

# ME

## HR & LEARNING

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## Aidan O' Brien, Strategic Advisor to Founders, Dubai, UAE

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More than 152,000 Emiratis employed in the private sector by end of June 2025

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**ME**  
**HR & LEARNING**

# EDITOR'S NOTE

**Hello Reader,**

Get ready to ignite those creative engines because we're about to take this issue to new heights! With every article, every story, and every insight, we're not just sharing knowledge—we're sparking a revolution in HR and Learning that will inspire, engage, and transform our readers like never before!

Our mission? Simple: To deliver content that's not just read, but felt. We're talking articles that make hearts race, interviews that spark "Aha!" moments, and stories that leave a lasting impact on every professional who turns through our virtual pages.

This isn't just another issue—it's a rallying cry to every HR and L&D professional out there. We're here to challenge the status quo, break boundaries, and set the stage for the future of work. We're creating a buzz that's going to resonate across the industry, from boardrooms to break-rooms, and everywhere in between.

We are the ones who bring the human back into Human Resources, the learners back into Learning & Development, and the wowfactor into every single piece we produce. Let's make this issue not just a success, but a phenomenon!

So, buckle up and let's unleash our creativity, passion, and power to create something that's not just good—it's outrageously outstanding and outshining awesomeness! Let's make this issue a knockout, together!

Remember, we're not just a magazine. We're a movement. Let's make some magic happen! Here's to creating something

Extraordinary.

## The Team



Paul Michael G.



Maggie Williams



Rohit Bassi



Uzair Hassan



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## Spotlight on Aidan O' Brien, Strategic Advisor to Founders, Dubai, UAE

Aidan O' Brien shares his story of finding opportunity in Dubai

- **Tell us about you, your experience, and your time in the Middle East.**

I first moved to the UAE in 2017. I had been in and out a few times for some events and every time I landed in Dubai - it just felt right. I don't know how to explain it but I do believe there are some places in the world that suit us individually more than others. And the combination of year round sunshine and endless exciting opportunities to make an impact and reach people from all over the world just excited me from the beginning. I absolutely love the Middle East, the culture, the clarity, the identity and the intention. It is so forward thinking and so dynamic - I think it is the perfect place for visionaries to be.



↑ Aidan O'Brien, CEO, Strategic Advisor to Founders, Dubai, UAE

- **How would you describe the culture of your business?**

When an individual or company is coming to me I know what type of person they have to be to even have the conversation. They are open minded and have the humility to learn and to grow, both personally and professionally, so immediately there is a powerful culture. Average people would rather invest time to try and get better because they value money more, but the super successful know that time is more valuable than money so they invest money to buy their time back. With each client, there is a hunger to achieve mastery. There is a desire to make quantum leaps. So every day is exciting.

My business is all about activating people, resetting their mindset and waking them up to their true potential. It is also about showing people how to perform at a higher level professionally, whether that's in leadership, sales or shifting company wide culture. If the client is a leader or team of leaders, my focus is to shift their personal philosophy first and increase the awareness to facilitate the highest level of execution going forward.

- **How do you get to work with some of the best decision-makers and best companies in UAE and around the world?**

I always say I am seeking people who are seeking me. I am not looking to work with everyone. Working with companies and speaking and coaching all around the world for more than 15 years now, I know what people are dealing with, what they are seeking and what companies have to do to succeed - so my work is simple. Keep over-delivering to my

clients, achieve incredible results transforming both the individual and the business and from there the next client finds me. If you become good enough at what you do and you do it for long enough, the right people will find you. And if you make it your business to be findable to the right people then doors will open faster than you can imagine.

- **What are your biggest challenges in the next 5 years?**

It may sound like a dreamy answer but I genuinely don't feel like I have any challenges in the next 5 years. Because the truth is we all have challenges day to day. Yes, sometimes we face greater challenges than other days, but the mindset is the same. It doesn't matter what you face, you will overcome it. In fact you have overcome every challenge you have ever had already, so why wouldn't you overcome the next one? This is also why it is important to keep developing yourself and why mindset is 80% psychology and mindset. Everything comes down to the meaning you give it and to the frame you put around it. For example if you believe it's hard to do business in summer - it will be hard for you. But if you feel summer is an amazing opportunity because all your competition is sleeping then your summer will be better and your year end bottom line will also be. I always tell my clients (and this is a chapter name in my upcoming book) "your chaos is your communication" and what that means is everything that happens to you is telling you something. It is not inherently good or bad, it is just a signal and if you change your frame to this isn't happening "to me", it is happening "for me", you will see no challenge is too big.

- **What are the skills and competencies you see most people missing in the job market or with the company you work with?**

The biggest issue I see globally, not just in the UAE is people work harder on their job than they do on themselves. This means people are so focused on hitting targets, or reaching the deadline that they leave no time to develop the mindset or skills that will actually give them the leverage to make their job easier, or even multiply their results. When I go into a company and I train their sales staff or I work with the leaders teams the two main things I work on with them is mindset and skills. Without the right attitude, awareness and approach it doesn't matter how good the skills are, so mindset comes first. But when mindset and identity are locked in and people know who they are and why they do what they do - then it's about the skills. I call them "the skills that pay the bills" because they do. And the most important skill is communication and more specifically influence. Influence is the most important skill in business and I could argue the world. Because everything you want, other people have, and if you want something from someone else you have to be able to influence them. For any professional at any stage of their career - levelling up in communication can completely transform their performance, their culture, their results and their quality of life. I can't overstate the importance of this enough.



## Spotlight on HR & Learning in the MENA with Pearson Vue

Dr Gary Gates MD & Raed Rajeh, Pearson VUE director of Business Development share their perspective.

