast, showing local staff appreciation was the most common theme among expatriate managers in Dubai. As is the case worldwide, showing appreciation provides motivation and encourages ongoing cooperation. Shaw (1990) commented on the significance of the need for expatriate

managers to garner acceptance by the local society if they were to gain consent to manage.

Expatriates expressed the factors contributing to the situation they face in managing UAE organizations. Nine of the thirteen Al Ain interviewees indicated that unfamiliarity with the Arabic language caused almost all of the challenges they faced. The Arabic language remains a strong component of the traditional culture in Al Ain while, in Dubai, the English language has made greater inroads into the culture with the influx of expatriates into senior management and leadership positions in UAE organizations. This was reflected in responses with this factor failing to rate a mention by Dubai respondents. In addition, this supports the findings of AlMazrouei and Pech (2015). Expatriates frequently encounter difficulties expressing their wishes and requirements accurately to local staff when they do not possess strong English language skills. Similarly, without proficient Arabic language skills, expatriates encounter similar difficulties. This finding keeps with Chang's (2008) observation that learning the national language is essential to conducting work in a foreign context.

Furthermore, Dubai interviewees found that different factors contributed to the challenges they faced in managing and leading UAE organizations. Support for the multicultural aspects of the workforce was cited as a contributing factor in managing successful outcomes by seven of the twelve respondents there. The strong multicultural flavour of Dubai springs from the influx of many varied cultures and nationalities. This resulted from a governmental policy aimed at attracting international businesses. The expansive population of expatriate workers thus provided the basis for international teams as a significant factor in expatriate managers' success. AlMazrouei (2012) confirms this finding in noting that business

prospects have fuelled a surge in the immigration of foreign nationals into Dubai. Furthermore, this phenomenon is related to a decision by the government to promote the city as an international business centre.

### **Practical implications, research limitations and future research**

This research provides practical guidance for expatriate managers charged with successfully leading organizations in UAE. It also offers guidance for employers seeking to recruit or employ appropriate management talent to UAE. The paper highlights the benefits of how a more focused training in key aspects of cross-cultural management such as leadership and decision-making styles as they apply to different urban cultural settings within the UAE can facilitate greater likelihood of expatriate management appointment success and can result in reduced training costs. Moreover, the study informs expatriate managers on how to enhance their proficiency in decision-making in the host country. Global competitiveness has made it an imperative for expatriate managers to operate effectively and efficiently in different countries (AlMazrouei and Zacca, 2015).

Our findings underscore several important implications to expatriate managers decision-making practices in the UAE. First, the results highlight the validity of utilizing a consultative approach to leadership and decision making in the Emirati context, thus confirming previous findings from leadership studies in the region (Hammoud, 2011; Randeree and Chaudhry, 2012). At the same time, the study outcomes suggest that consultative leadership may be the most effective and accepted approach to decision making in an organization marked with high levels of employee diversity, where the workforce represents a wide variety of cultural orientations. We suggest that this particular approach gives voice to the various subordinates of

different nationalities through the act of consultation, thus empowering employees to participate in a decision making process that is collective in nature.

In addition, the findings highlight the necessity of tailoring decision-making approaches to the cultural expectations of local staff. While this observation may seem somewhat intuitive, executing this often proves most challenging for expatriate leaders. Since the literature on the effectiveness of cross-cultural training remains inconclusive (Littrell, et al., 2006), the “how” and “what” would necessarily impact the outcomes. Nevertheless, the reported deficiency in training is pronounced enough to conclude its significance in expatriate managerial operations in the Emirates.

In a similar vein, the findings suggest the importance and need for multinational corporations to address the issue of language proficiency among their staff. Effective and reliable communication is one of the most essential mechanisms of any organization and basic functions cannot be accomplished easily in its absence (Feely and Harzing, 2003). While this finding is simplistic in nature, this aspect of cross-cultural management in the Emirates requires attention as companies may not be able to fully utilize their human resources in the face of impeded communication.

The main limitation of this research is the relatively small sample size. While strong evidence was found to be indicative of the particular issues investigated, the study would have benefited from a larger sample to provide greater validity to the topics discussed. In addition, the use of structured interviews limited the chances of valuable information and insights from being brought to light as a result of the interviews conducted. In contrast, using semi-structured interviews would have provided greater information and detail while still keeping the study within the bounds of the topics being researched. Additionally, the insights provided by the

interviewees were subjective in nature, given that they were reporting on their own perceptions and impressions based on their experiences.

