Maximising the Employment of Saudi Females

(Based on the full Research Report available from www.employingwomen.com or Oxford Strategic Consulting. Contact reports@oxfordstrategicconsulting.com or +447785110910.)
About Oxford Strategic Consulting

Specializing in Talent Management, HRM and the development of Human Capital, Oxford Strategic Consulting provides bespoke research, strategic advice and implementation support to corporations, organisations and governments worldwide.

Blending academic insight with commercial expertise, Oxford Strategic Consulting helps its clients define and achieve their strategic goals and sustainable competitive advantage.

OSC has extensive experience advising and assisting organisations, and governments, in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), including particular expertise in developing national talent, including Women’s Employment and Leadership as well as more general Leadership and Talent Development Programmes.

OSC regularly conducts high impact research and develops services to help with critical topics of strategic importance, as well as identifying best-practice and Differentiating Strategic Capabilities (DiSCs) for private and public sector organisations. OSC has a wealth of change implementation, HR and training expertise, and regularly assists clients to implement practical solutions to deliver sustainable competitive advantage.

About EmployingWomen.com

www.employingwomen.com is a unique collaboration between leading women’s employment experts from Saudi Arabia, GCC and the UK. Led by the team at Oxford Strategic Consulting with input from major employers, leading women and other researchers, EmployingWomen.com combines the leading thinking with highly practical toolkits, guidelines, tools and templates.

EmployingWomen.com is designed to be the one-stop source of resources, advice and support for any women’s employment initiative, whether it’s a first-step for an employer or the expansion of existing arrangements. With a wealth of practical examples, detailed research and additional support options, the EmployingWomen.com team are sure that employers and other interested parties will find useful information and tools.

The www.employingwomen.com site is constantly updated with new content and information.
Introduction

Through helping employers to employ more Saudi females, this report aims to play a part in helping the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) to achieve its strategic aims and to ensure that all the citizens of KSA can play a full role in its growth and development as a leading knowledge economy, in line with its strategic objectives.

Based on extensive research, its recommendations are used to provide a comprehensive “Employer Toolkit” and a wide range of Support Services available via a new web resource – www.employingwomen.com.

This is a significant economic, social and cultural opportunity. We calculate that raising female workforce participation in KSA to c40% (still lower than most G20 economies) could increase GDP by c$17 billion pa whilst it could add $58bn in revenues to Saudi companies as well as significant increases in productivity, engagement and innovation.

At a micro level, the wage contribution of females is becoming an increasingly important component of family income (as elsewhere in the world). In the past 40 years, replacement of small family-based home-based economic units with salaried employment in factories, offices and oil-fields has arguably led to a decrease in women’s economic participation. Around 385,000 degree level females are available in the market, but not currently utilized, whilst our research suggests the private sector has the theoretical capacity to employ at least 7m females (if supply were available and barriers removed). Just one of our recommendations - a company employing females on flexible terms, working from local centers or from home, and providing Call Centre and IT support services - could address a current potential market of ~160,000 client companies, capable of providing outsource work for the equivalent of ~4.5m full time females.

Allowing well educated Saudi females to achieve their full potential is a laudable aim, of benefit to themselves and wider society but, as our research shows, this has to be achieved without threatening family life and national, cultural or religious identity.

Of course, the KSA government, and the Ministry of Labor in particular, is well aware of these potentials and has launched many initiatives which are having significant impact. The greatest impact, however, will come from employers themselves, particularly in the private sector, and this paper aims to help them to maximise their employment of Saudi females. Some argue that this will simply mean that Saudi females will take jobs that would have otherwise been taken by Saudi males. This view misrepresents the employment market as having a fixed capacity to be shared between various categories – males vs. females or nationals vs. ex-pats etc. In fact, in the private sector, productive employment itself creates more jobs through growth. For example, a female contact centre sales person generates revenues and demand which in turn requires more production jobs and allows increased investment in growth. The business benefits of employing a diverse workforce, including females, are significant and include:

- Increased productivity, innovation and engagement (Herriot & Scott-Jackson 2000)
- Access to an unexploited source of human talent
- Demonstrable increases in Return On Equity, profit and share value (McKinsey and Co 2007: 2010)
- Potential increased sales – especially to sectors with large female components such as finance and investment, where Saudi females control a large proportion of family wealth. Saudi females currently control over $30 billion in Saudi bank accounts and own 12% of all private businesses
- Reputational benefits with real business impact

Having carried out the research, we believe that any Saudi-based company can gain the significant benefits of employing more Saudi females, with the help of the full Research Report, the Employer Toolkits and the other Support Services at www.employingwomen.com.
The Research

How the research was conducted

The research for this study was conducted between February and August 2012. The research was wide and varied in its scope in order to present as full a picture as possible. This included:

- Surveys of ~500 Saudi females from across Saudi Arabia
- Interviews with Executives of 50 medium and large Saudi firms
- Face to face interviews with 14 senior employed ladies
- In-depth studies of 6 exemplar case study companies.
- Reviews of many hundreds of academic papers, documents, surveys and news articles

Best-practice research and statistical methods were used to identify not only whether a finding was significant but also how big the effect was. The full Research Report and findings is available from www.employingwomen.com or direct from reports@oxfordstrategicconsulting.com.

