

# **Work Performance and Social Interaction among Saudi Women Workers**

**Soraya W. Assad**



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### *Abstract:*

The purpose of this study is to explore employees' work performance and social interaction in a women's educational institutions in Saudi Arabia and to analyze some of the cultural and social factors that influence this behavior. The study population consisted of 185 Saudi women engaged in administrative work. Findings show that general cultural values influence organizational structure and work performance. It also demonstrated that in order to understand employee behavior and interaction, it is important to take into consideration the ongoing encounters between forces of change and forces of stability and the socioeconomic conditions which operate in Saudi Arabia today. The conclusion of the study points to the importance of bringing about alterations in employees' performance and organizational structure to ensure efficiency and professionalism while Saudi Arabia attempts to adapt to the emerging global economic and social conditions.

### *Introduction:*

In Saudi Arabia, cultural values emphasize diligence in work and competence. Saudi Development programs emphasize improving the quality of worker performance. A main objective of the National Development Plan (the fifth plan, 1990-1995:13) is: "To develop human resources, thus ensuring a constant supply of manpower, upgrading its quality and improving its efficiency to meet the requirements of the national economy". The emphasis on improving the quality of workers' performance is also reflected in the main objectives of (the sixth plan 1995-2000). There is a realization that the

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implementation of development projects is dependent on the degree to which workers in organizations are capable of performing their tasks adequately and efficiently.

### ***Purpose of the Study***

The purpose of this study is to explore employee work performance and social interaction in a Saudi educational institution and to analyze some of the cultural and social factors that influence this behavior.

### ***Importance of the Study***

In Arab countries, administrative reform has been viewed not only as national necessity but also to adapt to the emerging global economic conditions (Jreisat, 1997, 1999; Esman, 1991). Reform ideas such as improving employee performance and accountability have also become global (Jreisat, 1999:20). In recent years there has been much emphasis in Saudi Arabia as elsewhere on improving individual performance at work. Changes are being sought in the sphere of cultural value orientations, to promote a strong work ethic facilitating economic development.

A few studies have examined Saudi men's managerial values (e.g., Ali and Al-Shakis, 1985; Al-Twaijri, 1988; Al-Meer, 1989; Al-Aiban and Pearce, 1993). However, very little research has been conducted on actual employee work behavior, particularly among women workers in Saudi Arabia. The data of the present study, while not inferential, provide useful and recent descriptive information about women.

Research on work performance developed initially in the West. Assumptions and findings concerning Western populations do not apply perfectly in non-Western cultures. The study examines employee work performance in Saudi Arabia within its own societal context.

The study of work attitudes is still underdeveloped in Saudi Arabia, and negative stereotypes of national work ethic practices are

prevalent. The study provides a better understanding of work behavior to achieve effective managerial practices in the country.

In Saudi Arabia women are segregated from men outside of the family, including in the labor force. The study sheds light on cultural and social factors the influence women's work performance within their own work contexts.

### *Literature Review*

Of particular importance to economic and social progress in developing countries such as Saudi Arabia are issues related to the work ethic and individualism. One approach to societal development stresses individual motivation, values, and ethics. Much of the research in this area has been carried out in the West and derives from Max Weber classic study (1958) of the Protestant Work Ethic (PWE) underpinning capitalism. Ali (1988, 1992) studied the work ethic in other belief and social systems and described a specifically Islamic Work Ethic (IWE) which has its origins in the Koran and in the sayings and practices of the prophet Mohammed and the early Islamic leaders.

According to Ali, the IWE is an orientation toward work which implies that work is a virtue in light of man's needs and a necessity for establishing equilibrium in individual and social life. This orientation stresses work as life fulfillment more than life denial, as in the Arab saying, "No one eats better food than that which one eats out of one's work" (Ali, 1992:507). Islamic traditions also emphasize the importance of quality of work, as in the admonition to "Persist in your action with a noble end in mind.... Failure to perfect your work while you are sure of the reward is injustice to yourself" (Ali, 1992:507).