- **How would you describe the culture of your business, especially in terms of learning, innovation, and talent development? (Dr Gary Gates)**

Pearson is recognised globally as a leader in lifelong learning. Our mission is to empower individuals to reach their full potential and achieve their goals through education. As an organisation dedicated to lifelong learning, we are committed to making a positive impact by developing innovative products, fostering a culture of high performance and continual learning.

- **From your perspective, what are the most urgent workforce challenges facing the Middle East in the next five years? (Raed Rajeh)**

Recent government policies across the Middle East have prioritised widespread upskilling in emerging technologies, recognising the critical importance of preparing the workforce for rapid digital transformation. According to the Pearson 2025 Value of IT Certification Candidate report, 92% of respondents indicated that certification has become more important than ever in the

current technological landscape. The report further highlights that over 80% of professionals believe that advances in artificial intelligence will significantly impact both existing roles and the creation of new career pathways within the next five years.

In light of these findings, the region's focus on AI-related skills and certifications is strategically aligned with anticipated shifts in the job market.

- **Your latest Pearson VUE report reveals a surge in certification interest. Why do you think certification has become so important right now? (Dr Gary Gates)**

A significant increase in the emphasis on certification can be attributed to several key factors highlighted in the 2025 Pearson Value of IT Certification Candidate report. The report reveals that 92% of respondents now



• **Raed Rajeh**, Pearson VUE Director of Business Development

consider certification more important than ever due to the rapidly evolving technological landscape. The findings underscore the critical role of certification as both a benchmark of proficiency and a strategic tool for workforce resilience and adaptability.

The majority of candidates cited skilling as their primary reason for pursuing certification, with 43% of respondents selecting this as their top motivation. Next motivation for 24% of candidates was to qualify for job promotions. 14% of candidates indicated that enhancing their resumes and professional profiles was most important.

- **How are certifications helping organizations and professionals stay ahead in an AI-driven world? – (Dr Gary Gates)**

Artificial intelligence is anticipated to impact the majority of industries and professions in the foreseeable future, representing a significant disruptive force comparable to the advent of the internet. According to the Pearson 2025 Value of IT Certification Candidate report, 69% of candidates reported that their employers have either started or increased investments in AI. In Middle East and Africa, 62% of candidates reported increases in AI investments by their employers. Certifications play a critical role in equipping individuals with the necessary skills and validated proof of their competencies to meet evolving workforce demands.

- **What specific skills or competencies should HR and L&D leaders in the region focus on today to stay competitive? (Raed Rajeh)**

A key competency that transcends specific industries or professions is the capacity for continuous learning, often referred to as “learning to learn.” Given the accelerated pace of technological advancement, the nature of many occupations is subject to significant change over relatively short periods—such as three, five, or ten years. To remain relevant, individuals must recognise the imperative of lifelong learning..



• **Dr Gary Gates**, MD, Pearson Vue, Dubai

- **Can you share any insights on how Middle East companies are approaching upskilling and talent retention through learning and certification?**  
**(Raed Rajeh)**

The Middle East is at a pivotal moment in its workforce evolution. With national strategies like Saudi Vision 2030 and the UAE's AI roadmap leading the way, companies are rethinking how they build and retain talent. Upskilling is no longer a side initiative, it's a strategic priority.

What's especially encouraging is how organizations are embedding learning into the employee experience.

Certifications, particularly in areas like AI, cloud, and cybersecurity, are being used not just to validate skills, but to open doors - whether that's a promotion, a new role, or a broader career path.

Ultimately, the organizations that succeed will be those that treat learning as a long-term investment, not a one-time fix. In a region defined by ambition and transformation, that mindset is what will set the leaders apart.

- **What advice would you give to HR and learning professionals who are rethinking their workforce strategies for the future? (Dr Gary Gates)**

HR and learning professionals reassessing workforce strategies should prioritise the cultivation of a continuous learning culture within their organisations. According to the 2025 Pearson Value of IT Certification Candidate report, 92% of respondents believe that certification is more critical now than ever before, largely due to rapid technological advancements. In addition to technical proficiency, the advancement of essential skills such as critical thinking, effective communication, interpersonal abilities, and problem-solving is increasingly valued by employers. Establishing a learning environment that supports the ongoing acquisition of both technical and soft skills is therefore vital for maintaining workforce competitiveness and organisational resilience in an AI-driven economy.



## Eleven Percent of GDP lost to Employee Disengagement

Josh Freedman of 6seconds counts the cost of Low Emotional Intelligence

### The Business Case for Emotional Intelligence

What's the most expensive thing in your business that no one's talking about? Low emotional intelligence. When leaders don't manage people well.... when they react instead of respond, avoid tough conversations, or fail to build trust... the cost is enormous.

