

# Generation Z: March of the Multi-Patriates in the Arabian Gulf

By Vernon Bryce, Kenexa

**“M**y earliest childhood memory is my father going fishing. He described the deep blue waters and brought me back many exotic fish of different colors...”

The incessant waves of change in established and emerging global markets require us to be more adept, agile and innovative, like a fisherman on the reef—or sink. Articles in leading business journals and informed communications to business leaders about the challenges and opportunities—and the threats and risks in organizational change—advise us to become “dolphins, not surfers,” “transformational, not just transactional,” “proactive, not reactive,” “multicultural, not monocultural,” and so on.

Less often, we receive well-structured evidence and trends from the supply side of the global employment market. Research on this can be traced back well into the 1990s and earlier. One particular article by Attiyah (1996) contended that dependence in the Arabian Gulf on expatriate labor would continue and that more help was needed to enable expatriates to achieve greater levels of acculturation.

Beaverstock (2000) concluded that very little empirical research had been conducted on migration of highly-skilled international labor in the world system. Yet, by the end of 1998, 161 London firms had reported a seven-fold increase in professional and managerial “migrations;” 70% of these for less than three years. More recent research (Fechter, 2007; Faulconbridge, 2008) shows that isolation and lack of embeddedness of these expatriates outside of work remains a cause for concern and debate.

This article, which reflects the multi-step changes in the Gulf’s workforces and markets in particular, asks two basic questions:

- What if there’s something special about people already “weaving through the waves?”
- What does it take to engage them and retain their commitment and confidence?

Through anecdotal, qualitative and quantitative evidence, I offer conclusions for workforce employment policy and practice and further research in the Gulf, particularly on recruiting and retaining sustainable high performers—future winners within warring global markets.

## Anecdotal Evidence

Interestingly, many successful Gulf companies already have recruited very diverse groups of executives, many of whom could be described as “multi-patriates”. These people have been born, lived, learned, worked and played in a huge range and rich mix of geographies, cultures, faiths and climates globally. They can possibly be classified as a hidden generation—Generation Z—who weave through waves of change. Let’s look at a few such people, in order to better understand what makes them multi-patriates.

**Carlos Ghosn** was born in 1954 in Brazil, of Lebanese parents. As a child, he moved to Beirut, where he studied in a Jesuit school. He subsequently graduated in engineering from L’Ecole Polytechnique and L’Ecole des Mines de Paris and became a French citizen. In 2008, Carlos, now CEO of Renault-Nissan and credited with reviving the fortunes of this icon of the Japanese car industry, received the prestigious INSEAD Award for “Trans-Cultural Leadership.” He says his experience of being raised in different countries has helped him a great deal.

**Arun Sarin**, head of the UK's biggest mobile telecom company, is respected for reviving the fortunes of Vodafone, transforming it from a European market player to a global player. He was born in India, of an Indian Army family who lost most of their possessions during the Partition in India's recent history. Arun initially was schooled at the Indian Institute of Technology, before moving to the U.S., where he earned an MBA from the University of California and became an American citizen. After heading Vodafone's U.S. business, later in 2003, he headed the whole group, successfully replacing the charismatic Christopher Gent, one of the UK's most adored dealmakers and a very tough act to follow.

**Ahmad Khayyat** is not a widely known name—yet. He studied chemical engineering in the UK and went on to earn a Ph.D. He later became the Chairman of Chemical Engineering at the University of Jordan, and is a member of the American Institute of Chemical Engineers. Recently, after 20 years in investment planning and manufacturing, he became CEO of Emaar Industries and Investments in Dubai. The \$60 billion Emaar Group is en route to becoming one of the most valuable companies in the world by 2010. Maybe Ahmed and colleagues are well placed to “weave through the waves of change.”

There are probably a hundred other such stories we could tell about successful senior executives and professionals and their achievements of transitioning through national, cultural and language boundaries. Often perceived by others as “unusual,” these multi-patriates' periods of experience are vital in the fast changing global markets. So, what can we glean and gain from these unusual people—what factors or qualities make the big difference? Can we distill this evidence and apply it meaningfully to waves of change in global markets?

With regard to his own experience, Carlos Ghosn has many nuggets of wisdom to share. He is recorded as saying, for example, “You have to love the country—love the culture you are in.” He is convinced that one of the precious qualities that multi-patriates possess is empathy. Second, he strongly believes there is a transcultural mindset in many of these people, based on their life experience of “permanent change internationally.” Yes, he says workers raised or living in diverse environments are unusual, and he is convinced that their diversity helps foster more innovation, when they are embedded in teams. Finally, he adds a cautionary note that country teams in these new environments quickly notice an expat's empathy—or most likely lack of it—toward the host culture; to their advantage or detriment.

In his recent book, *The CEO Shift*, Tommy Weir, a senior learning solutions executive, predicts major and stark “shifts” in executive landscapes globally. He proposes that these shifts in power, pace, urbanization, economics and behaviors are swiftly shaping a future many of us will not survive professionally unless we make a shift, too.

### Qualitative Evidence

We decided to examine possible differentiation between conventional “mono-patriates” and the less conventional and hypothetical “multi-patriates.” Members of a sample group, identified as reasonably successful multi-patriates, were investigated individually. These Kenexa clients and non-clients experienced moves to different cultures and locations at least thrice during their work lives.

Between them, this sample of individuals had lived, learned and worked in and with a myriad of places across 33 countries and peoples, for several years, in a range of employment and non-employment conditions. The most frequently mentioned overall were the U.S. and UK.