Ali (1992) pointed out that during the first six centuries of Islam, knowledge, trade, industry, agriculture, and the construction of complex organizations thrived. Work and creativity were honored in all their forms. Ali (1992:509) contends that foreign domination of the Arab world by the Ottoman Empire (1412-1918), which was continued by the early and modern western powers, had an adverse impact on

Arab work structure and behavior and led to decay in the influence of the IWE. The early western powers instilled in Arabs a feeling of inferiority, the superiority of the West and the vision that without Western administration, the Orient was doomed to failure, This sense of inferiority has continued through foreign influence on Arab political structures and the influx of multinational corporations and expatriate labor (Ali, 1992:510). Consequently, social alienation and apathy in the workplace have spread (Ali and Al-Shakhis, 1985; Ali, 1992; Barakat, 1993). Yet studies among Arabs in different settings have also shown recent changes in work orientation and have found strong evidence of high commitment and attachment to work (Abboushi, 1990; Ali and al-Shkhis, 1985; Yasin and Stahl, 1990; Ali, 1989, 1992).

Another work-related issue that has been examined primarily in the West is individualism, which has been considered the foundation of the work ethic and high achievement in Western society (see, e.g., Hofstede, 1980). In his multicultural studies, Hofstede contrasted individualism with collectivism, defining the former as a preference for a loosely knit social framework in which individuals are only obligated to take care of themselves and their immediate families. In an individualistic society, emphasis is on assertiveness in meeting such obligations to the maximum of one's ability. By contrast, according to Hofstede (1984), collectivism represents a preference for tightly knit social frameworks in which people are emotionally integrated into an extended family, clan, organization, or other in-group that is expected to protect them in exchange for their unquestioning loyalty. In collectivist societies, since there is no clear line between job life and private life, relationships (both on and outside of the job) take precedence over work tasks (Hofstede, 1984).

Some researchers have viewed collectivism as a characteristic of Arab society while categorizing Western society as an individualistic culture (Badawy, 1980; Muna, 1980; Barakat, 1993; Buda and Elsayed Elkhoully 1998). Saudi Arabia has been described as a collectivist

society, since the family, not the individual, is the basic social unit (Al-Awaji, 1971:78). The major characteristics of Middle Eastern managers are described as a heavy reliance on personal contacts, a highly authoritarian tone, rigid instruction, and many management directives; social position and family influence are everpresent factors (Badawy, 1980). Muna (1980) reported that two-thirds of the Arab executives in his survey thought that employee loyalty is more important than efficiency. Buda and Elsayed Elkhoully (1998:487) found that Arab research subjects were significantly more collectivist than U.S. subjects but varied among Arab nations in this regard: Egyptian subjects were significantly more individualistic than Gulf state subjects.

On the other hand, some authors, such as Almaney (1981) and Baali and Wardi (1981), have claimed that Arabs are highly individualistic and have blamed the failure of Arab cooperation and economic programs on the individualistic quality of the Arabs. Al-Faleh (1990:28) also considered Arabs to be individualistic, as exemplified by their preference for working alone rather than on a team. Wagner (1995), and Buda and Elsayed-Elkhoully (1998) offer the compromise view that degree of collectivism varies among collectivistic cultures.

Research on the work ethic in Saudi Arabia is limited and has usually been undertaken from the perspective of management and focused on male workers. A few references criticize Saudi male employee performance (Al-Awwad, 1991; Al-Saeeri, 1993; Al-Swaf, 1994). These studies indicate that low level of Saudi work performance is a critical problem because of its negative impact on the productivity of individuals, groups, and the national economy as a whole.

According to Wilson and Graham (1994:259), studies have shown that Saudi employers often pass over Saudi job applicants for several reasons: Saudis often insist on higher salaries, they are unskilled, they have poor work habits, and employers find it difficult to fire them. In

addition, attendance among Saudi employees is often sketchy, as family and private business concerns take precedence; late arrivals at and early departures from work are also common. Many Saudi bureaucrats have outside jobs, which they put first. All of this has led to complaints about the bureaucracy's inefficiency and lack of speed in handling documents. Work attitudes are another obstacle to creating a well-skilled Saudi work force. Most Saudis tend to disdain any work which is not considered "noble" (sharif), shying away from all manual, menial, tenious work, such as plumbing or road-sweeping (Wilson and Graham, 1994:256).