It would be beneficial to take the concepts explored in this study further by conducting comparison studies between countries in the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf (GCC), which include Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia, as well as the United Arab Emirates. It would also advance the results from this study if future research in this area were to include leadership styles as an aspect affecting decision-making styles. Other possibilities would be to focus on the effects of certain aspects of leadership styles within one industry sector or to conduct a comparison between industries. The use of observation to supplement expatriates' personal impressions would strengthen the validity of the results. A longitudinal study may also prove beneficial as a method of examining the effects of changes to leadership styles as the manager's face, and deal with, challenging situations resulting from cultural differences. Furthermore, contrasting between Western educated and Eastern educated expatriate managers would offer interesting findings and reveal any differences in their proficiencies in or approaches to decision-making and differences in how they adjust their leadership styles and behaviour to the local environment and expectations (AlMazrouei and Zacca, 2015).

## **Conclusion**

Managing across cultures is vital for international business success, and managers need to make decisions in a way that accommodates the local culture in which they are posted. This paper explored how expatriate managers in the UAE make decisions in respect to their contextual environment. Additionally, the study investigated the approaches expatriate managers use to adjust their decision-making

and how they manage local staff in contrast to home country staff. Finally, the study investigated the factors that contribute to the situation specific environment the expatriate managers' experience.

The results show that the consultative management style enhanced by a hybrid approach of melding the strongest aspects of the expatriate's decision-making style with the strongest aspects of the local style met with pronounced success managing in the UAE. Additionally, the expatriate manager's expression of appreciation towards local staff provided motivation and encouraged cooperation. The strong value of generosity and graciousness are mentioned in the literature as intrinsic to traditional Arabic and Bedouin cultures (Sarayrah, 2004) and therefore explain the persisting effectiveness of this technique on encouraging local employees. Furthermore, it was found that expatriates periodically experience difficulties articulating their requirements accurately to local staff due to unfamiliarity with the Arabic language. However, Arabic language was less of a factor in the cosmopolitan city of Dubai as compared to the more traditional city of Al Ain, which is located in the Abu Dhabi Emirate. In fact, language proficiency is cited as one of the most daunting challenges faced by multinational corporations today (Feely and Harzing, 2003), and while the world is trending toward increasing adoption of English for business communication, global managers cannot always rely on their staff having a proficient command of the language.

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**Table 1: Distribution of interviews**

Industries	No. of interviews given	Number of interviews completed	Response rate
Hospitals	15	10	67%
Commercial Centers	10	5	50%
Hotels	12	10	83%
Total	37	N=25	68%

**Table 2: Gender, nationality and education distribution**

Gender	No. of interviews	Nationality	No. of Interviews	Education	No. of interviews
Male	15	Indians	8	Bachelor's degrees	11
Female	10	Sri Lankans	2	Master's degrees	6
<b>Total</b>	<b>N=25</b>	Pakistani	2	Doctorate	1
		Nepalese	1	Non-degree qualifications	7
		Philippines	3	<b>Total</b>	<b>N=25</b>
		Indonesian	1		
		Iranian	1		
		Australians	4		
		US	1		
		British	1		
		Russian	1		
		<b>Total</b>	<b>N=25</b>		

**Table 3: Differences for Al Ain interviewees in decision making between current UAE job and home country (N=13)**

Dimensions (no. of statements)	Sample statements
Consult (N=10)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I do my best to consult with my boss. I talk to him and I take a decision.</li> <li>You have to understand before you do something that there's rules and regulations you have to follow. You cannot just decide things without consulting the proper person.</li> <li>I would involve top management by consulting, then deciding. The same technique as in India.</li> <li>I would say, yeah, more consultative while back home in India I was less consultative and my management was more individual. Employees in the UAE are generally less empowered and the management is less empowered on an individual basis. Here the style of management is more consultative.</li> </ul>
Participative (N=8)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In the United Arab Emirates decision-making is done in a more participative and consultative way. On the other hand, in Austria, participation and involvement is more influential and more widely practiced.</li> <li>Back home there is not much difference to here, almost the same. Back there, I was also working in a hospital. Ultimately, in the organisation, decisions are not made by just one person but collectively. Arriving at decisions in both the UAE and India involves teamwork and collective</li> </ul>

