

## Attitudes of Omani Youth toward Work: The Case of Sultan Qaboos University Students

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**Abstract:** This paper examines the attitudes of Omani youth toward the culture of work and the different ramifications of these attitudes in terms of concerns, interests and preferences. The problematic of the study focuses on the assessment of the hypothesis that the young generation in the Sultanate of Oman, especially the one represented by university students, tends to be more individualized and self-centered, which occasions a high rate of explicit attitudes vis-à-vis work, namely in terms of status and money, at the expense of implicit ones, such as assistance, social values, altruism and friendship. In addition to other relevant theoretical perspectives, the study relies on the concept of work culture as articulated in the literature of sociology. At the methodological level, this exploratory study endeavors to measure the work culture using a random sample of students enrolled at Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) in the Sultanate of Oman. The research findings demonstrate that the work culture among university students is arranged in the form of a paradigm dominated by motives like self-development, independence, knowledge exchange, expertise, skills, job security, social and financial stability, and outreach work. These are followed, to a lesser extent, by motives like social networks, community service, family respect, social status, workplace relationships, achievement, decision-making, leadership and livelihood. This arrangement of youth attitudes, however, reflects some kind of double standards within the cultural component of work. The outcomes of this study will help the relevant employment authorities understand that today's young workers are different from their predecessors. Thus, it is imperative to adopt administrative and management strategies to deal with the concerns of future generations.

**Key words:** work attitude; self-orientation; emerging workforce; self-development; independence; job security.

### 1. Introduction

Work is naturally defined as a human activity based upon an engaged choice, the strength to overcome idleness and face daily life problems. It is considered an expression of commitment to duty and a tool to safeguard human dignity. On the other hand, it is likened to the condition of release from alienation, serving as a panacea for

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the treatment of many immoral, social and psychological diseases. Given that it is a means to earn a living and to relieve human beings, work is primordial in human nature and is sacred in Islam. The aim of work is so important that it is related to the overall aim of human existence through which the continuity of mankind on earth is ensured. The concept of work is not merely restricted to its being a source of income, for it determines the motives of individuals and makes them accept life, in addition to providing autonomy, stability and social security. Also, work gives the individual the opportunity to achieve social prestige.

However, the culture of work in the abstract sense of self-orientation toward work varies among individuals in accordance with the differences prevailing in their economic and social positions. Thus, it is important to point out that the attitudes of the individual toward work unfold their concept of the work culture, especially among those who are new to the job market.

In the light of the increasing number of Omani jobseekers, particularly the youth, and the rising number of expatriate workers in the country, it is necessary to examine the Omani youth perception of the value of work. Addressing such an important question can actually reveal the framework within which work operates. In the absence of work, however, the youth would only remain active jobseekers. The Public Authority of Manpower Register has recently declared that the number of jobseekers in the Sultanate of Oman has reached (153,326), 36% of whom are males and 64% females. Moreover, according to the same Authority, holders of a general diploma certificate, a high school certificate and lower certificates represent 88% of jobseekers (Public Authority of Manpower Register, 2014).

It is in such a context that the present study endeavors to examine the work culture of male and female SQU students who are on their way to joining the workforce, and to find out about their attitudes toward work and its importance as well as their personal preferences in this regard. The study focuses especially on the most important components of work as perceived by young Omani university students to determine their attitudes and their future choices. The results of this study will benefit the relevant authorities and decision-makers who are concerned with planning for the potential workforce by identifying the attitudes and work preferences of the latter in the light of the specificities of the modern Omani society.

Taking the above into consideration, this study especially attempts to test the important hypothesis that youth, especially university students, are bent on individualism and self-centeredness. It is expected that the centrality of work among this third generation will diminish, and it is also expected that the rate of explicit orientations (status and money) will increase at the expense of the implicit orientations in work, such as assistance, social values, altruism and friendship). As opposed to the first generation, the third one gives more value to the explicit rewards of work. Several studies have demonstrated that though the third generation does not have an earnest desire for work, they are still keen on making money and achieving status (Twenge et al., 2010, pp. 1118–1120). In fact, testing such a hypothesis will help us achieve results which have practical implications for job creation and the employment management of the emerging workforce. Specifically, in determining the significant components of work culture among youth, this study aims to:

- shed light on the attitudes toward work in the field of sociology
- monitor youth self-orientation toward work
- identify the most important practical implications of youth attitudes toward work

## 2. Methodology

This study belongs to the category of exploratory studies which aim to find out about the self-orientations of young university students toward the culture of work. It utilizes the social survey method and random sampling, and takes into consideration proportional representation at the level of gender, college and cohort.

The sample was randomly picked up from the statements of enrolled students who represent (1%) of the total university student population, taking into account the following standards which stipulate proportional representation at the level of gender and college:

- approximate gender equity in representation
- proportional representation per college if possible
- inclusion of all enrolled students across cohorts
- distribution of samples per region across the Sultanate

The sample includes 143 male and female students distributed according to the different colleges and cohorts, in addition to the different population clusters (Urban–Rural–Bedouin). The study uses the questionnaire form as a tool for the collection of the basic field data and the standard of work attitudes. The study comprises 14 statements tackling several attitudes toward work, whether these are explicit (money, status and achievement) or implicit (reaching out to others, communication, etc.), in addition to self-development. The questionnaire form was reviewed by a group of evaluators specializing in sociology and social work to gauge its validity and the extent to which such a tool can reflect the components of work culture among university youth, as well as a stability test for the tool before implementing it in the fieldwork. The sampled population in the questionnaire consisted of 15 participants during two periods with a time interval using Pearson Correlation Coefficient to determine the strength of the pre/post measurement 0.84. This rate is considered high and proves the tool's measurement stability. The data were collected in approximately one month (September, 2015).

The attitudes of youth toward work in this kind of study are defined as the set of ideas, conceptions, emotions, orientations, beliefs, preferences and priorities, in addition to social standards conceptualized by the individual or the group about all forms of work through social conditioning. Hence, this component is merged into personality and becomes an orientation for behavior. Sometimes these standards function both as implicit and explicit orientations. The attitudes toward work are related to desirable and undesirable behavior, and the culture of work is seen as a reflection of the proportional importance of implicit and explicit gains obtained by the individual through work.