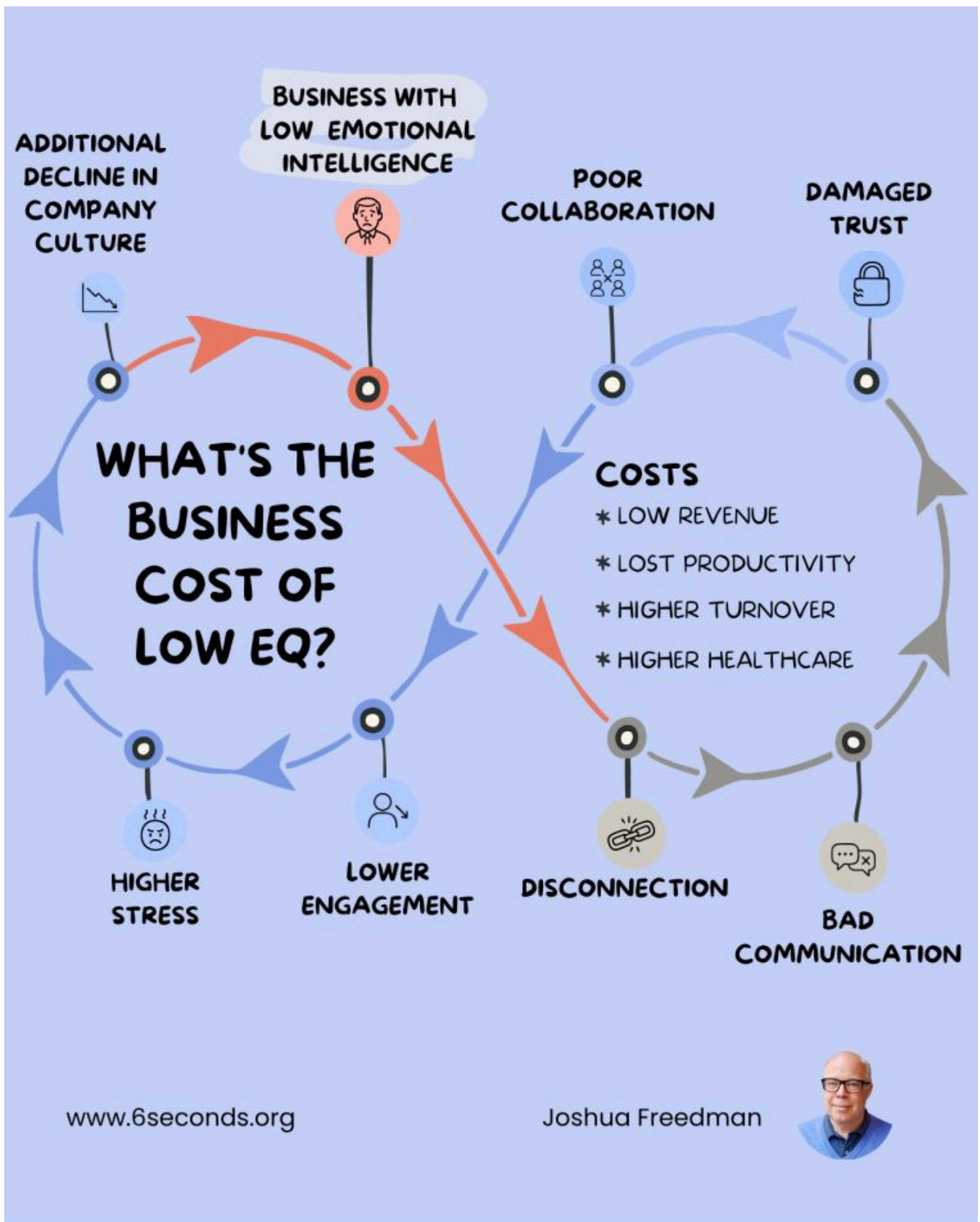
**In fact, 11% of global GDP is lost to disengaged employees.**

In this infinity loop from The Business Case for Emotional Intelligence, you can see how low EQ drives tangible, recurring costs

1. Poor people-management fuels disconnection.
2. That erodes communication, fractures trust, and creates confusion.
3. Which leads to more errors. More accidents. Higher healthcare costs. Absenteeism. Reputational damage. Bad customer relationships.
4. And turnover.
5. Which leads to a worse culture.- It's a self-reinforcing spiral: broken culture → poor performance → even weaker culture. But flip the loop, and the story changes. When emotional intelligence is woven into culture:

- People work better together
- Engagement and retention rise
- Customers feel it — and stay loyal
- **A 5% increase in customer loyalty yields a 25% increase in profit.**

That's the power of emotional intelligence in action. Where do you see low EQ creating friction — or high EQ creating flow?



## A Small Step That Makes a Big Difference: Transforming Education Through NLP and Visual Learning

ME HR & Learning talks to Sara Haboubi, Jumpstart Learning Creator, Dubai

What if a single conversation could change the trajectory of a person's life? For Sara Haboubi, that moment came in 2002 when she experienced a 30-minute NLP session that unravelled a belief she'd unconsciously carried for 16 years — that being smart was unsafe. This hidden decision, made at age 15 to avoid bullying, unknowingly derailed her academic journey and planted seeds of self-doubt for years to come.

But it also sparked something else: a relentless drive to help others avoid the same fate.

Fast forward two decades, and Sara has trained over 80 schools in her ground-breaking Jumpstarting Word and Number Skills for Educators process — a neuro-inclusive visual learning approach that is now changing the lives of students and teachers across the globe.



➔ **Sara Haboubi**, Jumpstart Learning Creator, Dubai

Born from a fusion of Neuro Linguistic Programming (NLP) and the innovative insights of dyslexic author Olive Hickmott, Jumpstarting focuses on two overlooked yet crucial elements: helping students enter an optimal emotional state for learning and training them to use mental imagery to grasp words and numbers. The result? Students once labelled as “behind” or “unable” begin thriving in classrooms — often within minutes.

Recently, a six month project with a British curriculum school in Karachi, the impact was both



Recently, a six month project with a British curriculum school in Karachi, the impact was both measurable and remarkable:

- **Word Skills:** Spelling accuracy jumped 30–70%, sentence construction improved, and students gained up to a year in reading fluency.
- **Number Skills:** Maths accuracy rose 50–70%, with fewer number reversals and more confident problem-solving using visual strategies.
- **Classroom Engagement:** Over 80% of participating students showed greater confidence, reduced anxiety, and more active participation.
- **Homework:** Parents reported reduced stress, more independence, and a newfound willingness to complete tasks at home.

All of this, from what seems like a small shift — but one with a big ripple effect.

For HR leaders, policymakers, and educational reformers, the implications are profound. The Jumpstarting process doesn't just improve academic performance; it empowers students to believe in themselves, equipping them with skills that serve them long beyond the classroom. It also enables teachers to reach neurodiverse learners in a way that feels inclusive, effective, and deeply rewarding.