	decision-making.
Involving staff (N=4)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In the UAE you need to involve staff in making decisions and explain them in detail along with the reasoning behind them because locals won't accept the decisions unless they know the details that prompted them however, in Australia, decisions are made and communicated in a direct way and they are usually accepted.</li> </ul>
Sensitivity to the culture (N=2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In my home country it's easy to make decisions because there is only one nationality but, in the UAE, you have to be sensitive when you make decisions concerning locals.</li> </ul>
Use of traditional decision-making methods (N=1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Decision-making still seems to be based on the traditional ways and this shows no sign of changing in any context, whether this is commercial or in government. In the UAE I'm much more involved in detailed decision-making but I'm involved at a level of daily activity I would never be involved at in the United States. Never. Shoot me!</li> </ul>

**Table 4: Differences for Dubai interviewees in decision making between current UAE job and home country (N=12)**

Dimensions (no. of statements)	Sample statements
Openness (N=3)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Again, the openness. I think that's the biggest thing ever. It's how you open everybody to new experiences, learning new things. There's things here that you can't do back home and, it's not only that, you try, everybody tries it, and everybody's learning at the same time.</li> </ul>
Patience (N=2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Patience. You have to be a lot more patient. I mean, I'm Scottish and Scottish people are naturally aggressive. I don't know why it's the way it is. But here you have to take into account the language. In fact, there are some people who won't understand how you act so there's everything like that, affect the cultural differences so, when you would get angry, you have to take a step back and just, say, breathe. Maybe they understood it differently, or they took it a different way, so. Also, in Scotland, decisions are made more aggressively. In the UAE this won't work because the locals are less assertive. If you try to force them to accept a decision they'll imply that they'll accept it although they'll resist you but not in a direct way.</li> <li>In the UAE you have to be more patient and have a certain amount of resilience and be able to adjust to this. People react to requests based on the amount of importance and the amount of power the person requesting has. A powerful minority is in control. In Australia aborigines are a minority who feel threatened in their own country.</li> </ul>
Involving local staff (N=5)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>You have to do more planning, organising, brainstorming with the staff, keep discussing things with them. I mean you have to consult with the staff before making any decisions, unlike in India. If you don't involve local staff here in Dubai in decision-making they won't accept the decision.</li> <li>Most of the time we discuss with colleagues before making decisions. The culture of the hospital is that we sit down with colleagues to discuss things before we make decisions.</li> </ul>
Consultation (N=8)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>You have to consult more, there would be more consultation and taking into account of local factors than you would at home. In Australia, decision-making is done with less consultation and is more individually-based. You can't try that here, though. It just won't work.</li> </ul>

Advice (N=3)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I did not have much opportunity to make decisions back home but this was because I did not work in Russia. Since starting work here in Dubai I assess the strengths and weaknesses of a situation and I obtain advice from subordinates and colleagues when I need to make decisions.</li> </ul>
Freedom to make decisions (N=1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>First, you have full freedom and as an acting boss you have to make your own decisions. Back home, before you make a decision, you have to check with your superiors, you have to check with the level above you and then can proceed with making the decision.</li> </ul>
Understanding local people (N=3)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>You need to understand the different culture and the different mentality in the UAE and not make decisions based on emotions. You have to keep in mind how the local people operate and make an effort to understand how each individual thinks.</li> </ul>

**Table 5: Approaches used by Al Ain interviewees to adjust their decision-making techniques in the UAE (N=13).**

Dimensions (no. of statements)	Sample statements
Training (N=5)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ah yeah. Example, training itself. I had to change my training techniques after coming here, actually because the things that I used back home cannot be used here. I had to change the technique.</li> </ul>
Meeting (N=2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mostly, I'm dealing with the locals, meeting with them and consulting with them to make decisions. Solving staff problems.</li> <li>Using meetings and being a lot more adaptive to the participative decision-making style.</li> </ul>
Reviewing the labour laws (N=2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reviewing the labour laws to check if the organisation is on the right track. Then I make my decision based on that.</li> <li>... I also use the law and discuss the laws with them.</li> </ul>
Spending more time with locals (N=4)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Actually working mainly with local colleagues. I spend more time with local colleagues which helps me to adjust my decision-making.</li> </ul>
Involvement (N=4)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Getting people involved in the decision making.</li> <li>I involve staff in decision-making.</li> </ul>
Consultation (N=8)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I first consult with my boss then I make a decision because my boss has been working with the staff for long time and know better how to work with them to achieve results.</li> <li>I use a consultative style but I make individual decisions based on those consultations.</li> </ul>