Main findings

The respondents lived in widely dispersed areas of the Kingdom but with just over 50% living in Riyadh, Jeddah and Dammam. Just under 5%, for example, came from Jeezan in the southwest.

In summary:

- There is a lower level of science graduates than is required by the economy and this is recognized by females respondents as a barrier to employment.
- Unemployment among females graduates is very high at over 60% in the sample.
- The majority of females wish to work part time across all ages, regions of the country and type of degree (56%) but nearly all employers are only considering full time employment models (86%).
- The majority of females (73%) prefer females-only work environments.
- Most employers believe it is too expensive, not legally possible or logistically complicated to employ more females.
- Most employers, however, would be interested in employing more females if they could be shown how to overcome the problems they associate with it.
- Transport to the workplace was mentioned as a barrier, but was not as significant as predicted.
- Most of the females interviewed are not very active at searching for jobs, did not understand the job market and were unprepared for the world of work.
- The majority of the females interviewed have a limited awareness of the roles that are potentially available and, although they would like to work, lack information and access to advice on what sort of careers they can have.
- Employers have little expectation of females being suitable for progression into management. Only 17% of employers thought females were suitable for such roles.
- Both employers and Saudi females agree that a ‘lack of appropriate jobs’ (having facilities and conditions such as female washrooms and suitable work) and ‘other responsibilities’ (such as family obligations) are major obstacles. More employers than females felt that society/cultural attitudes were a major obstacle.
Recommendations

The following recommendations derive from the research findings and attempt to address the main research question: "In what ways can employers employ more Saudi females?". The recommendations are particularly aimed at companies who are employing Saudi females for the first time, or who are looking to significantly increase their employment of Saudi females, but they also include more general recommendations relevant to other stakeholders. These recommendations have been used to create three highly valuable resources:

**Toolkit for employing Saudi Females** – providing practical methods and tools for use by employers in employing Saudi females

[www.employingwomen.com](http://www.employingwomen.com) – a website resource base designed to be a constantly growing “one-stop” source of practical advice, guidance and tools

**Sources of Help in Employing Saudi Females** – Information and links on sources of help available, including services developed by OSC and others to help with the recommendations of this report and Employer Toolkit.

Each employer recommendation (tool) presents a step-by-step suggested process to complement existing ways of working. We recognise that many employers have existing talent management and HR processes that cover many of the recommendations, so they are intended to add specific guidance to help increase the efficiency of implementation and provide suggestions for Saudi female-specific talent management initiatives.

The diagram below shows how each Tool fits together into a coherent process for employing Saudi females.
Develop the Business Case for Employment of Saudi Females

The research and the case studies in particular demonstrated that the organizations that had been most successful at employing females, did so in a very focused and active way, often with a full project plan, a clear understanding of any investment required and, most importantly, the returns and benefits that might accrue. Like any other Business Case, this would include appropriate high level support, a Project Plan and effective project management. The Business Case could also identify discrete functions (such as telephone sales) where a group of females could work together without need to mix often with men – to meet the aspirations of the 73% of females who still prefer to work in an all-female environment.

Manage Talent Effectively (female and male)

It is clear from the case studies and the company responses that the best employers of females are often also ‘best in class’ at Talent Management and HR generally. This is not to say that only the biggest companies with the largest HR budgets can successfully employ females. One of our best examples of female employment is a medium sized engineering company with very few HR staff, whilst one of the largest organizations in the Kingdom, with many hundreds of HR staff, has not managed to employ very many females. However, many of the following recommendation areas rely on, or are enhanced by, sound HR systems and processes and many of the actions proposed in the Employer Toolkit could be viewed as representing world-class talent management, with females as the focus. For those employers that are less advanced in talent management and HR, the Employer Toolkit may help improve the management of talent generally, whilst those with sophisticated Talent Management processes will find it easy to integrate many of the Employer Toolkit and Toolkits into their HR processes. The key areas of talent management: Acquiring Talent, Developing Talent, Managing Talent and Retaining Talent, are detailed as key steps in the Employer Toolkit. As an example, given that the females are leaving University with less IT and Language skills than are required, then employers themselves are going to have to provide additional training. As this report is about what employers themselves can do then an obvious recommendation is for employers, or employer groups such as Chambers of Commerce, to provide this remedial training in English and IT. The case studies also suggested training is also needed in ‘work familiarity and behavior’. Training courses in ‘Preparing for Work’ and ‘Leadership for Females’ are now available – see www.employingwomen.com. Similarly, an effective talent management process would include mentoring for various groups, including females.