Sara's dream is bold yet achievable: for every educator to be trained in this process so no student has to be labelled or left behind simply because they learn differently. And she believes Dubai is uniquely positioned to lead this movement. With its pioneering inclusion policies, commitment to innovation, and a government championing opportunities for People of Determination, the UAE is fertile ground for scaling neuro-inclusive education that delivers real, lasting change.

In Sara's words:



**Rather than treating dyslexia and other learning differences as problems, we can teach differently — so every student can learn successfully.**



It started with one question, one conversation, and one decision to see things differently. That's all it takes to spark transformation — in a student, a classroom, or an entire education system.

Because sometimes, a small step really does make the biggest difference.



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## AI based Screening to Challenge Traditional Hiring in Data Analytics

Generative AI powered tools to drive the screening process says Jadd Elliot Dib, Founder & CEO, Pangaea X



➔ **Jadd Elliot Dib**, Founder and CEO of data analytics platform Pangaea X.

Unlike keyword-based ATSes, generative AI-powered screening tools will improve the hiring process by making the screening and interview process more perceptive by drawing out the candidate's capabilities. This enables recruiters and hiring managers to make more data-driven decisions regarding data analytics talent, ultimately benefiting the organization.

In today's competitive talent landscape, organizations face various challenges in hiring for data analytics roles. Recruiters are inundated with resumes, hiring timelines are shrinking, and the demand for data analytics talent continues to outpace supply as more businesses embrace digital transformation. Generative artificial intelligence (AI) provides the capability to conduct more systematic and objective candidate assessments, focusing on skills rather than flashy words on resumes.

As with any novel technology, there is skepticism regarding AI across multiple industries and disciplines. However, as the public becomes more exposed to AI, it is becoming clearer that the most effective use of AI is to complement and aid humans – not as a replacement. Recruiters and human resources (HR) professionals will benefit from AI making the screening process more efficient and cost-effective compared to past methods. While applicant tracking systems (ATS) have been in use for a few decades, most of these use keywords to filter candidates' resumes. This has led to applicants optimizing their resumes to get past the ATS. Unfortunately, it becomes a game of applicants saying the right words and ticking the right boxes, instead of showcasing the skills they can bring to the organization. On the human side of things, [bias in hiring](#) is an issue that the HR field has been grappling with for a long time, which can and should be mitigated by technology.



Instead of administering coding challenges or traditional tests, generative AI-powered tools allow conversation-based assessments through natural language processing (NLP). NLP is a field of AI that enables computers to understand, interpret, and generate human language. This includes analyzing sentiment and understanding user intent. With regard to skill verification, NLP probes into the candidate's domain knowledge, problem-solving thinking, decision-making approach, communication clarity, as well as cultural and behavioral alignment with the organization. Furthermore, computer vision technology can be integrated into the process, enabling the system to monitor and analyze facial cues to complement speech patterns and content depth.

Additionally, AI screening programs are more flexible. Keyword-based programs are too rigid, while human recruiters cannot be expected to have deep technical knowledge, especially for large organizations that hire a wide variety of roles. With generative AI, experts, whether inside or outside the organization, can review and customize the interview logic and question flows to train the AI, ensuring that interviews are fit for purpose in hiring specific roles.

AI-based tools create a structured interview experience that's designed to test how users think, respond, and behave. Combined with behavioral analytics, these deliver deeper real-

time insights into the candidate's capabilities, so recruiters can match candidates' real experience with the on-the-ground expectations of the role. Generative AI skill verification also determines interview eligibility instantly, flagging gaps, strengths, and unique value in seconds. This addresses the weaknesses of traditional screening methods, which can be shallow, biased, or misaligned. Creating a skill-first evaluation that minimizes human subjectivity is necessary, especially for data analytics roles that require objectivity and technical excellence.

As organizations continue to scale their digital capabilities, the demand for skilled data analytics professionals will only intensify. Generative AI offers a transformative opportunity for HR teams to move beyond outdated processes and embrace a smarter, skill-first approach. By leveraging technologies like natural language processing and behavioral analytics, recruiters can gain deeper insights into candidates' true capabilities that traditional methods often miss. Rather than replacing human judgment, AI enhances it, enabling recruiters to make faster, fairer, and more informed decisions. In a field built on data, it's only fitting that the hiring process evolves to reflect the same precision and intelligence.

## Al Ghurair Recognised for Third Year as Top Employer in the UAE

AL Ghurair reaffirms commitment to People-First Culture with GREAT PLACE TO WORK® CERTIFICATION

Al Ghurair is proud to announce it has been officially certified as a Great Place to Work®. This certification showcases the company's commitment to creating a culture built on trust, pride, a sense of community, and working aligned to their purpose of 'In Pursuit of Better'. It also reflects the spirit of the workplace operating as One Al Ghurair, a unified organisation built on shared values, strong relationships and a collective vision. The recognition comes in addition to Al Ghurair being certified as a Top Employer in the UAE for three consecutive years.

The Great Place to Work® certification is based on employee feedback about their experience working at Al Ghurair, with a focus on trust, pride and camaraderie in the workplace.



**This recognition reflects our firm belief that our people are the heart of our progress.**



 **John Iossifidis**, Group Chief Executive Officer, Al Ghurair.

**We're committed to building a purpose led culture where every individual can thrive, contribute meaningfully, and grow with purpose.**



Sarah Lewis-Kulin, Vice President of Global Recognition at Great Place to Work®, added:



**Great Place To Work Certification is a highly coveted achievement that requires consistent and intentional dedication to the overall employee experience. By successfully earning this recognition, it's clear that Al Ghurair stands out as one of the top companies to work for, providing a great workplace environment for its employees.**



The certification is a testament to Al Ghurair's ongoing commitment to foster a positive and purpose-led culture - one that is based on being people oriented, purpose led, value creating and committed to sustainable excellence.