Naser (1995:165) found that among Saudi female office workers in the institution she studied, making frequent personal phone calls at work, visiting socially in colleagues offices, and showing work efficiency only in the presence of a direct supervisor are common work behaviors. She also reported a lack of such positive work behaviors as getting things done without follow-up from the supervisor and showing enthusiasm and seriousness at work.

On the other hand, Ali (1988:575) found that managers in Saudi Arabia were highly committed to the Islamic Work Ethic and showed a moderate tendency toward individualism.

### ***Method***

This is a descriptive study. It is based on a survey of 185 Saudi women engaged in administrative work at a major Saudi Arabian women's educational institution, including 81 contract and 104 permanent employees. Contract employees are those hired on a contract basis for six months. They get paid according to their qualifications. These employees are not usually entitled to such government employment privileges as retirement pay, promotion, yearly bonuses, and emergency leave. However, they may receive social insurance for retirement, and they are entitled to twenty days yearly of paid vacation and to paid sick leave for up to nine months. Years of

work experience as a contract employee are not considered in calculating benefits if the employee later acquires a permanent position with the organization. Permanent employees are those hired on a permanent basis. They get paid according to the job grade level assigned to them. They are entitled to such government employment privileges as retirement pay, promotion, yearly bonuses, ten days yearly of emergency leave, thirty days yearly of paid vacation, and paid sick leave for up to a year.

The educational institution was selected, because it is one of the main public higher educational institution in Saudi Arabia, and the one with the largest number of Saudi employees. All 185 workers participated in the study. Job positions included were general office workers, bookkeepers, counter clerks, file clerks, typists, librarian assistants, and secretaries. The same population was subjected to other studies by Assad (2000, 2001).

Questionnaires were written in Arabic and were administered to the subjects at their work sites, during working hours, and in the presence of the researcher. The author relies on employees perception of their performance. The author believes that this method was appropriate since the author is known to the employees, has worked with them and established rapport. Consequently employees answered the questionnaire with ease and confidence. Part I of the questionnaire collected demographic data about the subjects: women's marital status, education, major, monthly income, years of work experience, and employment type. Part II of the questionnaire included sets of questions assessing work performance and employee social interaction.

Work performance refers to the way the members of an organization perform their job. This variable was measured through questions on whether or not the respondent: (a) came to work late, if so, how late and how frequently this happened; (b) left work early, if so, how early and how frequently this happened; (c) needed to be

reminded to get things done; (d) called the office if she would be absent for one day; (e) stayed in the office when the boss was absent for a short period; (f) needed to be told how to prioritize her work; (g) called other departments if necessary to help inquirers; (h) helped inquirers in the order they arrived; (I) informed the boss when leaving work early; and (j) made personal phone calls more than once to twice a day.

The employee social interaction variable was measured through questions asking the respondent whether or not: (a) she substituted for an absen colleague; (b) her colleagues volunteered to help her; (c) she visited socially in colleague's offices more than once a week; (d) she visited socially in colleagues' offices for twenty minutes or more; (e) she took snack and tea breaks more than once a day; (f) she took snack and tea breaks for twenty minutes or more; (g) she visited colleagues on special occasions outside of work; (h) she exchanged gifts with colleagues; (i) she contributed to formal gatherings at work; (j) she resented persons who worked hard; (k) there was a lot of gossip and back biting in the office; and (l) colleagues got along well together. In addition, respondents were asked to indicate reasons for going to work late and or leaving work early and to list, in order of importance, factors that they think could improve their work performance.

## ***Findings***

### ***Demographic Characteristics of the Study Population***

The majority of the respondents were married, had children, held a bachelor's degree, had specialized in majors other than administration, and were under the age of 35. All 81 contract employees earned less than 6,000 Saudi riyals (\$1 = 3.75 Saudi riyals) per month, whilst only 40 permanent employees (38.5 percent) earned less than this amount. With respect to number of years of work experience, contract employees had less work experience than permanent employees. Among contract employees, 87.6 percent had been working no more

than five years, while 61.5 percent of the permanent employees had been working more than ten years (see Table 1).