This study, which revolves around three axes, starts by investigating the components of the work culture from within the field of sociology, discussing the concept and the theoretical framework which contains the cultural approach, as well as by exploring Albert Bandura's theory of social learning and Pierre Bourdieu's reproduction theory. The second axis examines some of the previous studies which focused upon the components of the work culture and its value among the youth, school and university students. The third axis shows the results of the field study about the self-orientations of the youth among university students toward work. This field study examines first the characteristics of the target community, the self-orientations toward work and then the most important conclusions drawn from the significant social indicators and the practical implications resulting from the attitudes of students toward work; and finally the study puts forward some proposals and recommendations that might be of practical use to authorities, decision-makers and stakeholders.

### 3. Attitudes toward Work: The Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

Several theoretical approaches have been put forward in the endeavor to unravel the role of culture in prompting physical behavior, through which supreme morals, ideals and rituals are displayed as basic constituents of the culture of any group or organization. These approaches attempt to interpret the way social institutions contribute to the formation of the culture of the individual and how these institutions are reflected in the individual's views and attitudes toward the meaning of the concept of work. It is appropriate to refer here to the cultural approach to the concept of work as reflected in the thoughts of Max Weber and Talcott Parsons, in addition to the contributions of Albert Bandura in the theory of social learning, and Pierre Bourdieu in the theory of reproduction. One should also cite the theoretical perspective on the meaning of work as advocated by Shenkar and Ronen (1987), derived from the theory of reproduction, whose approach attempts to determine the levels of influence in forming the individual's work culture.

#### 3.1 Cultural Approach

In its teachings, Islam emphasizes the importance of the culture of work, and there exist several verses in the Holy Qur'an which stress the correlation between faith and work, thus levelling criticism at the prejudiced cultural traditions which motivate people to accept only certain types of work (Shuqair, 2012, p. 49). In the literature of sociology, the culture of work relates to the general concept, as was the case during the scientific debates about the search for introductions to a theory of work and its value orientations in the light of social transformation. Culture comprises social values, and the significance of the part dealing with work increases in the eyes of modern society, because work relations are constituents of all forms of social relations. Work culture, from Max Weber's perspective, is defined as the set of volitional individual options determined by the ideas and the conceptions of social groups, and these options are subject to socio-historical conditions. The hypotheses of Max Weber developed out of the need to consolidate the relations between beliefs and economic growth, as beliefs influence value orientations, thus economic behavioral patterns are formed (El-Nabalawi, 2007).

Weber asserts that modernization is associated with the movement from a worldview influenced by a religious tendency to a one that tends to be rational (Allam, 2007). The work value system, as is known today, belongs to the secular tendency espoused by Weber, while the Protestant work ethic, which emphasizes the Calvinistic tendency to accumulate wealth, is being largely used to explain the success of Western capitalism. Notwithstanding, the beliefs and positions which defend earnest work have always existed in the Western culture, and they have been closely associated with a specific religious denomination. Several studies have discussed how Weber's theory is tested in cultural contexts different from those prevalent in the Western culture (Abdul Rahman, 2007, pp. 197–198). Hence, the theories indicate that work, according to Weber, is part of the cultural standards of organization, which require that the individual be held accountable for work based on the common belief that work carries an intrinsic value.

Talcott Parsons also defines the standards of work as the sum total of the behaviors and interactions of individuals whereby the work culture plays an important role in maintaining and consolidating the social structure. The work culture is, accordingly, referred to as the set of behavioral orientations, i.e., the attitudes, beliefs, preferences and priorities of individuals or groups in all the activities which are associated, in any form, with work, and this culture is not limited to a given professional activity. At times, these orientations can take either an explicit form or an implicit one, and they relate to socially desirable or undesirable behavior. It is also worth

noting the relative importance of the explicit and implicit rewards that individuals gain from work and from their personal attitude toward work. Therefore, any activity or behavior related to work has a value that orients it (Allam et al., 2007, pp. 25–29).

In the context of development and modernization theory, the relationship between modernization and traditional culture is inspired by the belief that “The modernization process will inevitably create a rapprochement between the new values at the expense of traditional ones, and subsequently the former will replace the latter”. This approach is related to the visions of the dependency school and the modernization theory in their belief in the inevitability of the connection between the modernization of developing nations and the adoption of the Western model (Inglehart & Baker, 2000, p. 20).

Stephen D. Harding and Frans J. Hikspoors have revealed how the new orientations toward work have developed, especially among highly educated young employees who desire to be more independent and involved in decision-making, thus marking a shift from the values of obligation and compliance to those of self-development. As a result, knowledge, auto-control and technology have become some of the most important mechanisms of the quality of competitiveness in work. Fukuyama aptly described this development in 1992 when he contended that technological invention and the distribution of sophisticated labor had led to a significant increase in the demand for technical knowledge at all levels of economic activity, thus making people assume that they are thinkers more than workers (Harding & Hikspoors, 1995, pp. 443–444).

### **3.2 Albert Bandura’s Theory of Social Learning**

Social learning is the process that allows the individual to acquire responses or new behavioral patterns through a situation or a social context. This theory focuses on the importance of social interaction, norms and conditions in creating learning. This implies that learning does not occur in a vacuum but in a social environment. Thus, behavioral and social patterns are gained through imitation, learning and observation, a process which happens through situations that include the relationship of an individual with another one or with a group when they mutually influence each other. In such a way, the individual learns the standards, values, social traditions, and the knowledge and skills that help them achieve social harmony. Much of human behavior is acquired through observation, be it accidental or volitional, by following a real model. Through observation, the learner becomes capable of solving problems in the right way even when the model fails in tackling the problems as such (Al Zayat, 1996, p. 364).

### **3.3 Reproduction Theory**

Sociologists categorize the work of the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1930–2002) within the branch of cultural sociology or as a theory which specializes in cultural practices, because his work revolves around interrelated issues about the cultures of societies and how they are used to justify given situations in capitalist societies. Bourdieu revisited the classical concepts in sociology and ascribed to them new dimensions and larger sociological perspectives. He elaborated new concepts which have contributed to the enrichment of the lexicon of sociology, such as the concept of habitus (Jason & Murphy, 2000, p. 186).