## Regional Crisis Response Enhanced with a State-of-the-Art Facility

Enhanced Dubai Assistance Centre Reopens Amid Rising Regional Risk Demands

As organisations across the Middle East and Africa face growing complexities in health, security, and operational risk, International SOS - the global leader in health and security risk management—has announced the reopening of its upgraded Dubai Assistance Centre.

The relaunch marks a significant milestone, coinciding with the Group's 40th anniversary, and underscores its four-decade legacy of safeguarding workforce wellbeing and delivering critical support during times of crisis.



**The enhancement of our Dubai Assistance Centre is a strategic investment in our ability to better serve organisations in one of the most dynamic regions of the world.**



said Sebastien Bedu, General Manager - Middle East, International SOS.

Over the past year alone, the Assistance Centres around the world have managed more than 300,000 cases, offering 24/7 support in medical and security emergencies,

real-time information and analysis, consulting services, and tailored training. Its critical role in safeguarding employees and operations makes it a lifeline for companies prioritising Duty of Care, business continuity, and talent retention in unpredictable environments.

Another significant enhancement for the centre is the integration of real-time risk intelligence through a strategic alliance with Ontic, a leading provider of Connected Intelligence software for threat management. This collaboration will integrate Ontic's advanced security technology with the global assistance capabilities, intelligence network, and decades of travel risk expertise of International SOS. The partnership aims to deliver unified solutions that empower security professionals to proactively manage threats, activate crisis response, and ensure the safety of their workforce worldwide reinforcing the Centre's position as an essential business resilience asset.

Operational resilience as a focus is underpinned by robust mitigation and response to health, wellbeing and security risks. The enhancement of the Dubai Assistance Centre serves as a reminder of how vital reliable infrastructure and intelligence are to businesses today -

particularly in regions where crises are not a question of if, but when.

When an individual or company is coming to me I know what type of person they have to be to even have the conversation. They are open minded and have the humility to learn and to grow, both personally and professionally, so immediately there is a powerful culture. Average people would rather invest time to try and get better because they value money more, but the super successful know that time is more valuable than money so they invest money to buy their time back. With each client, there is a hunger to achieve mastery. There is a desire to make quantum leaps. So every day is exciting.

My business is all about activating people, resetting their mindset and waking them up to their true potential. It is also about showing people how to perform at a higher level

professionally, whether that's in leadership, sales or shifting company wide culture. If the client is a leader or team of leaders, my focus is to shift their personal philosophy first and increase the awareness to facilitate the highest level of execution going forward.



**This centre is the operational backbone for hundreds of organisations who rely on us for rapid crisis response, health and security insights, and the tools they need to protect their workforce and operations.**





# AI IN EDUCATION

From 'about AI' to 'with AI': lessons that build judgment, creativity and real-world workflows.

Chat With History

## AI FOR TEACHERS

The workload on teachers is ever-increasing, with thousands leaving the profession each year. They won't be replaced by robots- they'll be succeeded by forward-thinking teachers who use new tools to streamline the grind and refocus on what matters most: pupils. Let AI be your co-pilot: cut the time spent on admin, and spark fresh, creative ideas when you're running on empty. LessonLab makes this simple. Need a plan for a lesson you've never taught—or something clear for a cover supervisor? Use our planning tools. Need evidence-informed strategies for tricky behaviour? Our Behaviour Management tool helps identify the root cause and suggests practical actions. Facing report season? Progress Reports turns teacher notes into accurate, personalised write-ups in minutes. And next in this fast-moving space: turning data into impact- securely using student progress to tailor every learner's journey, with teachers in control. We've got that coming soon!



**George Wescott**  
Primary Teacher  
Founder of LessonLab

## AI FOR STUDENTS

We prepare students for the “big-wide-world”. You know, the one where we regularly use pythagorus or simplifying quadratic equations... right? What we should be doing is preparing students to succeed with the tools they'll actually have. But we can't just hand out ChatGPT and call it a day. That's where Study Rooms by LessonLab comes in: a safeguarded, teacher-led chatbot that coaches thinking without doing the work. You set the brief (“Talk through the strategy for fractions”), and the system keeps pupils on task- if someone asks for the final answer or drifts off-topic, it blocks the request and alerts you. Students build real tool-fluency- prompting, checking, citing, reflecting- while you keep full oversight. To remove language barriers, Language Boards turn key vocabulary into on-device sound boards: auto-created, tappable buttons with icons and correct pronunciation, so every learner can hear it, say it, and use it confidently in class.



## F5 Research Finds Most Enterprises Still Fall Short in AI Readiness

Most companies will face security and governance issues blocking scalability

### 2025 State of AI Application Strategy Report,

F5, the global leader in delivering and securing every app and API, today unveiled its **2025 State of AI Application Strategy Report**, revealing that only 2% of global organizations are highly ready to scale AI securely across operations. The report compiles insights from 650 global IT leaders and additional research with 150 AI strategists, representing organizations with at least \$200 million in annual revenue.

The report unveils stark truths about the state of AI readiness for enterprises today and their ability to adapt at sufficient speeds to keep pace with new innovations. The most notable findings of the report reveal that while 77% of companies demonstrate moderate AI readiness, most lack robust governance and cross-cloud security, exposing them to risks. Meanwhile, 21% of companies fall into the low-readiness category, limiting their competitive edge as AI transforms industries.

The report provides a snapshot of the latest trends in enterprises grappling with embracing AI. Nearly two-thirds of survey respondents (65%) use two or more paid models and at least one open-source model. The average organization uses three models, and the use of multiple models correlates with deployment in more than one environment or location. The majority of models in use today are paid models such as GPT-4, but open-source alternatives are also popular. The top open-source models cited are Meta's Llama

variants, Mistral AI variants, and Google's Gemma.