Employer of Choice for Saudi Females

One of the findings of the research was that, particularly in the major conurbations of Riyadh, Jeddah and Dammam, there is actually a scarcity of well-qualified females who are willing to work for the private sector and that these well qualified females are hard to find and attract. This, combined with the demonstrated business benefits of employing females, means that it is imperative for companies to actively create and promote the conditions and environment that are most valued by these highly sought after females. Employers should also use innovative techniques to publish success and attract females (for example using executive search). The findings suggest, contrary to popular opinion, that:

- Many females (73% in our sample of 500) want to work with other females, rather than with men they do not know. The pressure for companies to provide females-only environments is not simply due to regulation but is founded on deeply held beliefs by females themselves, and of course, their families. Examples from other GCC countries suggest the desire to avoid a mixed environment will change with increasing speed, but to be ‘an employer of choice’ requires a deep understanding of the current situation and requirements of the target resources, not general assumptions based on a small subset of advanced, well supported ladies.
• Most females want to work in more flexible ways (part time etc) in order to balance work and family life. In many economies, part-time and flexible working has been introduced in order to allow highly valuable people (men and females) to contribute that value, despite other, non-work, obligations or motivations. Flexible working, particularly remote models such as home-working, require very specific management styles and processes with a high degree of trust, a focus on outputs rather than inputs (time) and appropriate HR systems and processes, for example rewarding on results rather than time ‘at work. This is a challenge for many Saudi companies where a strong hierarchy with close supervision may have been the norm.

Use “Active Manpower Planning” to make room

The GCC labor market in general is admirable in its focus on tenure and job security for all employees. This is a fundamental and worthy outcome of the Gulf Leadership Style (see Scott-Jackson et al 2009). There is little appetite in well run companies for ‘hire and fire’ and this means that Saudi females would probably not, for example, be recruited to forcibly replace an expatriate, unless the expatriate had retired, died or left voluntarily. Assuming that there is no great value in replacing Saudi men with Saudi females, then this suggests that employment opportunities for females can only really come from growth or gradual ageing of the workforce. Reliance on growth is, of course, feasible in an economy growing at the rate of many GCC countries including Saudi. However, the stated objective of the Saudi Government is to replace expatriates with Saudi nationals, especially with Saudi females, over time. So how can a company replace expatriates with Saudi females without resorting to unfair sacking or redundancy of those expatriates?

In line with good HR practice, a well developed manpower or resourcing plan will include any strategic areas of growth where there might be opportunities to employ females. This could include expansion or new areas of business altogether. The sooner any growth opportunities are identified then the sooner the attraction and selection processes can be launched.

Firstly, the manpower plan should clearly identify any roles where the incumbent is retiring or due to end their contract over the next year. Replacement can be planned in good time so the very best candidate, including females, can be recruited in time.

Secondly, based on management performance ratings or appraisal feedback if available, it is possible to identify people who are poor performers, probably unhappy in their role and who could be actively helped to find a new role in or outside the company.

Prepare the working environment and the potential workers

Several of the senior female leaders in our case studies had developed a very powerful way of dealing with many of the social stereotypes that could have impacted their ability to work. Various aspects of the social, cultural and regulatory environment can generate bias, hostility and misunderstandings for Saudi females and Saudi men in managing or working with male and female colleagues.

The social identity of the subordinates and the managers outside work is replicated and enhanced ‘at work’. So, for example, if the subordinate has negative attitudes outside work (for whatever reason) e.g. sees females as incapable or only suited to certain roles, then by default they will display those negative attitudes and behaviour ‘at work’.

It has been shown that humans are capable of adopting several different social identities appropriate to different situations. For example, an accountant might also be a football supporter and a father - and act (and think!) differently in each situation. Some successful Saudi female managers and staff have overcome ‘default’ (negative) attitudes by developing an ‘at work’ group identity with distinct social and hierarchic norms. This, formally, would be described as ‘adapting social identity’. Put simply, (as described by one female Saudi manager): “When you enter the office you see me as a work colleague, not as a man or a woman and I see you as a work colleague and not as a woman or a man”. In every organization, some skilled employees will independently develop
their own techniques to build healthy, mutually respectful and productivity enhancing ‘at work’ attitudes within themselves, subordinates and colleagues.