As a reaction to structuralism, which relegates the human being and subjects them to social structure and its product, reproduction theory reconsiders the social actor. Structuralism insists on removing the actors from the center of the structure as though the latter operated in an automatic way that transcended the will and consciousness of the individual. Bourdieu’s reproduction theory emphasizes the relationship between the actor and the social structure, which culminates in the actors’ reproduction of this structure, but Bourdieu does not rule out

the ability of the actors to transfer the structure and change it, as this entails the existence of structural conditions (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 202).

Bourdieu believes in the dialectical relationship between objectivity and subjectivity, and claims that there is no contradiction between them. The objective tendency assumes that social reality consists of a group of relations and forces which impose themselves upon the actors without reckoning with their willingness and consciousness. On the other hand, sociology should adopt Durkheim's approach in perceiving social phenomena as objects and emphasize the objective systems which determine the behavior of individuals and their reactions. Contrariwise, the subjective tendency considers these reactions as foundations for its theory. Herbert Blumer and Harold Jarevenichael argue that social reality is only the sum total of infinite interpretations of events, as individuals interact in accordance with the meanings they agree upon. Such a viewpoint has led Bourdieu to elaborate the system of his concepts which combines the objective structures of society and the subjective roles of individuals who live therein. *Habitus*, which comes in the forefront of this kind of system (Waquant, 2006, p. 6), is defined by Bourdieu as the pattern of acquired preparedness, the concepts of realization and evaluation, the actions and the forms of behavior that people derive from social interaction. This concept reflects the different situations experienced by people in society, and *habitus* is considered as a guide for the behaviors of individuals based on the ego, which is manifested in the preparedness of individuals and their competences (Bourdieu, 2000, p. 19).

The concept of cultural capital, Bourdieu argues, is a set of symbols, skills, cultural and linguistic competences and the meanings which represent the prevailing culture, and these are adopted on account of their suitability to reproduce, perpetuate and transfer the culture through the educational process. This concept stresses the forms of cultural knowledge and the preparedness which reflect the internal and integrated symbols that prepare the individual to interact positively with competitive situations and to explain cultural relations and events. Bourdieu divides cultural capital into two parts: acquired cultural capital on the basis of educational qualification and the number of school years, and inherited capital derived from the status of the family and its different cultural relations. The latter part achieves direct profit in the first place within the educational system and in other venues, such as the workplace, in addition to the acquisition of individual distinction in all fields (Abd El Wahhab, 1999, p. 99). Bourdieu affirms that cultural capital is formed through the conscious knowledge of the prevalent culture in the society and the ability to understand and use sophisticated language. Additionally, Bourdieu asserts that possessing cultural capital varies depending on the different classes. Thus, the educational system supports the acquisition of such a model of capital, which makes it difficult for individuals hailing from a lower class background to succeed in this kind of system (Sullivan, 2000, p. 893).

Some researchers have made use of reproduction theory in the elaboration of their theoretical models. In this respect, Shenkar and Ronen proposed a model for the meaning of work (Westwood & Lok 2003, p. 141), which supposes that the meaning of work reflects two levels: the macro-social which involves the cultural, social, political and economic variations in the society, and the micro-individual which includes the role of the family and the personality of the individual in the formation of meaning. Both levels influence the organization of the work institution through the acknowledgment of the centrality of work for the individual, its aims and gains, and through the determination of its role in the life of the individual and the social standards appertaining to work. In turn, all of these lead to a set of psychological, social and objective results, and they affect the expectations of the workers and their future work plans.

It seems clear from the above that there are several theoretical views derived from the classical literature of sociology which explain the formation of the culture of individuals, in general, and their attitudes toward work, in

particular, as well as the extent of the translation of such views into cognitive, sentimental and behavioral frameworks which characterize the orientations of the individual or the group toward life and, consequently, toward work.

#### 4. Literature Review

Mansour (1981) has attempted to understand the distinctive value structure among students or individuals who are looking for an appropriate job. His study focuses on the values associated with work among Saudi adolescents since this age-group is directly concerned with work and their needs can be satisfied based on their attitude toward work. The study has concluded that the distinctive values of work among adolescents take the shape of a structure predominated by the values of serving, innovating and achieving over other values. However, the values which have an average degree of importance are: diversity, collegiality, aesthetics and relations to superiors in the job hierarchy. The least important values are: social status, work environment, leadership and income. The results of the study have confirmed that rural adolescents are drawn to work on the basis of the characteristics of work, the guidance of others and attitudes toward others, whereas urban adolescents are more interested in self-actualization, the pleasure of work and the opportunity to reach out to others.

Moussa (1993) has aimed to explore the reality of youth, identity and patriotism by monitoring the reality of culture and conditioning in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, as well as the attitudes of youth toward education and employment. The outcome of the study has unraveled the relationship between the alienation of Arabs, in general, and that of GCC citizens, in particular, which has led to overall double standards in culture, economy and education. The study has also revealed that social and political conditioning, which is carried out through education, inculcates into youth the values of obedience, compliance, the shunning of freedom and independence, and avoidance of all that is practical and professional. Some of the educational policies have reinforced the feeling of disdain of manual work in most Arab countries, particularly in GCC countries where manual work is undertaken by foreigners. This is due to the fact that school curricula have become either too theoretical or geared toward socially elevated professions. On the other hand, some economic policies (liberalization) in Arab countries have resulted in the emergence of peripheral types of work which have brought their practitioners affluence unrelated to the effort deployed or the degree held.

Al-Rushud (2006) has traced the movement of rapid social change in Saudi Arabia, and his study aims at measuring the attitudes of Saudi youth toward work in the private sector. Using theoretical perceptions and practical data derived from fieldwork, this study determines the most important and appropriate planning indicators to develop the attitudes of Saudi youth toward work in the private sector. The study concludes that the attitudes of youth toward work in the private sector are influenced by the behavioral dimension in the first place, i.e. the individual's endeavor to do something or what prompts them to behave in response to something, followed by the cognitive dimension, which is the knowledge that youth possess, while the sentimental dimension comes in the third place.