*Table 1: Summary of Demographic Characteristics of the Study Population*

Factor		Contract Employees		Permanent Employees		Row Totals	
		F	%	F	%	F	%
Marital Status	Married	64	79.0	72	69.2	136	73.5
	Single	17	21.0	32	30.8	49	26.5
Educational Level	No college degree	29	35.8	26	25.0	55	29.7
	College degree	52	64.2	78	75.0	130	70.3
Major	Liberal arts	32	39.5	53	51.0	85	46.0
	No major	29	35.8	26	25.0	55	29.7
	Administration	20	24.7	25	24.0	45	24.3
Monthly Income	Less than 6,000 Saudi riyals	81	100.0	40	38.5	121	65.4
	6,000 Saudi riyals or more	0	0	64	61.5	64	34.6
Age	Under 35	63	77.8	42	40.4	105	56.8
	35 or older	18	22.2	62	59.6	80	43.2
Years of Work Experience	1-5	71	87.6	19	18.3	90	49.0
	6-10	5	6.2	21	20.0	26	14.0
	More than 10	5	6.2	64	61.5	69	37.0
Total responses for each factor		81		104		185	

### *Work Performance*

With regard to punctuality, as Table 2 shows, more than a third of

the respondents (41.1%) reported that they arrived at work at least 15 minutes late at least once to three times a month. More than half of the respondents (62.1%) said that they sometimes left work at least 15 minutes early. This happened at least one to three times a month in the cases of almost a third of the respondents (28.6%).

**Table 2. Respondent's Self Descriptions Related to Punctuality**

Punctuality Responses	Yes or No	Employment Type					
		Contract Employees		Permanent Employees		Row Totals	
		F	%	F	%	F	%
I sometimes get to work fifteen minutes or more late	Y	32	39.5	44	42.3	76	41.1
	N	49	60.5	60	57.7	109	58.9
I get to work late at least once to three times a month	Y	38	46.9	38	36.5	76	41.1
	N	43	53.1	66	63.5	109	58.9
I sometimes leave work fifteen minutes or more early	Y	47	58.0	66	63.5	113	62.1
	N	34	42.0	38	36.5	72	38.9
I leave work early at least once to three times a month	Y	31	38.3	22	21.2	53	28.6
	N	50	61.7	28	78.8	132	71.4
Total responses for each factor		81		104		185	

Table 2 also shows that contract employees seemed to be less concerned about punctuality than permanent employees. A higher percentage of contract than of permanent employees indicated that they got to work late at least once to three times a month (46.9 compared to 36.5%), and contract employees also more often reported that they left work early at least once to three times a month (38.3 compared to 21.2%).

A possible explanation may be that contract employees felt less motivated to be punctual because they were more frustrated by and

dissatisfied with their work status. In an earlier study (Assad 2001) the author reported these contract employees complained about their lack of such rights and privileges as promotion, paid vacation, yearly bonuses, emergency leave, training opportunities, retirement benefits, and protection against lay-offs during budget cutbacks. They also indicated dissatisfaction with their wages.

The Saudi Social value system is based on three main subsystems: 1) the Islamic religion, 2) the family, and 3) the cultural tradition. The results reported here seem to reflect in part Saudi Arabian cultural values which encourage loyalty to the family. When respondents were asked about their reasons for getting to work lated, 22.0 percent indicated family reasons. When they were asked about their reasons for leaving work early, 39.8 percent reported family reasons. Thus family loyalty appears to explain some of the respondent's failure to arrive and depart at scheduled times.

The family is one of the most important social institutions in Arab society. Thus the extended family often exerts a dominating influence. Obligations to one's family, created by mutual expectations of help, assistance, support, and succour, are not treated lightly. In Saudi Arabia, the social structure, social values, and patterns of relationships all center around the primary group (family, kin, tribe, and friends), toward whom the individual's primary loyalty and responsibilities are essentially directed. As Ali (1992:517) has indicated, in Arabia, individuals' loyalty and commitment remains with their immediate and extended family. This pressure has made it difficult for the worker to subordinate personal responsibilities to work obligations. The worker is often caught between the conflicting responsibilities. In the sex-segregated Saudi work environment, women supervisors are expected to excuse employees being late to work or leaving work early for family reasons; the same holds true for male supervisors of male workers.