**Table 6: Approaches used by Dubai interviewees to adjust their decision-making techniques in the UAE (N=12)**

Dimensions (no. of statements)	Sample statements
Planning (N=3)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Using management skills like planning and making decision.</li> </ul>

Consulting (N=4)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consulting with friends and asking questions.</li> <li>• Again, you have to consult more and understand more where people are coming not purely from a business sense but you have to understand the cultural sensitivities as well which you may not necessarily have to do back home in Australia. It's more a fact of business. Here, you've got cultural sensitivities which you put into play as well.</li> </ul>
Training (N=6)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Internal training courses</li> <li>• .... I also attended training courses about the UAE culture.</li> <li>• I have taken a lot of training courses in terms of decision-making.</li> <li>• We attend training in how to implement decision-making to suit the UAE culture and local staff.</li> </ul>
Feedback & follow labour laws (N=4)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I use feedback about the effectiveness of decisions from colleagues. Also, I have to follow the company labour laws which have different sectors. I have to follow these precisely.</li> </ul>
Leveraging experience (N=3)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Probably just using the experience of longer stay expatriates or local nationals who I work with, sharing their experience, basically.</li> </ul>
Brainstorming (N=5)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Actually, every morning I have a briefing with my colleagues, I am getting all information from my colleagues and brainstorming and also we are making discussions and respecting each other.</li> </ul>

**Table 7: Managing local staff in Al Ain differently to home country staff (N=13).**

Dimensions (no. of statements)	Sample statements
Friendly & kind (N=3)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Being friendly, kind.</li> <li>• Actually, we respect them. A little bit of communication. Adapting to the local decision-making style. Establish friendly relationships with the local staff more than we would do in our own country is the main difference in managing local staff.</li> <li>• You need to make more of an effort to be friendly and open and use teamwork here more than in Pakistan.</li> </ul>
Understanding (N=5)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understanding the local staff and the differences between them and my Filipino staff was the best way to manage them. This involves achieving a balance between understanding and decision-making by recognising that decisions have to be made in a way that will achieve objectives without offending cultural sensitivities.</li> </ul>
Participative (N=8)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• You need to work with local staff in a participative way, be very careful when providing feedback so as to not offend, and provide clear, excellent instructions. This is different to Austria where work is conducted in a less participative way and feedback can be given in a more direct way.</li> </ul>
Approaching (N=6)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The first time when we are talking with them some of them are not good in English. Before they understand very well about what we are going to say to them sometimes they are talking to us. It's only the way how I approach the other person. So they are not made to feel uncomfortable. This makes it easier for them to understand what I'm saying. The difference is only, again, approaching them and talking to them. In Indonesia, there is no problem because I talk to my staff in Indonesian.</li> </ul>

Providing background information (N=3)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The best way to manage local staff is to provide background information and the reasoning behind decisions when giving them whereas, in Australia, this is not always necessary, although people always appreciate it when you do.</li> </ul>
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**Table 8: Managing local staff in Dubai differently to home country staff (N=12).**