Kazim (2006) has attempted to identify the value system change affecting several economic values among young people between 1999 and 2005, and leading to system value changes among the youth with regards to their preference for professional careers. The findings have revealed a change in the value of rapid gain through preference for work over education in a regressive manner, and changes have affected the value of saving. Therefore, it can be argued that several changes have occurred at the horizontal level in young people's economic

values, since the majority of respondents prefer professional careers because they represent job security and financial stability. However, some opt for the good revenue-generating self-employment.

Wray-Lake et al. (2009) have carried out a follow-up study of high school and university adolescents, concluding that the importance of work value among adolescents in the American society has started dwindling since the mid-1980s. In particular, there is a steady decrease in the centrality of the value of work, while there is a gradual decrease in the orientation toward preparedness for work, irrespective of the need for money, or overtime work to make optimum efforts to improve their work performance. Moreover, the value of the importance of work varies according to gender, as males attribute more importance to the centrality of work than females, while the study has also revealed that women are more prepared to work overtime and to work even when there is no need for money. Black university-going adolescents, on the other hand, value the importance of work more than their white counterparts who do not expect to earn any university degree. The explicit and material values of work, such as status, prestige, respect, progress, income and profit among students, have been perceptibly higher from the late 1980s to the late 1990s. There is, nonetheless, a variation on the basis of gender, since the value of work which generates the highest degree of explicit rewards, financially and status-wise, has increased, while women lean toward work that provides more respect (Wray-Lake et al., 2009, pp. 15–19).

Muhammad (2010) has identified the nature of the similarities and differences in the values of work among young people in some Arab countries, demonstrating that the differences in these values reflect the cultural differences of these individuals, on the one hand, and the differences in their personal characteristics, on the other hand. The findings have shown that work has an enormous value among all participants from different societies. Morocco ranks first and is followed by Iraq, Egypt, Jordan and Saudi Arabia. The findings of the study have also revealed that some values are considered extrinsic, such as good income, job security and working hours, while others, like status, compatibility with competences and the pleasure principle, are considered intrinsic and they rank higher among Arab youth. There is also variation at the level of gender when it comes to job security, working hours, responsibility, job suitability for men, status and initiative for women.

Twenge et al. (2010) have analyzed five work values which vary depending on the generation in question. These are the explicit values, the implicit values, leisure time, material values and social values. This study has espoused the hypothesis that the middle generation and the young generation are more individualistic and subjective; therefore, a vertical comparison has been drawn for a specific high school age-group and the first undergraduate university levels ranging from 1976 to 2006, i.e., over four time periods. The study has led to findings which have profound implications for the employment and management of the emerging workforce, whereby the value of leisure time increases in a steady manner over the generations, while the value of the centrality of work decreases. Furthermore, the explicit values, such as status and money, increase among the second and third generations. In comparison with the previous generations, the third one does not prefer the values of altruistic work, such as assistance and societal values. Social values like friendship and inherent values like pleasure decrease among the third generation in comparison with the first one. Also, the value of leisure time tops the values of the third generation, followed by those of the second one and the first one (Twenge et al., 2010, pp. 1118–1120).

Relying on several relevant sources, and using the theoretical rooting perspective to trace the development of the values of work, El-Nabalawi (2014) has surveyed contemporary social transformations and values of work in economic systems. The study has concluded that there are internal factors which influence the value attitudes toward work, such as the work environment, the nature of work, years of experience, etc., and external factors like

the worker's environment and the economic and social importance of work. There exist also some implicit work values which are overall subjective ones and are related to the individual, such as achievement, belonging, pride and integration, and there are open and explicit work values like promotion and the social and economic values of work.

The survey about the values of Omani youth (National Center for Statistics and Information, 2015) is intended to measure and develop a set of social indicators related to the values and attitudes of Omani youth vis-à-vis a number of issues, such as education, work, the use of social media and the extent of belief in the importance of religious values in preserving the cohesiveness of the family and society. The study has concluded that in terms of job security, 87% of young workers feel secure, with 43% (highly secure), 44% (somewhat), while 13% estimate that their feeling of job security is low. The highest levels of job security were recorded in Al Wusta, Al Dhahira and Al Sharqiya governorates, while the lowest were in South Al Batinah, North Al Sharqiya and Dhofar. The feeling of job security is slightly higher among women (45%) than men (43%), probably due to the fact that a high proportion of women work in the public sector which increases job security. This also occurs as a result of the rise in the level of education and age. The results have also shown that the increase in the degree of job security takes place, to a large extent, among workers in the public sector 67% in comparison with those who work in the private or family sectors 24%.

On the other hand, the study conducted by the National Center for Statistics and Information (2015) has meant to survey the opinions of Omani youth (university students, jobseekers and workers) concerning the most important issues of work. This study has concluded that a large number of youth (71% of students, 85% of jobseekers and 82% of workers) believe that their educational degrees highly qualify them for the job market. The results of the study have also revealed that women, particularly actively working ones, are the most satisfied with the suitability of their educational degrees for the job market. The results have shown that in terms of work preference for youth, close to 33% of students enrolled in higher education prefer working in the private sector, which is significantly higher than the percentage of jobseekers (5%) and workers (12%). Concerning the determinants of job preference for Omani youth, the results have pointed out that the most important factors are stability and job security. As for remuneration, the results have shown that the average acceptable salary in the private sector (951 OMR) is higher than in the public one (875 OMR), while the opposite takes place among jobseekers.

It seems clear from the above that the focus on the young generation who are enrolled in schools and universities is due to their importance in determining the strong social indicators regarding the emerging workforce and their attitudes toward work, which paves the way for the elaboration of the policies of employment, taking into account the attitudes and preferences of new workers. In addition, some studies have concluded that the attitudes of youth toward work are somewhat similar, thus transcending geographical location to articulate the explicit attitudes at the expense of the implicit ones. This, however, takes into consideration the differences in some attitudes, as there is in the eastern part concern about job security, while in the western part the focus is on the financial rewards. This will be discussed in the light of the results of the present study.