Active interventions can develop best-practice ‘at work’ social identities within the majority of staff. Group identities work well if their values and behaviours are clearly defined, held in common by the relevant group and reinforced by process and management. Social Identity theory shows that Group identities are much more powerful if membership of the group is seen as valuable for self-esteem and entry is difficult, exclusive and aspirational.

• Make the social group desirable and highly esteemed by the outside group
  Ensure you are ‘Employer of Choice and that people will be proud to work for your company. Employees displaying desired attitudes should be visibly rewarded.
  Employment of females itself can help social standing and pride.

• Difficult to enter
  The assessment and selection process should be demanding, and test for desired attitudes (or the capability of adapting) - to reinforce exclusivity and pride in belonging.

• Not hostile or confrontational to outside norms and values
  Modesty and respect should be maintained in line with cultural values, and the dignity and choices of females and men should be maintained, whilst allowing managers to manage.

• Reinforced in all aspects of group (work) life
  The Saudi female managers clarify the expected behaviours and attitudes and constantly remind people – especially newcomers.

• Reinforced through powerful socialization
  E.g. one of the female managers we interviewed has highly engaging social events every week, and another has lively team lunches with specific social ‘traditions’ each day.

**Actively manage all stakeholders**

Many of our company respondents claimed that even well-educated females were unprepared for the ‘world of work’ and were unclear how to behave, how the behaviour of others should be viewed, what are the normal obligations of work and so on – all this in addition to the question of whether the formal subjects taught in University match the requirements of the job market. This report aims to help employers to employ more females, in the current and immediate future so it does not
include any critique of current or future educational changes but tries to advise employers on what they can do to employ more females, even if the current educational, regulatory or social environment makes things more difficult. The obvious solution for a lack of preparedness for work is for employers a) to develop induction and pre-work learning experiences to help young females adapt more quickly (see www.employingwomen.com) and b) work closely with the academic establishments to include more work experience in the syllabus.

In addition, the study found that many families and male relatives did not encourage or support their female dependents to work as they sometimes had inaccurate perceptions that conditions of work would be unsuitable, that females working was a source of shame for their male relatives in particular and that the kinds of roles or the companies themselves were not suitable. On the other hand, of course, many families were extremely supportive and, in fact, the most successful females we interviewed had all had supportive families, particularly fathers. As more females become employed and as more families face the need for females to work economically then such misperceptions will gradually reduce but in the meantime, the private sector should follow the example of the best case studies and actively engage with families. The case study companies engaged with the families of female employees by holding open fun days, maintaining communications with the families and welcoming them into the premises regularly. They also engaged with families in general by presenting the ‘world of work’ at family events associated with schools or other venues.

Fit the work to the woman, not just the woman to the work

Several of our case study companies had set up networking groups for females (a very good example is the Olayan Women’s Network (OWN)) which provide mutual support and mentoring as well as in some cases acting as an agent for change to encourage the recruitment and development of more females.

We also found, however, that some companies were attempting to employ females but without having in place the basic services required such as washrooms, prayer facilities etc.

In particular, the evidence from this research confirms that many more talented females would work if their conditions and working hours were more flexible. Employers should consider part-time working, ‘hot-desking’ (where two or more people work partly from home and partly from a shared workstation), home working and flexible hours. Many Saudi companies and managers will find this difficult to implement, so ‘hub working’ may be the solution, where another company, specializing in the employment of females, provides their services to companies.

Offer Saudi females a Career - not just a job

Relatively few qualified females are able to find meaningful employment and even fewer are able to build a long term career or maintain a challenging and fulfilling role. Our case study firms encourage capable females to take on leadership roles and provide support and training for them to do so. A Leadership programme for Women is now available (see www.employingwomen.com). In addition, as mentioned previously, females should be the subject of well established HR and talent management processes, including development and retention strategies.

Use pilot projects to try new ideas

One of the clearest findings from the research was that companies were very concerned about the cost implications of employing females and also the affect on their current business. These concerns were widely expressed and mirrored the findings amongst females that they were seen as suited to particular fields and a limited number of roles. However there was evidence from the in-depth interviews with leaders of major corporations that some of this was the result of a reluctance to take risk and that there was potential to use females employees in a far wider range of roles than was expressed by most respondents.
This is entirely understandable; business in a global marketplace is subject to many competitive pressures and there is a natural inclination to focus on the immediate and visible and delay action in areas that are not currently causing a problem.