### Recommendations to Improve AI Readiness

The report highlights critical cybersecurity concerns as organizations scale AI capabilities, revealing concerning trends about enterprises' ability to tackle the complexity of securing AI workloads. Key cybersecurity trends identified in the report include:

- **Organizations see AI as a viable cybersecurity asset:** 71% of all respondents already use AI to augment security.
- **AI-specific protections are lacking:** Only 18% of moderately ready organizations have deployed an AI firewall, with 47% aiming to have done so within a year.
- **Data governance weaknesses:** Just 24% of organizations practice continuous data labeling, indicating reduced transparency and increased risks of adversarial attacks.
- **Cross-cloud inconsistencies:** Hybrid environments create governance gaps, leaving workflows and data exposed to vulnerabilities.
- **Expanded attack surface:** The use of diverse AI models exacerbates risks without proper control frameworks for open-source tools.



**While most companies demonstrate moderate AI readiness, they still need to ensure robust governance and comprehensive cross-cloud security to avoid exposure to significant risks.** ”



**The research in the State of AI Application Strategy Report aligns with what we're observing across the Middle East, where many organizations are increasingly integrating AI into their operations, often without all the necessary levels of governance or safeguards in place.** ”

### Cybersecurity Challenges in AI Adoption

The report highlights critical cybersecurity concerns as organizations scale AI capabilities, revealing concerning trends about enterprises' ability to tackle the complexity of securing AI workloads. Key cybersecurity trends identified in the report include:

- **Organizations see AI as a viable cybersecurity asset:** 71% of all respondents already use AI to augment security.
- **AI-specific protections are lacking:** Only 18% of moderately ready organizations have deployed an AI firewall, with 47% aiming to have done so within a year.
- **Data governance weaknesses:** Just 24% of organizations practice continuous data labeling, indicating reduced transparency and increased risks of adversarial attacks.
- **Cross-cloud inconsistencies:** Hybrid environments create governance gaps, leaving workflows and data exposed to vulnerabilities.
- **Expanded attack surface:** The use of diverse AI models exacerbates risks without proper control frameworks for open-source tools.



📍 **Mohammed Abukhater**, RVP for the Middle East, Türkiye, and Africa at F5

## From Cloud to AI. How Tech Leaders are Investing in Skills Development to Drive Transformation

New Coursera report: UAE Tech Leaders Double Down on Cloud & GenAI Skills to Fuel Digital Transformation

New global Coursera report, in partnership with Amazon Web Services, highlights UAE tech leaders' strategic focus on skills development to keep pace with technology and stay ahead of security threats

To download the full report and explore global and UAE-specific insights, [click here](#).

A majority of UAE technology leaders identify cloud (93%) and Generative AI (GenAI) (89%) transformation as top business priorities over the next three years, recognizing both as foundational to future growth. That's according to [new research](#) from leading global online learning platform Coursera, Inc. (NYSE: COUR), developed in partnership with Amazon Web Services (AWS).

**Kais Zribi, Coursera's General Manager for the Middle East and Africa**, said:

"While automation is vital to transforming teams, workflows, and business operations, the UAE data reveal that strategic investments in human capital through upskilling and reskilling will be crucial to driving innovation. As organizations look to fully harness the potential of cloud and AI, investing equally in technology and people will be foundational to building a future-ready workforce.



**This report delivers a clear mandate for technology leaders: investing in skills development must be a cornerstone of every transformation strategy.**



The report also highlights that 95% of tech leaders worldwide view cloud transformation as a key business goal. Globally, foundational skills are prioritized, with 63% ranking cloud skills, such as cloud development and engineering, as the most critical, followed by data (58%) and cybersecurity (54%). AI skills rank fourth, with 47% identifying them as important over the next three years.

Titled From Cloud to AI: How Tech Leaders are Investing in Skills Development to Drive Transformation, the report offers key insights into how organizations and their senior technology leaders are strategically addressing skills gaps to meet their digital transformation goals.

Core findings show that UAE tech leaders view keeping pace with

technology (61%) and staying ahead of security threats (60%) as the most critically important drivers of skills development. Optimizing cloud spend (59%) and managing complex infrastructures (52%) were also cited as major concerns, underscoring the urgent need for a skilled workforce.

Globally, tech leaders report clear benefits from investing in skills development, including enhanced performance and productivity (72%), greater workforce agility (67%), and improved talent mobility (58%).

More than half (52%) of global tech leaders expect 30-50% of tasks to be automated. Nearly all (99%) anticipate their codebases will be partially AI-generated or developed with AI assistance in the next three years, with 86% expecting 20-50% of their codebase to involve AI in its creation. Yet, 88% believe human

contributions remain irreplaceable, emphasizing that AI success depends on greater investment in talent development. In fact, 77% of leaders globally recognize that upskilling existing employees will be essential to achieving transformation goals within the next 12 to 18 months.

The global study was conducted across the US, the UK, India, the UAE, France, and Mexico between March and April 2025. It captures insights

from more than 750 technology leaders responsible for large-scale digital transformation initiatives at organizations with over 1,000 employees and average annual revenues exceeding US\$100 million (with UAE-based companies averaging US\$21.6 billion).

To download the full report and explore global and UAE-specific insights, [click here](#).





# *The Hidden Pitfalls* of L&D Projects – And How to Fix Them

Many organizations invest heavily in learning and development, yet too many initiatives fall short. The issue isn't commitment, it's recurring mistakes that quietly undermine success.

*At SkillUp MENA*, we've seen what derails projects and how to avoid it:



## **Scope Creep**

Goals expand beyond control.



## **The Ghost Client**

Stakeholders disengage mid-project.