## **5. Self-orientations of Youth toward Work: Results of Fieldwork**

### **5.1 Characteristics of the Study Population**

The total number of male and female university students reached 15342 at the beginning of March 2016. The

rate of the College of Arts and Social Sciences is about 18% of the total number of university students, followed by the College of Engineering, the College of Economics and Political Science and the College of Science. An approximate closeness between the rates of males and females has been noticed, as the following Tables 1 and 2 indicate.

**Table 1 Number of Students Enrolled in the Bachelor's Degree Program by College and Gender (March 2016)**

College	Female	Male	Total
College of Arts and Social Sciences	1779	918	2697
College of Economics and Political Science	1280	1162	2442
College of Education	1066	628	1694
College of Nursing	352	120	472
College of Law	465	479	944
College of Medicine and Health Sciences	692	361	1053
College of Science	1265	1000	2265
College of Agricultural and Marine Sciences	800	454	1254
College of Engineering	593	1928	2521
<b>Total</b>	<b>8292</b>	<b>7050</b>	<b>15342</b>

**Table 2 Number of Students Enrolled in the Bachelor's Degree Program by College (March 2016)**

College	Number	%
College of Arts and Social Sciences	2697	17.6
College of Economics and Political Science	2442	15.9
College of Education	1694	11
College of Nursing	472	3.1
College of Law	944	6.2
College of Medicine and Health Sciences	1053	6.9
College of Science	2265	14.8
College of Agricultural and Marine Sciences	1254	8.2
College of Engineering	2521	16.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>15342</b>	<b>100</b>

The following are the most important characteristics of the study sample.

Table 3 (gender distribution) refers to a large degree of gender convergence whereby males recorded 50.3% and females approximately 49.7%, which is somewhat similar to the gender distribution ratios among university students in early 2016, whereby the rate of females at the university reached about 51 and males 49% according to the latest statistics issued by the university as noted above.

**Table 3 Distribution of Study Sample by Gender**

Gender	Frequency	%
Male	72	50.3
Female	71	49.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>143</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 4 (distribution by college/specialization) shows that students at the College of Engineering and Science have recorded 37.8%, while students at the College of Arts and Social Sciences and the College of Economics and

Political Science have recorded 34.3%. It is noted that these four colleges represent about 72.1% of the study sample. The remaining 27.9% represents the colleges of Agricultural and Marine Sciences, Education and Law, the School of Nursing and the College of Medicine and Health Sciences. Here, the data indicate that the study sample distribution by college is, to some extent, close to the actual distributions. The colleges of Engineering, Science and Arts and Social Sciences rank at the top of the list of colleges in the study sample.

**Table 4 Distribution of Study Sample by College**

College	Frequency	%
College of Agricultural and Marine Sciences	15	10.4
College of Arts and Social Sciences	24	16.8
College of Economics and Political Science	25	17.5
College of Education	12	8.4
College of Engineering	27	18.9
College of Law	8	5.6
College of Medicine and Health Sciences	1	0.7
College of Science	27	18.9
School of Nursing	4	2.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>143</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 5 (distribution by cohort) indicates that about one-third of the sample comes from cohort 2010 at a rate of 32.8%, and both 2011 and 2013 cohorts have closer rates of 42%, while 2008 and 2015 cohorts are less representative with a rate of 0.7% each. This demonstrates that the study sample is focused on middle range cohorts (2010–2013) and it decreases among new students and graduates in 2008 and 2015. Unintentional as it might be, this is due to issues related to the responses of students, and allowing for a fair proportional gender representation, sometimes we had to exclude some of the samples.

**Table 5 Distribution of Study Sample by Cohort**

Class	Frequency	%
2008	1	0.7
2009	7	4.9
2010	47	32.8
2011	29	20.3
2012	16	11.2
2013	31	21.7
2014	11	7.7
2015	1	0.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>143</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 6 (distribution by area classification) indicates that the majority of respondents are of urban origin, as they represent nearly 60.1%, followed by those of rural origin 26.6% and the Bedouins as the least representative 13.3%. These distributions cover, to a large extent, the population sectors, noting some kind of convergence between the population distribution of the study sample and that of the Sultanate of Oman, where urban areas represent more than 72% in comparison with rural and Bedouin sectors.

**Table 6 Distribution of Study Sample by Area Classification**

Classification	Frequency	%
Bedouin	19	13.3
Rural	38	26.6
Urban	86	60.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>143</b>	<b>100</b>

The above clearly shows that the study sample represents approximately 1% of the total number of enrolled SQU students, according to March 1st, 2016 data, which amounts to 143 items wherein the gender ratios converge with a slight increase in favor of males. The data cover all university colleges and take into account, as much as possible, the concept of proportional representation. They also include different categories of students from all cohorts, especially the median cohorts as previously mentioned, in addition to the diversity of the area classifications of students, which are to a large extent analogous to the population classification distribution across the Sultanate.

### **5.2 Self-orientations toward Work**

For the purpose of the present study, and in order to simplify the interpretation method, the levels and degrees of attitudes toward work have been divided from the perspective of the SQU students study sample according to the arithmetic average to test the strength or weakness of the statement. Because the scale of importance adopted here consists of three levels (very important, important and unimportant), the period (1–3) has been divided into three equal levels so that the length of each period is equal (0.66) as follows: strong orientation toward work lies in the period (2.34–3), while medium orientation lies in the period (1.67–2.33) and weak orientation occurs in the period (1–1.66). Table 7 clarifies this.