Each participant experienced either a face-to-face or a telephone interview in order to establish early factors in their experience, behavioral attributes they would hypothesize as effective in their experiences to date, and workplace factors they would greatly prefer to be in place that would continue to engage them at work. In their experienced judgment, the qualities they identify in themselves and others who thrive in multiple contexts—most specifically in multi-patriate workplaces—overlapped a great deal.

The participants identify 12 common factors in themselves and in others who thrive in multi-patriate workplaces. Surprisingly, these factors attracted a high level of agreement as the interviews progressed. The participants' “Top 12” micro-qualities interestingly cluster around three macro-headings:

#### Self Focused:

- Openness—capacity to approach people and experiences with “open arms; without prejudice”
- Empathy—deep spontaneous concern for and awareness of others' needs and feelings
- Positivity—immediately, habitually seeing and expressing the upside of situations and people
- Altruism—natural appreciation of goodness; generous desire to contribute for others' good

#### Team Focused:

- Confidence—self-awareness of internal strengths; also how to apply their strengths to new challenges
- Flexibility—spontaneous and seamless response to new information and new approaches
- Team-working—preference for working in a group; effective within groups, adds to groups
- Work-focused—need for work to be a central dominant part of their life—work is their life

**Solution Focused**

- Curiosity—attracted to novelty and the unusual; and to finding out how others live and do things
- Learning—constant desire for new experiences from which to develop new knowledge and skills
- Imagination—capacity to see beyond the now, beyond daily reality; how things can be different
- Resilience—emotional toughness under extreme new social and cultural pressures and opportunities

In addition, the top biographical aspects/ themes were: early expatriation, exposure to languages and cultures, sense of adventure, outdoor team sports, “itching” for change, feeling that they can’t go back, love of challenge, need for variety, never giving up, always giving, perceived inflexibility in old friends who stayed, and need for expression.

In most, there was a need for continuing fresh experiences and an urge to keep exploring. Several people expressed puzzlement that others do not share these needs, that anyone could not value diversity, that others do not see “we are all very similar,” and that anyone believes one set of values could ever serve everybody’s needs.

**Quantitative Evidence**

In most global companies, there is a diverse mix of people of many nationalities frequently working together at one location. What does this tell us about the demand and supply sides of the global labor markets? More importantly, what individual team and collective characteristics are necessary simply to get things done effectively and efficiently? Looking ahead, are there ways of searching for the consistencies in the early experiences of potential multi-patriate employees, and then building more formal testable assessment techniques to attract and deploy these folk? Equally important is the need to sustain their commitment through the process of identifying the key drivers of their perhaps differential engagement in the workplace, of course.

So, what do our studies tell us about expatriate or multi-patriate engagement?

Building on the powerful methodology adopted in Kenexa’s WorkTrends™ annual survey process, several new demographic aspects were introduced into our global samples in 2008. This has led to some intriguing findings in expatriates’ workplace opinions and, furthermore, in their employment policy and practice.

Several reports and sub-studies are under preparation this year already for a range of Kenexa clients and audiences. Separate regional studies in the Asia-Pacific region and in the Gulf region also will be made available. A region of particular interest to our

sample of multi-patriates identified in the above qualitative study is the Gulf. Specifically, we are very interested in differences between expatriates and non-expatriates, differences between major Gulf countries and job types, and differences between the Gulf and other global development zones, such as India and China.

Some very interesting findings were discovered in the Gulf. Essentially, there were some identical key drivers for non-expatriate and expatriate employees across four principal Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) nations:

- Leaders who inspire confidence in the company’s future and in its leaders
- Managers who recognize and involve individuals in their teams
- Exciting opportunities for skills improvement and better jobs
- Excellence in work-life balance and commitment to community

Of major interest are the unique drivers of expatriate engagement. These clustered under:

- Work/life balance, workload balance and personal recognition
- Fair pay, good working environments, better information and training
- Good managers who say people who commit to quality are important

These, taken with the hypothesized key attributes of expatriates provided earlier, offer real opportunity to review and reengineer expatriate recruitment selection and development practices—particularly to test out their pre-employment habits and beliefs as differentiators.

**Conclusions**

In the global marketplace, we must be more alert to testable empirical findings about the personal attributes and workplace engagement factors that will help companies realize the true potential of increasingly expensive multi-patriate employees, the best of whom realize that they are a rich resource for winning in global marketplaces. Yet, this new “Generation Z” can feel grossly undervalued—until we embed these findings—and opportunities to use their skills can soon slip away.

At the same time, there is real opportunity in tracking, market by market, the intrinsic key drivers for successfully recruiting specific multi-patriate expertise. These factors are less frequently developed into a formal selection process, and yet they could be far more informative to reduce risk or increase probability of sustainable success.

In addition, evidence gleaned from intelligent surveys of successful expatriate communities offers additional distinct opportunities to

manage risk. Listening to these communities openly and honorably, so that their diversity can be celebrated and not stifled, is an immediate path many employers already are following.

*Our early experiences shape our lives—in this case, a generation of “Zuppies” is looking for even more exotic opportunities than they’ve already experienced—to express their desire for variety, to visit countries their parents ventured into and inspired them toward, often in response to challenging circumstances. Multi-patriates are urged on by their “itch” to learn and experience, plus a drive to achieve and desire to give and give and give. Multi-patriates also seem driven by their insatiable desire for more challenge as they flow flexibly through the waves of change. ■*

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