However the risks of not taking forward a programme of increasing female employment are large. The development of the Saudi economy in line with the current development plan means creating over 400,000 jobs for females in addition to those created as part of the natural growth of the economy. The imperative of both Saudization and employing more females is to the benefit of firms that grasp the opportunity, as discussed in the review of literature.

In order to assist companies to obtain the business benefits of having female employees, it is recommended that companies adopt flexible approaches including pilot schemes for flexible working patterns, job sharing and imaginative ways of providing employment. The Employer Toolkit provides information on setting up and running an innovation pilot and how to take this into a more permanent form.

**Know the situation before the change, assess the impact after the change**

In order to successfully achieve the goals of any major project it is important to measure the key factors before the change is introduced and then again after the change has been implemented. That way the predicted benefits can be assessed and the programme modifies if required. The most successful case studies had clear data on the ‘state’ of female employment in their organizations both before and after implementation, as well as ongoing measures going forward.

The Employer Toolkit and [www.employingwomen.com](http://www.employingwomen.com) contain information related to the design of a self assessment system and the feedback cycle and an Audit developed by OSC to allow an independent assessment.

**Regulatory**

This report is clearly focused on helping employers to do what they can to employ more females in the circumstances and environment that exist today and in the near future. It does not set out to advise the other stakeholders such as educators, Government, society generally or indeed females themselves. Nevertheless there are several areas where the research suggests changes would have very high impact – bearing in mind that changes are already being implemented in these areas. For example, it has become clear that the educational establishment needs to work even more closely with employers, including through employer groups such as the Saudi Chambers. Although this was not a primary research objective, it is also clear that many initiatives are already being launched to achieve more integration between education and work and we applaud these efforts. Similarly, many of the respondents mentioned regulation as being either unclear or unhelpful in their efforts to employ more females. Given the fast changing social environment then it is extremely difficult for regulation to be enacted fast enough to respond to new circumstances and requirements. For example, there is an increase in females working in varied mixed environments, without employers being penalized. The likelihood of enforcement seems to depend on the reputation of the employer, with an underlying logic that a large respectable employer will have the appropriate safeguards and procedures in place to ensure protection for the woman’s dignity, modesty and safety. Similarly, the pace of change means that in some areas there are no relevant regulations for situations that had previously not been encountered. For example, if there were few females working in mixed environments then regulations and processes to avoid and deal with sexual harassment would not be an urgent priority. The Ministry of Labor has been quick to draft and adopt new regulations in response to new needs and changes in society and is also in the process of issuing clear Guidelines to Employment regulation which can be modifies as required. We very much welcome and applaud these efforts. All relevant Government bodies should follow suit.

On the other hand, the strong theme of this report is that employers are not helpless in the face of any such issues and should be proactive in providing their own solutions. For example, as
mentioned previously, a good employer will have internal procedures which provide protection and redress for any victims of unprofessional behaviour and these internal procedures should be well in advance of the bare minimum required by law. So a company handbook containing clear processes and instruction is necessary, rather than waiting for Government to insist on sound HR practices.

“Female Friendly” Business Model

One of the obvious solutions proposed in our previous GCC report (Scott-Jackson et al 2010) and repeated in the recommendations below, is for company/s to be created to employ females using advanced flexible working methods and for this company to provide services, such as Call centre or IT support, to private and public sector employers. That way the employers simply buy the services but do not have to invest in new facilities, management styles and working practices and the females can work under flexible methods will allow them to meet family obligations, reduce travel and work in females-only environments as required (by 73% of the female respondents). This is similar to an outsourcing model, so the researchers explored current and likely future markets for these kinds of services.

36% of the companies currently outsource some of their activities utilizing the equivalent of between 3 and 1000 ‘seats’. In total they outsource about 2800 roles (an average of 56 roles per company). Again, extrapolation would therefore suggest a total minimum market size of 700,000 companies * say (half the average per company here) 28 = ~20m potential outsourced roles. 46% of the employers samples would be likely or very likely to use such a service. Again, extrapolating and dividing by half in the interests of caution, our sample suggests a current potential market of ~160,000 firms capable of providing outsource work for the equivalent of ~4.5m roles or FTEs (full time equivalents).

OSC is in the process of setting a specialist ‘females-only’ company called Al Mara to employ Saudi females under flexible terms (including home-working) and to provide such services to Saudi-based and international companies.
Appendix A – Research results of Survey of 500 Saudi Females

Demographics

The 500 respondents were taken from across Saudi Arabia and represent a range of ages.