**Table 7 Likely Levels of Orientation Degrees toward Work**

Likely mean	Level
1–1.66	Weak
1.67–2.33	Medium
2.34–3	Strong

**Table 8 Illustrates the Response of the Study Sample to the Scale of Orientation toward Work**

S.	Statement	Response degree			Average of phrase	Strength of phrase	Standard deviation	Judgment	Rank
		Unimportant	Important	Very important					
1	I am seeking a job that provides good opportunities for social interaction	14	75	54	2.27	75.67	0.632	Medium	6
2	I will choose a job which guarantees social status	28	64	51	2.16	72	0.728	Medium	10
3	I want a job that secures a regular lifelong income	9	47	87	2.54	84.67	0.613	Strong	3
4	It is important to choose the job which facilitates the process of exchanging knowledge, expertise and skills	4	60	79	2.52	84	0.554	Strong	4
5	It is important to have a job that helps develop self-ability through learning and training	4	39	100	2.67	89	0.527	Strong	1

**Attitudes of Omani Youth toward Work: The Case of Sultan Qaboos University Students**

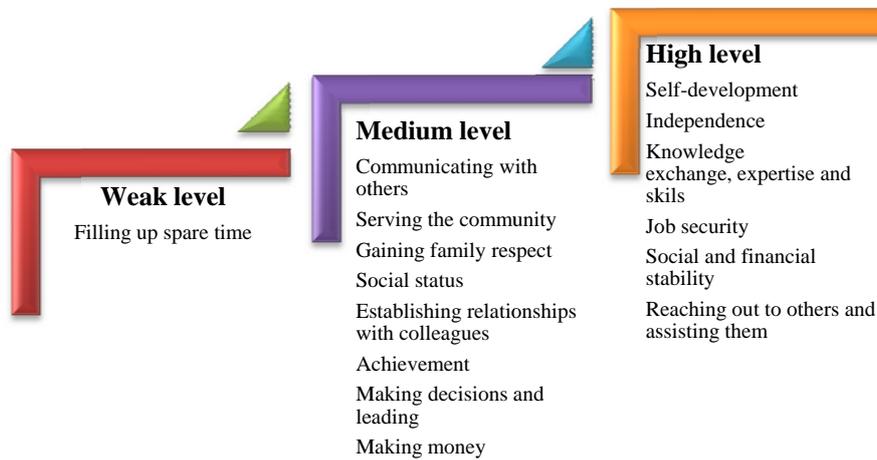
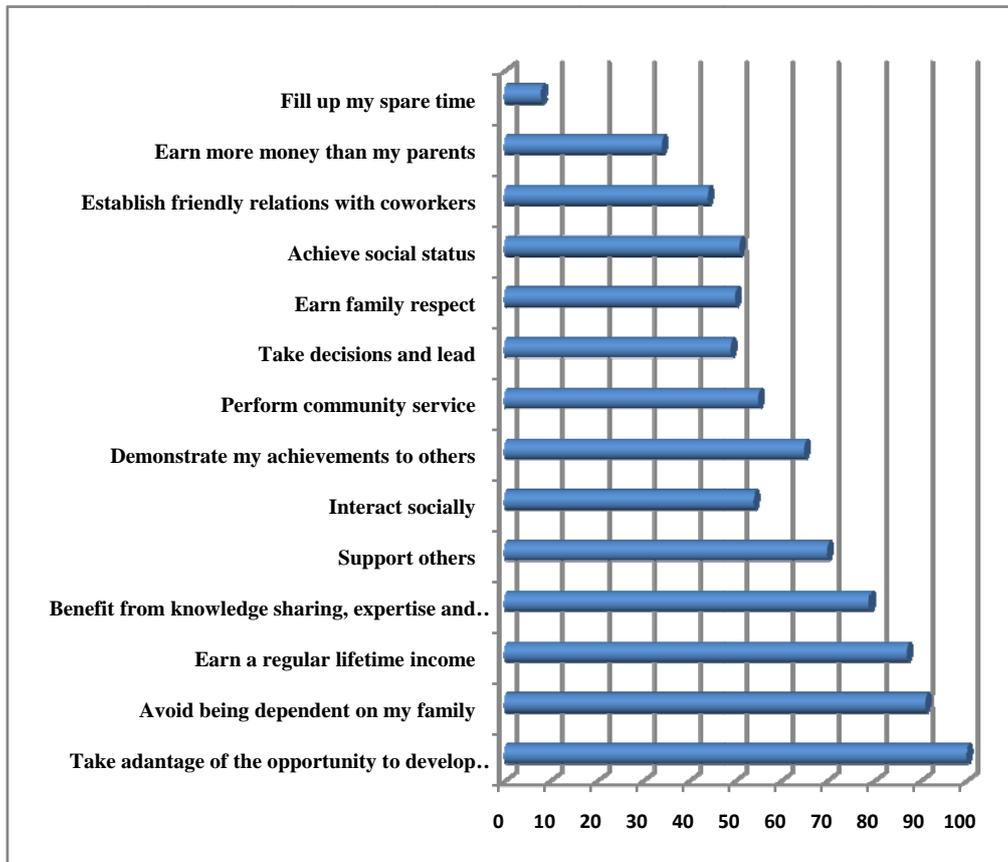
6	I am not looking for any specific job, but I want to work to fill up my spare time	102	33	8	1.34	44.67	0.582	Weak	13
7	One of the important points I will focus on when searching for a job in the future is the opportunity to make decisions and lead others	20	74	49	2.2	73.33	0.666	Medium	8
8	I am looking for a high paying job that will make me richer than my parents	66	43	34	1.77	59	0.808	Medium	12
9	I believe that the favorite type of job is the one which creates opportunities for community service	18	70	55	2.26	75.33	0.67	Medium	7
10	It is important to have a job that provides opportunities for reaching out to others and supporting them	5	68	70	2.45	81.67	0.565	Strong	5
11	I work to earn an income that helps me become financially independent of my family	11	41	91	2.55	85	0.634	Strong	2
12	One of the reasons I work is to gain family respect	22	71	50	2.19	73	0.684	Medium	9
13	I seek a job which provides good opportunities to establish friendships with coworkers	23	76	44	2.14	71.33	0.67	Medium	11
14	It is important for my job to help me demonstrate my achievements to others	25	53	65	2.27	75.67	0.744	Medium	6

Table 8 outlines the response of SQU students (study sample) regarding their attitudes toward work. This dimension includes 14 statements whose proportional strength, which is distributed in terms of weak, medium and strong values, ranges from 89% to 44.67%. Five statements have received a strong level, which stresses the importance of the perception of the job as a provider of opportunities to develop one's abilities through learning and training by a proportional strength of 89%, followed by the importance of work in order to earn a personal income which helps the person remain financially independent of one's family by a proportional strength of 85%, then comes the desire for work to secure a regular lifetime income by a proportional strength of 84.76%, the importance of the choice of a job which facilitates knowledge sharing, expertise and skills by a proportional strength of 84%, and finally the importance of a job which provides opportunities to reach out to others and assist them by a proportional strength of 81.67%.