Dimensions (no. of statements)	Sample statements
Understand local's behaviour (N=2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I had no opportunity to work in Russia. Here, I take things from their culture and try to understand their behaviour like details, you know, maybe the customs as well. There are still differences between locals and non-locals because foreigners bring their own ways with them and the local people are not used to them. The local people are proud of their heritage and want to maintain their culture.</li> </ul>
Using a mentor (N=2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I wanted to manage local staff differently from Australian staff. A mentor showed me and guided me how to manage the local staff and I then practiced it and I was able to undertake the job by myself. After a while I was able to manage them quite well.</li> </ul>
Individual understanding (N=4)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>You have to be one on one with them in order for them to understand you have to communicate with them one by one. This means individually.</li> </ul>
Being patient (N=3)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A lot of it's the same, but, again, patience and understanding and trying not to make your point sternly because they can misinterpret that as you being angry directly at them rather than the situation. A lot of them will take it personally rather than 'I'm not angry at you, I'm angry at the situation' but they take it as direct anger from you.</li> </ul>
Appreciation (N=5)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>... Also, providing direction and showing them appreciation for their efforts is worthwhile. In Pakistan you need to apply less pressure to get the results you want.</li> </ul>
Be good to local staff (N=4)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Managing local staff is not a difficult task for me. I treat them like the others so there is no differentiation. I don't think it's difficult to manage them because if you're good to them they are good to you. I focus mainly on the work.</li> </ul>
Respect their country (N=1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Start from the basis that this is their country and, at the end of the day, you do what you can do for them because one day you have to leave so what you achieve has to be sustainable and good. You have to make sure that they feel a part of it.</li> </ul>
Think like them (N=4)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Actually, I try to think like them, you know. I try to use their accent, mostly. Because when you get close to people they will understand you more by building good relationships. I think management, you can get close to them and then you can ask whatever you want from them.</li> </ul>

**Table 9: Factors contributing to situations faced by Al Ain interviewees in managing UAE organisations (N=13).**

Dimensions (no. of statements)	Sample statements
Arabic language	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sometimes I don't understand what the staff are saying in Arabic, so ask my manager to help me in those situations.</li> </ul>

(N=9)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not knowing Arabic well was a problem. A training course help me to understand some of what people were saying.</li> <li>• I was not good with Arabic so I did some training so I could underhand more.</li> <li>• Not understand the Arabic language was a problem so I arranged for training to help me.</li> </ul>
Communication (N=6)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communicating with the staff was difficult. I had to make an effort to understand each of them.</li> <li>• Communication with the staff was not easy. I worked around it by promoting teamwork and forming teams.</li> </ul>
Bureaucracy (N=1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I believe that the bureaucracy in the UAE is more complex. What existed in Europe twenty years ago still seems to influence peoples' thinking and perception in Al Ain organisations today. Bureaucracy seems to be a way of avoiding doing things.</li> </ul>
Leadership styles (N=4)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I sometimes find the leadership styles and the ways local managers make decisions hard to understand. I solved this by making sure staff at every level clearly understood the company objectives.</li> </ul>
Understanding the culture (N=4)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I found that a lack of understanding of the culture contributed to the factors I faced as a manager of local staff. I improved this by reading and listening to stories about the UAE culture, and by researching the culture thought the media, such as the internet.</li> </ul>
Goal making (N=1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some local staff don't seem to have goals and stick to them and that they tend to lose focus. This is in contrast to how I operate, so I assign goals for them and monitor their progress as well as continually checking that the goal is still valid.</li> </ul>

**Table 10: Factors contributing to situations faced by Dubai interviewees in managing UAE organisations (N=12).**

Dimensions (no. of statements)	Sample statements
Organising & follow-up (N=2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Organising and follow up and making sure things are done and open discussions.</li> </ul>
Understanding (N=6)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A lack of understanding of each others' culture between me and the local staff created difficulties in managing staff.</li> <li>• Again, product knowledge. Understanding that the staff don't know some of the techniques for selling. There's a lot of them, especially the Europeans, who are uncomfortable when the Filipino staff follow them around the store. They don't seem comfortable with that and we don't like it. The customers walk straight out. The customers need eye contact from a distance. If somebody's wanting to know something, that's when staff need to recognise that and then approach them rather than being right behind them.</li> </ul>
Honesty & integrity (N=4)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I believe in my job the only thing which is very important for me is honesty and integrity. These two are very important for me.</li> </ul>
Supporting (N=7)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supporting my multicultural team. As well, probably organisational culture</li> </ul>



Show other points of view (N=2)	and building trust. That's also very important.
Watch the local people (N=4)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li data-bbox="533 371 1347 432">• ... You just need to show them other points of view before you leave and then let them manage.</li><li data-bbox="533 490 1347 631">• The United Arab Emirates is an Arabic community with a balanced culture. You have to watch the country and the local people to understand what the country wants done to achieve practical outcomes. It's not useful to try to impose your will too strongly as the local people will have a pretty good idea of what's needed.</li></ul>