![bar chart showing distribution of Saudi females by location]

**Saudi Females: Where do you live?**

- RIYADH: 25%
- JEDDAH: 20%
- DAMMAM: 15%
- KHOBAR: 10%
- MADINA: 5%
- MEKKAH: 4%
- NAJAN: 3%
- TABOUK: 2%
- ALTAIF: 1%
- JIZAN: 1%

**Level and type of qualification**

60% of the respondents hold a degree or higher level qualification with another 34% holding a two year Diploma. These degrees include elements of Computing and English. Of the first degree holders, 32% hold a Science degree and 28% an Arts Degree. Our sample has a higher number of science degree graduates than in Saudi Arabia as a whole. It shows that even where science degree graduates are actively sought out they represent a minority of respondents. The preponderance of arts and diploma graduates means that many Saudi females lack the basis for technical careers. However this can be overcome with role-specific training and graduate programmes. Company graduate schemes that recruit based on carefully designed Assessment Centers and include structured training can provide an effective approach to overcoming skill gaps.

![Subject Area of Degree chart]

- Arts and Humanities: 30%
- Social Science: 25%
- Medical Science and Medicine: 20%
- Business Studies and Administration: 15%
- Religion and Islamic studies: 10%
- Science and Engineering: 5%
- Computing and IT: 5%
- Maths and Statistics: 2%
- Other: 1%
- Media and Journalism: 1%
The selection by females of degrees that are not directly connected to a specific role requirement is often criticized. However, it can be argued that all Degree courses are designed to impart basic skills such as communication, IT, English, enquiry and research, as well as the specialist content, and that these non-vocational skills are valuable for employers. A History degree, for example, can promote skills in critical analysis, development of argument and use of evidence-based decision making. A more compelling problem, described by the company interviews, is that graduates are not familiarized with ‘the world of work’ – their responsibilities, acceptable behaviour, how offices and factories work, obligations of the employer, team working and so on. Some Universities are trying to rectify this with short courses or internships but, in the meantime, it is up to employers to manage the issue by providing effective induction courses prior to joining the company. Saudi Aramco, for example, has launched a major programme for new graduates. This is more difficult for the small company, but the Employer Toolkit and www.employingwomen.com include sources of help on designing and running such an induction program. The TVTC of course, does run vocational training but this tends to be for candidates at non-degree level and so is outside the scope of this report.

**Active Job search**

How many jobs have you applied for in the past month?

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<td>1</td>
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65% of the respondents have not applied for any jobs in the past month even though 58% are actively looking. Around 9% are very active in the job market. This split reflects the interviews with senior females which suggested that the few females in ideal circumstances (very supportive families, well educated, used to working with others and used to job hunting) were very proactive both in searching for and securing good jobs. The majority of female job-seekers are fairly passive, waiting for a job to find them. The Saudi recruitment market in general is reliant on recommendations and relationships rather than active search and matching by either employer or candidate. This suggests that more help could be given to both parties to seek out, attract and secure the ideal job for the ideal candidate.

**Employment Status**

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<td>Not employed</td>
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<tr>
<td>Working from home</td>
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<td>Part time</td>
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35% of the respondents were employed in some capacity with majority (28%) employed full time. 65% were not employed. This is a higher percentage employed than the population of Saudi females as a whole, reflecting the selection of qualified females for the survey. Of the 27 part time females, 7 worked less than 15 hours and 16 worked between 16 and 30 hours. Three females stated they were part-time despite working over 40 hours per week!

**Part time vs. full time preference by age**

When asked how they would like to work, only 39% suggested they would like to work full time and a breakdown by age shows that, across all ages, more females want to work part time than full time. Also amongst the under 25s a higher number than expected say they wish to work part time than would be expected and this pattern is reversed amongst the 25-35s. In addition, of the group saying they would rather not work at all, a higher proportion than expected are under 25. Both of these numbers might indicate a lack of desire or aspiration amongst young educated Saudi females compared to their older counterparts.

![Part time vs full time preference by age](chart)

This preference for part-time working was supported by comments made in the semi structured interviews where working more than 6 hours a day was described by some respondents as ‘impossible’ and ‘too much’ by them and many of their friends and family. This desire to work part time can be contrasted with the view of employers that part time work is inefficient and too complex and expensive to arrange. Only two of the employers would consider offering part-time working.

**Preferred Workplace for Saudi females**

![Preferred workplace](chart)
73% of respondents would prefer to work in a females-only workplace. This runs somewhat counter to the impression given by media (and perhaps based on the expressed views of more vocal members of society) that females want to work in mixed environments and are being constrained or held back by regulation and conservative families or communities. Of course, 21% do prefer to work in a mixed environment or don’t mind, so solutions to maximise females’s employment have to be adaptable to both preferences and to changes in those preferences over time. Given the very low rates of home-working currently, it is interesting that over 8% would prefer to work from home even though it is a relatively unexplored concept for well-educated females, accepting of course that many females do work from home in small scale domestic occupations such as clothing, catering and handicrafts.