Eight statements have received a medium level of 75.67%, which expresses the importance of the job in helping one demonstrate their achievements to others, and the elevated perception of the value of the job that provides good opportunities for social interaction has scored 75.67%. The importance of the job that provides the chance to serve the community has received 75.33%, and the one that provides opportunities for decision-making and leadership has received 73.33%. Moreover, the family respect motivation has received 73%, followed by the choice of a job which brings about social status by 72%, the choice of a job which provides good opportunities for the establishment of friendships with coworkers by 71.33%, and finally the choice of a job which provides opportunities for financial rewards that will make the worker richer than their parents by 59%.

Only one statement has received a weak level at a rating of 44.67%, which expresses the state of not looking for a specific job and the attribution of the desire for work to the need to fill up one's spare time.

The following chart shows the order of orientation levels toward work among the students figuring in the study sample.



By analyzing the results of the work orientations of students in the study sample, in accordance with the statements which are labelled strong, there are five ones in their range which are equally strong. In general, there is an overall trend to elevate the system of values and attitudes which reflect a duality in the cognitive and socio-cultural fabric among the study sample individuals as represented in the preferences which reveal the cultural reservoir of students and determine their preferences for the job they target after graduation. Students'

choices embody a set of values which vary in nature, while the instrumental values associated with the individuals themselves increase, and these are followed by orientations of a sociocultural nature related to the societal context.

It is in this context that the instrumental orientation has emerged through the values of self-development, independence and career performance, as a result of the exchange of knowledge, expertise and skills. The individual is keen on choosing the job that provides the possibility of continuous learning and training. As a result, the statement "It is important to have a job that helps develop self-ability through learning and training" has received the highest rating among the statements. The statement which upholds the value of autonomy, "I work in order to earn an income that helps me become financially independent of my family," reveals the willingness of the individual to achieve self-reliance through work. This attitude reflects a level of self and social maturity among the students of the study sample. The statement "It is important to choose the job which facilitates the process of exchanging knowledge, expertise and skills" comes in the third rank and reflects the extent of the respondents' interest in choosing a job that can help them develop by sharing knowledge, expertise and skills.

The value of upholding job security, which appears through the statement "I want a job that secures a regular lifelong income", demonstrates the impact of the traditional socio-cultural context, which in turn supports the social stability of the individual and the family and impacts the individual's choices in life, notably the choice of a job. Here, the individual seeks work which, by virtue of providing lifelong job security, brings about stability. This, however, does not reflect contemporary reality, since being an essential part of the labor market and neoliberal dynamics, a job is constantly subject to the change that affects the market. This fact, of course, is not in harmony with the desires of the students figuring in the study sample who seek to achieve those traditional work conditions which have long been outmoded. It can, therefore, be said that given that some of their choices are no longer in harmony with the spirit of the age, they now reside outside of the modern system of work.

The concept of social values also emerges in the motives of the study sample behind the choice of a job after graduation, and this is reflected in the statement "It is important to have a job which provides opportunities for reaching out to others and supporting them". This reveals the extent of the attachment of the respondents to the traditional socio-cultural context, which supports the network of social relations and extends from family and local community to the work environment, even if it sometimes happens at the expense of job performance. The expressed job preferences after graduation betray a clash of different value systems at the forefront of the attitudes of the study sample in their choices between the instrumental values and the traditional socio-cultural ones.

The attitudes of the target students in the study sample, which have scored an average rating, range within three areas. The socio-cultural orientations come first and are followed by professional orientations and then the financial ones. The results of the study have revealed that the choices made by university students regarding desirable jobs after graduation, in fact, reflect their socio-cultural orientations, as they will help them communicate with others, which is exemplified in the statements "I am seeking a job that provides good opportunities for social interaction", "I believe that the favorite type of job is the one which creates opportunities for community service", and "One of the reasons I work is to gain family respect", Social status is also worthy of note, as in the statement "I will choose a job which guarantees social status", alongside the building of a network of social relationships with coworkers, as in the statement "I seek a job which provides good opportunities to establish friendships with coworkers".

Professional orientations are represented in the choice of a job that enables the worker to achieve and succeed, as in the statements "It is important for my job to help me demonstrate my achievements to others" and "One of the important points I will focus on when searching for a job in the future is the opportunity to make decisions and

lead others”. A set of instrumental orientations emerge here to reflect the ability to achieve, which becomes visible to the people around the individual as a token of success and excellence, in addition to what the job provides in terms of opportunities for participation in decision-making and acquisition of leadership skills.

Financial orientations also emerge at an average rating in the students’ choices for jobs, as shown in the statement “I am looking for a high paying job that will make me richer than my parents”, i.e., the desire behind the job is to enable the worker to improve financially and socially to the extent of outdoing one’s parents.

The statement which has received a low rating in the perceptions of the students toward the job they are interested in is “I am not looking for any specific job, but I want to work to fill up my spare time”. This statement reveals how the desire to look for a job decreases, and work only serves the purpose of filling up one’s spare time. This is a clear indication of the seriousness of students in their aspirations for work through a number of instrumental orientations in the following order: subjective, socio-cultural, professional and financial.

On the other hand, the statistical analysis has revealed the absence of any significant variables in the responses of the target population at the college or governorate levels. However, there are statistical differences at the gender level with the number of males being higher than that of females, as shown in Tables 9 and 10.