Another important factor is transportation. In Saudi Arabia, there is no public transportation for women, and they are not

permitted to drive. They are dependent on a male member of their family or a hired driver to transport them to work. The situation is more complex if only one vehicle is available to transport the husband, wife, and children or if the driver is absent because of sickness or has quit or been replaced by a new driver. Nearly one-third (30.8%) of the respondents reported that transportation was one of their reasons for being late to work, while 12.2 percent reported transportation as the reason for leaving work early.

In addition, many Saudi families are of Bedouin origin and exhibit characteristics of the Bedouin ethos. A Bedouin is concerned with a time frame which focuses on months and seasons and therefore has difficulty relating to the premium placed in the West on the efficient use of short time intervals. In Saudi Arabia, scheduling is expected to balance the need for work efficiency with concern for personal relationships.

Al-Awaji ((1971:77) explains that because traditional pattern of living in Saudi Arabia is routine-oriented and people expect the status quo to persist, the individual becomes accustomed to not exceeding his community's expectations. Time is valued as important only to the extent that socially sanctioned responsibilities are fulfilled.

Table 3 summarizes other aspects of employees' self reported work performance. More than half of the respondents (45.9%) admitted that they needed to be reminded to get things done, almost half (44.3%) said that they did not call the office to report that they would be absent for a day, more than a third (35.7%) said that they did not stay in the office when the boss was absent for a short period, and more than a third (38.2%) reported that they did not help inquirers in the order in which they arrived. In addition, the majority of the respondents indicated that they needed to be told how to prioritize their work (73.0%), that they did not call another department if necessary to help inquirers (64.3%), that they did not inform the boss

when leaving early (61.6%), and that they made personal phone calls at work more than once to twice a day (52.4%).

*Table 3. Respondents' Self-Descriptions Related to Other Work Performance*

Behavioral Responses	Yes or No	Employment Type				Row Totals	
		Contract Employees		Permanent Employees			
		F	%	F	%	F	%
I need to be reminded to get things done	Y	40	49.4	60	57.7	100	54.1
	N	41	50.6	44	42.3	85	45.9
I call the office in case I will be absent for one day	Y	45	55.6	58	55.8	103	55.7
	N	36	44.4	46	44.2	82	44.3
I stay in the office when the boss is absent for a short period	Y	46	56.8	73	70.2	119	64.3
	N	35	43.2	31	29.8	66	35.7
I need to be told how to prioritizw my work	Y	63	77.8	72	69.2	135	73.0
	N	18	22.2	32	30.8	50	27.0
I call another department if necessary to help inquirers	Y	27	33.3	39	37.5	66	35.7
	N	54	66.7	65	62.5	119	64.3
I usually help inquirers in the order in which they arrive	Y	50	61.7	57	54.8	107	57.8
	N	31	38.2	47	45.1	78	42.1
I inform the boss when leaving work thirty minutes early	Y	42	51.9	29	27.9	71	38.4
	N	39	48.1	75	72.1	114	61.6
I make personal phone calls at work more than once to twice a day	Y	47	58.0	50	48.1	97	52.4
	N	34	42.0	54	51.9	88	47.6
Total responses for each factor		81		104		185	

Table 3 also shows that contract employees worked less diligently than permanent employees in two respects: A higher percentage of contract than of permanent employees indicated that they did not stay in the office when the boss was not in her office (43.2 compared to 29.8%) and that they made personal phone calls more than once to twice a day (58.0 compared to 48.1%). However, a higher percentage of contract than of permanent employees indicated that they usually informed the boss when leaving work early (51.9 compared to 27.9%).