Factors that could help more Saudi females to become employed

The results are largely consistent with the obstacles cited below. For example, 16% cite Social Attitudes as the greatest issue and 18% cite Society and Religious Support as the greatest potential help. Lack of Appropriate Jobs was cited as greatest difficulty by around 22% and Availability of Suitable Job Opportunities cited by around 18% as the greatest help. An apparent anomaly is that, although only 5% cited lack of qualifications as the greatest difficulty, 32% of the females suggested that increased qualifications (especially in the sciences) would most help more Saudi females to become employed. The attitudes of the females surveyed implies that there is awareness that many may have qualifications that carry little weight in the market place.

Main Obstacles to the Employment of Saudi females

The following graph shows the Saudi females and Employers responses (see below) mapped to each other.
From the employer’s perspective, difficulties noted by the females can be grouped into three broad categories: difficulties in the job/work itself (which are under the direct control of employers); difficulties due to societal attitudes (which employers would have to mitigate); and difficulties to do with the females themselves (which employers would have to resolve).

It can be seen that 15-20% of both employers and Saudi females agree that a ‘lack of appropriate jobs’ and ‘other responsibilities’ are major obstacles. In this case ‘lack of appropriate jobs’ meant jobs where the conditions and environment were appropriate – including facilities such as female washrooms, separate areas for females if necessary, hours of work (also mentioned separately) and the type of job itself. This reflects, for example, the fact that over 70% of females wanted to work in a female only environment. Other issues with the job itself include difficulty of working long hours and the need to balance family responsibilities. Transportation was still given as a difficulty despite most of our sample living reasonably close to their work. All these difficulties can be resolved by employers “Adapt the work to the woman, not just the woman to the work” (see recommendations section). For example, companies must ensure they have internal regulations and procedures to ensure fair and respectful treatment of females. Regulation of the workplace is the employer’s responsibility.

42% of employers felt that society/cultural attitudes were a major obstacle, but only 16% of the females themselves. Our interviews with successful females suggested that any general antipathy to females working (on religious or cultural grounds) was increasingly mitigated by the pressing economic need of many families to have two incomes and/or strong support from sympathetic immediate family members. Evidence from other countries on the history of female economic emancipation suggests that as more females work then society increasingly accepts the situation as normal. Employers may be seeing this as more of a problem than it actually is and, in any case, they can demonstrate that the work being carried out by females is coherent with social values and preserves modesty, dignity and self respect. Becoming an ‘employer of choice’ means actively reflecting society’s values whilst adapting to social changes as they occur.

The Saudi females themselves cite lack of work experience (and qualifications and language barriers were included in the ‘others’ category) as a difficulty. Employers who wish to derive advantage by employing females will not wait for the education systems or Government bodies to resolve these
issues. The lack of work experience, for example, can be resolved by internships, induction courses and mentoring.

**Qualifications/Training Required**

84% of employers believe that Saudi females would need some training before joining their organization, in the following topics:

![What sort of training would Saudi women need?](chart.png)

This is very coherent, with the opinions of Employers and Saudi females themselves citing the top three topics in common. More of the employers suggested that management skills were important and this, combined with the suitable roles identified, suggests that employers may be more likely to be considering females for management roles than are the females themselves! The females themselves cited language (English) and IT as the two most important skills needed by females for work. Technical skills were cited by 17% and job specific skills by 11%. Employers also cite ‘technical skills’ as one of the major requirements when looking for staff. This suggests that employers may have to assume the responsibility for vocational, job related training given basic skills in language, IT and the softer skills acquired through doing a degree (such as analytical skills). Employers favoured practical training, or a mixture of academic and practical. Despite the inclusion in many degree courses of English and IT skills, both subjects are seen as requiring additional training by both employers and the females themselves. Given that the females are leaving University with less of these skills than is required, then either Universities, the Government or the employers themselves are going to have to provide additional training. As this report is about what employers themselves can do, then an obvious recommendation is for employers, or employer groups such as Chambers, to provide this remedial training in English and IT. The case studies also suggested training was needed in ‘preparedness for work’ and a course has been developed and is available (see [www.employingwomen.com](http://www.employingwomen.com)).
Working from Home

One solution to the difficulties cited by the females would be for professional graduate females to work from home in roles such as IT and Call Centre roles – especially given the increasingly advanced IT and communications facilities now available. This was a strong recommendation from our previous GCC wide research (Scott-Jackson et al 2010). The Saudi female respondents were asked whether they would consider this option.