**Table 9 Distribution of Study Sample by Gender (Total: 143)**

Gender	Number	Arithmetic average	Standard deviation
Males	72	2.29	0.32
Female	71	2.19	0.31

**Table 10 Results of (t-test) of the Independent Sample to Measure the Effect of Gender Variable**

S	Variable	Source of variation	F value	Level of significance of F	T value	Degree of freedom	Level of significance	Difference in averages	Standard error
1	Score	case of equality	0.01	0.92	2.185	140	0.031	0.1006	0.046
		case of inequality			2.185	139.67	0.031	0.1006	0.046

The above table shows the value of Levene’s Test at 0.010 with a significance of 0.92, and this value is greater than the significance level 0.05, which, in turn, shows that the gender variation is equal. Thus, we will take the value of t and the degree of freedom in the first line in case of equality, i.e. the value of  $t = 2.185$  with a degree of freedom of 140 and the level of significance at 0.031. As the level of significance  $t$  is inferior to 0.05, there is a statistically significant gender difference in favor of males, given that the arithmetic average of the male sample 2.29 is superior to the arithmetic average of the female sample 2.19.

The statistical analysis indicates the presence of significant differences attributable to the gender variable in favor of males. The statistical process indicates a higher level of work orientations among males than females. This gender difference, which is due to factors related to the Omani socio-cultural context, may apply to other Gulf and Arab societies. In the male-dominated community, it is noted that work is an essential element of the formation of a mental picture about man, and in the light of a traditional context, financial obligations are incumbent on the male who bears the costs of marriage, founding the family and maintaining it.

Therefore, there are societal pressures which determine the work orientations of male youth in comparison with females. Nowadays, however, there is an increasing rate of female literacy to the extent that the Sultanate of Oman has achieved a breakthrough in bridging the gender gap in education, and women are now working in a variety of fields instead of the restricted ones they have been associated with up until recent times. Nonetheless,

the attitudes of men toward work are much clearer than women's, as the culture of work among males is formed through the effective role of a number of social institutions, starting from the family and the tribe and moving beyond to embrace other social institutions.

### 5.3 Conclusions and Recommendations

In conclusion, the attitudes of university students who figure in the study sample toward work are ranged in the form of a paradigm dominated by self-development, autonomy, the exchange of knowledge, expertise and skills, job security, social and financial stability, and outreach and support. At the medium level, we find social networking, community service, family respect, social status, relationships with coworkers, achievement, decision-making and leadership, and in the last position comes money making. Despite the different socio-cultural contexts, these findings are, to some extent, consistent with Harding and Hikspoors' regarding the new attitudes toward work, especially among the younger and more educated generation in the American society whose desire for more independence and participation in decision-making has increased, thus reflecting the transition from the values of obligation and conformity to those of self-development. These findings also confirm Inglehart and Baker's that adolescents and youth have stronger desires for independence and participation in decision-making (Inglehart & Baker, 2000, p. 20).

Moreover, this component of the attitudes of university students toward work reflects a form of duality within the work culture among youth in the Omani society. Moussa (1993) confirms the existence of a general duality in the culture, economy and education, attributing it to the role of education in social and political conditioning, as well as in inculcating in young people the values of obedience and conformity and the shunning of freedom, independence and anything that is practical and professional. Moussa warns against the case of a dual personality among youth, which may lead to feelings of alienation in some situations. On the other hand, in comparison with the study of Mansour (1981), which reveals that serving others, innovating and achieving are the distinctive work values of adolescents in Saudi Arabia, the present one differs to some extent.

It should be noted that the subjective or behavioral dimension lies at the top of the work culture among university youth in the study sample, which is clearly reflected in the desire for self-development and autonomy, followed by the cognitive dimension which lies in exchanging knowledge, expertise and skills, and in the final position comes the emotional dimension which is articulated through job security, social and financial stability, and outreach and support work. This is consistent with the findings of Al-Rushud (2006) and the results of the survey on the values of young Omanis conducted in 2015.

The importance of work lies in the strength of the orientation indicators of youth toward work, especially males, and this is consistent with the findings of Wray-Lake et al. (2009), which point out that in comparison with females, males ascribe more importance to the centrality of work, but one should take into account the difference between the Omani and the American societies in terms of job security. While job security has achieved a high level in the work culture of Omani youth, young Americans witness a lower job stability value, especially in recent years, and it has been noted that job security has become less important in the eyes of adolescents at the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first century. Nonetheless, the present study shows that in general vulnerable groups tend to give greater importance to the job security value, meanwhile taking into consideration some kind of decrease in the value of the implicit rewards of work among youth and a tangible increase in the explicit and financial rewards of the work values.

It also seems clear that work carries economic importance for university students who aim to achieve through

it independence, job security, social and financial stability, as well as the social values of work, as emphasized in the study of El-Nabalawi (2014). Moreover, the study of Kazim (2006) shows that the majority of respondents prefer professional careers because they guarantee financial stability, and there are also those who opt for self-employment which generates a good income. Moreover, because it enables them to make money, youth prefer work over education. This is revealed in the study conducted by Wray-Lake (2009), which shows that job security has become less important for adolescents in the present times compared to the 1980s and 1990s. While there is a decline in the value of the implicit rewards of work among adolescents, the explicit and financial rewards are clearly on the rise. Moreover, the study of the National Center for Statistics and Information (2015) has confirmed that approximately one third of enrolled students in higher education institutions prefer working in the private sector, which is considered a change in the orientations of youth and is, to a large extent, consistent with the present study.

Based on what has been discussed so far, the study recommends the following:

- The outcome of this kind of study can be used in the management of the manpower sector as it helps the recruiting bodies understand that the young generation of workers today differs from its counterpart in the past; therefore, it is necessary for them to adjust their administrative strategies to deal with the new generation.
- Focus should be put on the culture and system of work values through dissemination and awareness both among members of the general community and workers at all levels and sectors. Moreover, the various labor organizations should be involved in supporting and spreading the values of the institution, in addition to advocating the need for the compatibility of the personal orientations of young workers with the values of organization.
- To consolidate the culture of work and its orientations among different segments of society, especially youth, the means of intervention should be determined through emphasis on the social environment in order to understand the behavioral patterns associated with work, given that these patterns reflect the beliefs and traditions. Hence, the process of qualitative intervention to improve or elevate the work culture and its orientations becomes more effective only if we take into consideration the relevant social context. Instilling the work culture and its values often starts at school age and moves progressively toward older age categories. This is carried out in parallel with the informative endeavor to disseminate the culture of work and the important values of work through workshops, forums, conferences and various activities held in the workplace — be they in the services, production or commercial sectors.

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