Such findings show a relative lack of work efficiency among women office workers at the educational institution studied, a finding mirroring those of other studies primarily of male Saudi workers in different settings. These include: 1) ineffective use of working hours (Al-Sabhan, 1972; Dhaher, 1979; Al-Hegelan & Paler, 1985); 2) apathetic employees (Al-Hegelan & Palmer, 1985); 3) frequent absence of workers from their offices (Dhaher, 1979); and 4) intrusion of personal family matters during office hours (Murshid, 1973).

Possible organizational and cultural explanations for employees' work performance in the present study include: 1) the newness of practicing modern administration in Saudi Arabia. As Al-Awwad (1991:173) and Ali (1995:8) have pointed out, modern management practices are relatively new in the Arab environment. 2) Women's involvement in the labor force is also relatively new in Saudi Arabia. Almost half of the employees (49.0%) in the present study had only worked in the institution for less than five years. 3) Job training is infrequent (Assad, 2000). 4) Supervision is inadequate (Al-Husseiny 1990). 5) Incentives and disincentives to motivate workers are absent or poorly implemented (Assad, 2001). 6) In Arabia, managerial behavior remains within the framework of the authoritarian and hierarchical structure of the organization (Ali, 1993:3). Employees are usually expected to act obediently according to a formal hierarchy of authority. Decision-making is pushed upward in this hierarchy. Thus the majority of women employees in the present study seemed to

depend on their supervisors to be reminded to get things done and to be told how to prioritize their work. 7) Centralization of authority may have caused employees to feel at ease leaving the office when the supervisor is not in her office, since decisions are usually made by the supervisor and her signature is necessary in processing work papers. 8) The shortage of qualified, trained Saudi personnel to support the country's rapid expansion of government activities at the beginning of the oil boom may have been responsible for giving people assignments which differed from their educational specializations, skills, abilities, and previous job experience (Assad, 2000), adversely affecting employee performance. 9) The fact that hiring has not always been based on objective criteria, but rather has been influenced by family and friendship relations, makes it unsurprising that some employees may fall short in performance. 10) Saudi government employees are not concerned about job security because they are dismissed only if they have received Islamic legal punishment, have been sent to prison for dishonesty or immorality, have been prosecuted for more than a year, have not come to work for 15 days or more, or have been terminated from a job by a royal order or council of ministries' decisions. 11) The work behavior of employees reflects cultural values in Saudi Arabia which emphasize relational development and maintenance rather than adherence to schedules, clocks, or calendars. In the present study employees indicated that their reasons for leaving the office were: a) to take snacks with colleagues, b) visit socially in colleagues' offices, and c) to attend colleagues' formal gatherings. Another reason given by employees for leaving the office was to attend the noon prayer.

Al-Faleh (1990:29) indicated that some of the characteristics of the Arab organizational environment are: a) its members are motivated by affiliation needs rather than performance goals; b) managers also show a strong preference for a person-oriented rather than a task-oriented approach; and c) status position and seniority significantly outweigh ability and performance in importance. The

aforementioned characteristics are often found to be directly at odds with a performance-oriented style.

***Social Interaction***

In accord with Al-Faleh’s description of the Arab organizational environment, Table 4 shows that employees in the present study have friendly and close personal relationships with their work colleagues. The majority of the respondents indicated that: they substituted for absent colleagues (63.8%), they volunteered to help each other (68.6%), they informed each other of changes in work procedures (81.1%), they visited socially in colleagues’ offices more than one a week (44.9%), they took snack and tea breaks with colleagues more than one a day (80.5%), they visited each other on special occasions (67.0%), they exchanged gifts (72.4%), they contributed to formal gatherings (81.6%), and they talked with each other about personal problems (72.4%). In addition, large majorities indicated that employees don’t resent persons who work hard (71.9%) and that there is not a lot of gossip and back biting in the office (64.3%). Over half (55.7%) of the employees also agreed that colleagues generally get along well with each other.