76% would consider working from home with 20% uncertain and 4% saying no. The high positive response indicates that there is potential for employers to think about work in non-traditional ways. It may be that this suggestion also fits in with females’ desire to work part-time. There are significant problems with organizing successful home-working, in terms of supervision and productivity, but initiatives in other countries (e.g. www.businesshr.net) demonstrate that innovative approaches to employment can be very successful. Our interviews suggest that a mixed regime might work best where females might work from home for say 4 days per week but meet their colleagues and boss in some convenient location (such as females’ social centre) once per week. Alternatively, local centres could be created for females to work part-time near to their homes, providing services to large employers elsewhere. These suggestions are further explored in the recommendations section. Only 3% of all respondents had no IT / internet access from home. This places the sample at the higher end of international comparisons and shows much of educated Saudi society is able to access communications technology and work remotely. The role of technology in developing innovative solutions in workplace design is at the core of successful implementation. The results suggest that educated Saudi females are comfortable using technology and that these skills can be leveraged by employers.
Appendix B - Employer Survey

The Employers interviewed were dispersed fairly evenly across the Kingdom but mostly located in the main centers of Riyadh, Jeddah and Dammam. They employed 96,000 people in total of whom 3174 were females. On average, less than 4% of the employees were females.

Employment of females and location of company

There is a significant relationship between likelihood to employ females and location of the firm. Firms in the Eastern Province are significantly overrepresented amongst those firms that currently employ females. Both Jeddah and Riyadh based firms have fewer companies either employing females or thinking of employing them. Firms based outside the Eastern Province were more likely to say that they are not thinking of employing females than would be predicted statistically.

Employment of females and size of company

In our sample, the size of the firm has a significant relationship to the likelihood of employing females at present or be actively thinking about it. Medium sized firms of fewer than 500 employees are more likely to be employing females than the larger firms compared to what would be expected. Firms with over 2000 employees have a lower propensity to be employing females or thinking about it than would be expected. In this sample, the larger firms are not employing females in the numbers that might be expected.

Firms with 100 to 500 employees employed 14% females on average, whereas larger firms with over 500 employees employed only 2% females on average. 73% of employers would like to employ more Saudi females with only 2% saying they would definitley not want to.
How many Saudi Females could you employ if all obstacles could be overcome

If perceived obstacles (as above) could be overcome then the sampled employers estimate that they could employ over 5500 Saudi females. Three of the companies could employ more than 500 additional females each if obstacles could be overcome.

Employers’ perceptions of suitable roles for Saudi females

This was an open question, subsequently categorised by the research team.

The most commonly cited type of role was administrative/clerical, followed by ‘back office’ roles of sales & marketing and finance. ‘Front line/reception’ roles were scored highly despite being difficult to
segregate. 20% of the respondees mentioned leadership management, which is a very encouraging percentage. It is on first sight surprising that education and healthcare (currently the most common roles for females) do not feature more strongly but the respondents were probably thinking of their own organisations or the private sector in general.

There is a strong relationship between the location of a firm and the types of employment that respondents felt were most suitable for females. A good example is front line reception and customer facing roles. In Riyadh and Jeddah statistically fewer than expected respondents thought this was a suitable role for a female but in the Eastern Province more people than would be expected cited this as a role that Saudi females could perform. This is a significant relationship with a strong affect and therefore the location of a firm can be said to be related to whether customer facing roles are thought suitable for females. Other role types where the Eastern Province differed to Jeddah and Riyadh, were IT and telecommunications jobs, secretarial and administrator roles, customer services and HR positions and data management and analysis. The relationship here was not statistically significant but points to a pattern of difference that might merit further investigation.

Potential for Employment of Saudi Females

If there was a way of, for example, mitigating the perceived obstacle of cultural constraints or working within those constraints, then the 50 companies sampled here state that they could employ over 5500 more females. Extrapolating across the private sector, Achoui (2011) suggests there are at least 700,000 companies in KSA, who would have the potential, if the average here held true, of employing an additional 110 females each, giving a total potential of employing around 77m females if all obstacles could be overcome. Even if the mix of companies in this sample reflected slightly larger companies than the total, and the average overall was reduced by a factor of 10, there is still capacity to employ over 7m females. From that perspective, demand would far exceed supply.

The recommendations aim to deal with many of the perceived obstacles, so the goal of employment for say 200,000 of the ~400,000 available female graduates does not seem unrealistic.
Appendix C - References