## **The Customization Paradox**

Over-tailoring delays delivery.



## **The Forgotten Campaign**

Poor promotion reduces adoption.

We don't just deliver training, we partner with you to ensure learning is impactful, scalable, and engaging.

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## New Slack Research: Daily AI Usage Among Workers Surges 233%

Workers who use AI daily are 81% more satisfied with their job

Slack's latest Workforce Index revealed a significant increase in **AI** adoption and excitement among desk workers, with daily AI usage higher by an astounding **233%** in just six months. The survey of 5,000 global desk workers also found that AI has emerged as a clear competitive advantage, as workers who use AI daily prove to be **64%** more productive and **81%** more satisfied with their job than colleagues not using AI.

The Index reveals that workers are using AI to level up, going beyond just automating tasks. **96%** of workers have used AI to perform tasks they previously didn't have the skills to do themselves, and today's workers are **154%** more likely to turn to **AI agents** to help them perform tasks better and more creatively, rather than to just simply automate their work.

**Why it matters:** While workers have been **slower to adopt AI** than executives, adoption has surged over the past few months, with **60%** of desk workers now using AI and **40%** using AI agents. And Slack's latest Index shows that trust and confidence in AI grows with use; workers who use AI agents daily are twice as likely to trust them. With workers all-in on AI, businesses can deliver on their AI vision and unlock the full potential of digital labour within their organizations.

**Middle East perspective:**



**What we see amongst organizations in the Middle East**

**reflects the global research in Slack's Workforce Index, with strong adoption of AI agents among workers, and particularly millennials,**



said Mohammed Alkhotani, SVP and GM, Salesforce Middle East.

**By the numbers:**

**AI adoption, trust and excitement are soaring. Since November 2024:**

- AI adoption among workers has risen **50%**, with **60%** of workers now using AI
- Daily AI usage among workers is **233%** higher
- **40%** of workers have worked with an agent – and **23%** have offloaded tasks to agents to complete on their behalf
- Daily users of AI agents are **more than 2x** more likely to express high trust in AI across areas like data protection, accuracy, and decision-making

**Millennials are emerging as the surprise AI power user at work.**

- **30%** of Millennials say they thoroughly understand AI agents – edging out even Gen Z (**22%**)
- **68%** of Millennials use AI for strategic work like drafting, summarizing, and ideating

- 43% of executives report daily AI use, What we see amongst organizations in the Middle

visit: [www.salesforce.com](https://www.salesforce.com).



**This is a positive development and is helping to enhance workers' productivity and creativity. It is important for organizations to nurture this enthusiasm for AI and to ensure they have the right solutions and policies in place to ensure sustainable, long-term success with AI.**

**AI is making workers more productive and enabling them to grow into more creative, strategic work.**

- Compared to non-users, daily AI users are more likely to report "very good":
- Productivity (**64%**)
- Focus (**58%**)
- Job satisfaction (**81%**)

**The top three ways AI / AI agents have increased worker productivity are:**

1. Eliminating need for extensive research

2. Assisting with writing/communication
3. Helping brainstorm to overcome creative blocks

**96%** of AI users have used AI to perform tasks they didn't have the skills to do themselves.

- **72%** want AI agents to augment or automate brainstorming
- **80%** want AI agents to assist with research for deal support
- **82%** want AI agents to create presentations

**AI enhances – not replaces – connection among workers.**

- Daily AI users are **246%** more likely to feel more connected to colleagues and report a 62% higher sense of belonging at work.
- **1 in 3 (34%)** Gen Z say AI has made them feel more connected at work
- **50%** of Gen Z workers – the digital native generation – say AI hasn't changed how often they ask questions or collaborate with teammates.
- In fact, **29%** say it's actually increased their engagement.



◉ **Mohammed Alkhotani**, SVP and GM, Salesforce Middle East.

## UAE Pride In Private Sector National Workforce

His Excellency Dr. Abdulrahman Al Awar, MoHRE, stresses the importance of engagement with Emiratis in the private sector.



welcomed by top executives from the GEMS Education Group, namely, Dino Varkey, Group CEO; Jay Varkey, Deputy CEO; and Fatima Alshamsi, Head of Emiratisation. The visit was part of the Ministry's extensive and diversified

His Excellency Dr. Abdulrahman Al Awar, Minister of Human Resources and Emiratisation, and Acting Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research, reaffirmed the UAE's pride in its national workforce employed in the private sector, praising their meaningful contributions to the country's leadership and competitiveness. He highlighted that the private sector plays a vital role as a strategic partner to the government in nurturing Emirati talent and empowering them within the labour market.

This came during His Excellency's visit to GEMS Dubai American Academy, accompanied by senior officials from the Ministry of Human Resources and Emiratisation (MoHRE), where he met with more than 80 UAE citizens among over 790 employed across 44 establishments within GEMS Education Group. His Excellency was

programme to celebrate workers on International Workers' Day.

Al Awar stressed the importance of continuous engagement with Emiratis working in the private sector to listen to their insights and experiences, understand their professional journeys, and address any challenges they

may face, in an effort to support their job stability and career development. He also highlighted the Ministry's efforts to strengthen partnerships with companies that are committed to meeting Emiratisation targets; this includes organising site visits and highlighting the responsible role these establishments play in advancing government initiatives and supporting the UAE's ambitious vision and future plans.

Moreover, Al Awar urged the Emirati employees he met to continue developing



their skills and to approach their professional roles with a spirit of initiative and contribution. Following a briefing about the training and recruitment programmes that GEMS Education implements, His Excellency praised the institution for its efforts to provide a stable, supportive work environment, and its commitment to Emiratisation.