***Table 4. Respondents’ Perceptions Related to Employee Social Interaction***

Employee Interaction Responses	Yes or No	Employment Type				Row Totals	
		Contract Employees		Permanent Employees		F	%
		F	%	F	%		
I substitute for an absent colleague	Y	48	59.3	70	67.3	118	63.8
	N	33	40.7	34	32.7	67	36.2
Colleagues volunteer to help me	Y	57	70.4	70	67.3	127	68.6
	N	24	29.6	34	32.7	58	31.4

**Table 4. Respondents' Perceptions Related to Employee Social Interaction (cont'd)**

Employee Interaction Responses	Yes or No	Employment Type				Row Totals	
		Contract Employees		Permanent Employees			
		F	%	F	%	F	%
Colleagues inform me of changes in work procedures	Y	66	81.5	84	80.8	150	81.1
	N	15	18.5	20	19.2	35	18.9
I visit socially in colleagues' offices more than once a week	Y	43	53.1	40	38.5	83	44.9
	N	38	46.9	64	61.5	102	55.1
I stay in colleagues' offices twenty minutes or more	Y	12	14.8	49	47.1	61	33.0
	N	69	85.2	55	52.9	124	67.0
I take snack and tea breaks more than once a day	Y	69	85.2	80	76.9	149	80.5
	N	12	14.8	24	23.1	36	19.5
I take twenty minutes or more for snack and tea breaks	Y	28	34.6	40	38.5	68	36.8
	N	53	65.4	64	61.5	117	63.2
I visit colleagues on special occasions	Y	52	64.2	72	69.2	124	67.0
	N	29	35.8	32	30.8	61	33.0
Colleagues exchange gifts	Y	55	67.9	79	75.9	134	72.4
	N	26	32.1	25	24.0	51	27.6
Colleagues contribute to formal gatherings	Y	75	92.6	99	95.2	174	94.1
	N	6	7.4	5	4.8	11	5.9
Colleagues talk about personal problems	Y	57	70.4	77	74.0	134	72.4
	N	24	29.6	27	26.0	51	27.6
Colleagues resent persons who work hard	Y	22	27.2	30	28.8	52	28.1
	N	59	72.8	74	71.2	133	71.9

**Table 4. Respondents' Perceptions Related to Employee Social Interaction (cont'd)**

Employee Interaction Responses	Yes or No	Employment Type				Row Totals	
		Contract Employees		Permanent Employees			
		F	%	F	%	F	%
There is lots of gossip and back biting in office	Y	29	35.8	37	35.6	66	35.7
	N	52	64.2	67	64.4	119	64.3
Colleagues get along well with each other	Y	46	56.8	56	53.8	103	55.7
	N	35	43.2	47	45.2	82	44.3
Total responses for each factor		81		104		185	

Table 4 also show that the contract employees seem to socialize more with their colleagues than the permanent employees do. A higher percentage of contract than of permanent employees indicated that they visited socially in colleagues' offices more than once a day (53.1 compared to 35.5%) and that they took snack and tea breaks more than once a day (85.2 compared to 76.9%).

These findings clearly show the Saudi placed emphasis on a broad network of social relationships and obligations. Patterns of social relationships within the work organization appear to parallel those in Saudi society and the Saudi family that are characterized by close ties and loyalty. Societal pressures make it difficult to subordinate personal to work relations, particularly since some co-workers are also related by blood or marriage. As Barakat (1993:201) has stated that, a highly distinctive feature of Arab society is the continuing dominance of primary group relations. Entering into these relations means that individuals engage in unlimited commitments to the group, hence, the significance of family, tribe, neighbourhood, and so forth. The need for affiliation is nurtured at the expense of needs for power and achievement. In fact, however, the latter two needs are often met through affiliation. Members of the same group expect a great deal

from one another. Failure to live up to these expectations may result in deep bitterness. Co-workers engage in close personal relationships attempting to maintain intimate affiliations from which they derive a great deal of intrinsic satisfaction and a strong sense of belonging. In group affiliation and group interaction; kinship ties are important; they seem to believe that "getting along with" is more important than "getting ahead." They may value cooperation more than competition. When respondents in the present study were asked what factors would contribute to improvement of their work performance, (24.1%) indicated satisfying relationships with workers. Relying upon family and friendship ties for getting things done is another important factor within Saudi organization and in Saudi society in general. This strategy, known as *Wasta*, is an essential one in everyday life and is still widely practiced despite extensive criticism and complaining on this account. Because of the difficulty of obtaining services from public service organizations, people sometimes look to favoritism or nepotism in order to obtain the services they seek.

The need for affiliation is not necessarily a negative quality unless it is pushed to an extreme. The human relations perspective on organization as described in the work of Likert (1961, 1967) and Argyris (1960, 1964) views workers in the organization as human beings rather than as persons to get the work done. Workers are viewed as complex social creatures with feelings, desires, and fears. Behavior on the job is a consequence of many factors apart from wages. Workers derive their primary satisfaction through the group within which they interact. Failure to participate in satisfying group relationships will result in higher turnover, lower morale, more rapid fatigue, reduced performance levels, and the like. Work settings and flows should be designed to facilitate group emergence. Thus, tea breaks, rest periods, and so on are important not only because they reduce individual physical fatigue but also because they provide a space wherein persons can interact informally - to get to know each other, to become a group.

Studies have called attention to the influence of the work group on the motivation of members to perform their jobs effectively (Lawler 1973).

### ***Conclusion***

In its drive for economic development, Saudi Arabia faces managerial and social challenges. As elsewhere, general cultural values influence organizational structure and work behavior. To understand employee behavior and interaction, it is important to take into consideration the ongoing encounters between forces of change and forces of stability and the socioeconomic conditions which operate in Saudi Arabia today. Among traditional values are tribal family patterns, primary-group solidarity and the need for affiliation, restrictions on women's movement, and a relaxed concept of time are all at odds with the values of modern capitalist economies. Ways must be found to transition from the norms and culture of a nomadic and mercantile economy to those of a modern industrial and money economy which build on compatible aspects of Saudi tradition.

Islamic teachings place emphasis on hard work and productive efforts. However, the discovery of oil and the consequent increase in state income has facilitated the rulers' ability to distribute wealth through scholarships, landgrants, interest free property loans, free public education, and health care. At the beginning of the oil boom, there was a strong demand for skilled and semi-skilled labor. Therefore, it was not difficult to find jobs. In addition, there were land investment opportunities with rapidly rising land values. Many small businesses were established to satisfy the growing demand for services. Rising income also made it possible to import foreign labor to perform menial tasks. As a result of these occurrences, the traditional values placed on hard work, productive effort, and the necessity of work in one's life gave way to leisure, and conspicuous-consumption patterns. Recently, however, promising changes in work orientations have begun to take place largely as a result of changes in the economic environment such as declining oil prices, a growing scarcity of jobs

combined with women entering into the labor force, wider communications, and more education, increasing contact with foreign cultures, accompanied by relatively high cultural and historical awareness, along with the introduction of technology into the Arab world.

### ***Recommendations***

On the basis of the above findings the following recommendations are made:

- 1 - In this era of ever-increasing globalization of the economy, improving manpower efficiency in Saudi Arabia is a necessity if workers are to compete effectively internationally through better management of human resources and reinforcing strong Islamic work ethics.
- 2 - Organizations seeking to increase work efficiency need to develop and clearly communicate work performance standards, and dismissal as a last but very likely recourse if work performance remains substandard.
- 3 - Workers should be trained to behave in a professional manner reflecting Islamic values. They have to learn to behave according to work ethics and must be called to account if they fail to do so.
- 4 - Efforts towards training employees to acquire professional behavior should be accompanied by organizational structure changes such as: decentralization of authority, clarifying goals and priorities, empowering employees, revived diligence for simplifying rules, recruitment of competent qualified managers, and allocating adequate resources.
- 5 - Managers should be committed to quality and productivity and to serve as role models to employees.
- 6 - There is a need for a more team-based than hierarchical management style to foster transference of some allegiance from primary-group affiliations to affiliation with the work organization.
- 7 - There is a need to offer contract employees incentives such as

preferential consideration status when permanent jobs become available based on their punctuality records and other aspects of their work performance. In addition, permanent employees should be offered such incentives as preferential promotion consideration based on their reaching specified work performance goals.

- 8 - Organizational guidelines should be provided to employees specifying appropriate level of personal interaction at work.

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