**Private education is one of the priority sectors in the Emiratisation mandate,**



Al Awar noted. “Efforts to drive Emiratisation in the private sector are steadily progressing towards achieving national targets, in line with the directives of His Highness Sheikh Mansour bin Zayed Al Nahyan, UAE Vice President, Deputy Prime Minister, Chairman of the Presidential Court, and Chairman of the Emirati Talent Competitiveness Council.”

His Excellency commended GEMS Education for its proactive role in achieving Emiratisation targets and its commitment to cultivating an attractive workplace that inspires creativity and excellence.

During his meeting with officials at GEMS Dubai American Academy, Al Awar reaffirmed the key role that Emirati talents play, underlining their competitiveness in the education sector, the added value they bring by supporting innovation, and their ability to navigate contemporary academic requirements related to the economy of the future – all of which is made possible by the level of preparedness of Emirati

professionals, the advanced qualifications of academic institutions and universities in the UAE, and the support provided by the Nafis programme.

For his part, Sunny Varkey, Founder and Executive Chairman of GEMS Education Group, said:



**At GEMS Education, we are committed to supporting the UAE’s Emiratisation strategy. We are proud to welcome so many talented Emiratis to the GEMS family and deeply appreciate their positive contributions to our school communities and the nation’s education sector as a whole. Today, we celebrate the success of our Emiratisation efforts and look forward to continuing this important work together with our MOHRE partners.**



The Ministry of Human Resources and Emiratisation, in collaboration with the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, continues to establish effective partnerships with private sector establishments, and particularly leading education and higher education institutions in the UAE, with the aim of developing advanced academic programmes that equip a new generation of Emirati talent with the skills needed to meet the evolving demands of the labour market and embrace emerging technologies in education.

## MoHRE Gets Tough on Companies Not Complying with Employment Law

Strict Measures Implemented Against Establishments With Workers Not Actively Engaging In Licensed Activities

The Ministry of Human Resources and Emiratisation (MoHRE) has affirmed its commitment to implementing strict measures against establishments that have been flagged for not effectively engaging in their licensed activities and for having one or more registered workers without an actual employment relationship.

Since the beginning of the year, the Ministry's monitoring system has detected around 1,300 establishments, owned by approximately 1,800 employers, that were not effectively practicing their licensed activities, despite having registered workers without a real employment relationship. Strict measures were taken against these establishments, including suspending the issuance of new work permits, imposing more than AED 34 million in fines on their owners, and placing them in the third category in the classification scheme for private sector establishments.

Furthermore, and as part of the MoHRE's efforts to ensure establishment owners comply with the UAE's human resources laws and regulations, measures were implemented against owners of these establishment to prevent them from registering any new establishments in the Ministry's systems, in line with the provisions of Federal Decree-Law

No. (33) of 2021 on Regulating Labor Relations, Cabinet Resolution No. (21) of 2020 Concerning Service Fees and Administrative Fines in the MoHRE, and Ministerial Resolution No. (318) of 2024 on the Procedure for Addressing Establishments with Registered Employees Not Conducting Their Licensed Activities.

The Ministry of Human Resources and Emiratisation called on employers whose establishments cease operations for any reason to cancel their licenses and settle the status of their workers in accordance with the legal procedures in place in the UAE, in order to avoid legal accountability.

The Ministry went on to emphasise that an inactive licensed establishment maintaining registered workers constitutes a serious violation. The legal consequences apply to both the establishment owners and the registered workers, particularly in cases where no genuine employment relationship exists, a clear violation of the legislation.

The Ministry went on to emphasise that an inactive licensed establishment maintaining registered workers constitutes a serious violation. The legal consequences apply to both the establishment owners and the

registered workers, particularly in cases where no genuine employment relationship exists, a clear violation of the legislation.

The MoHRE highlighted the efficiency and effectiveness of its field-based and smart monitoring and inspection system in detecting and taking action against such establishments. Leveraging comprehensive indicators on each establishment's activities, authorities can assess its operational status. This assessment is based on factors including authorised business activity, the

number of sponsored workers, transaction movements with the Ministry, and other criteria verified through field inspections.

The Ministry of Human Resources and Emiratization expressed confidence in the level of awareness among employers and the community regarding the seriousness of such violations and their negative impact on the labour market, as well as both parties in the fake employment relation in question, urging the public to report any unlawful practices through its call centre on 60059000, or its smart application and official website.





## Emiratisation Policies and The Nafis Programme Prove Highly Successful

More than 152,000 Emiratis employed in the private sector by end of June 2025



The Ministry of Human Resources and Emiratisation (MoHRE) announced that the number of Emiratis working in the private sector has surpassed 152,000, employed across 29,000 companies as of 30 June 2025 – the deadline set for achieving Emiratisation targets for the first half of the year.

In a statement, the Ministry affirmed that the success of Emiratisation efforts in the private sector demonstrates the effectiveness of Emiratisation policies and the Nafis programme, guided by the vision and directives of the UAE's wise leadership. These efforts are delivering a notable positive impact, as evidenced by the rise in the number of Emiratis taking up private-sector jobs. The results also paint private-sector employment in a positive light for Emirati talent, boosting their competitiveness, highlighting the added value

they bring, and emphasising their contributions towards the sustainability and growth of their companies.

These accomplishments are in line with the directives of His Highness Sheikh Mansour bin Zayed Al Nahyan, UAE Vice President, Deputy Prime Minister, Chairman of the Presidential Court, and Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Emirati Talent Competitiveness Council (ETCC).

MoHRE went on to note that the continuous, record-breaking increase in the number of UAE citizens employed in the private sector reflects the sustainability of the country's economic growth. This is further demonstrated by the entry of new companies into the

national labour market, marking a 33% growth in the total number of establishments over the past year, enabled by the UAE's pioneering and sustainable development model and ongoing efforts to promote a world-class business environment.

Furthermore, the Ministry applauded private-sector companies targeted by Emiratisation policies for their cooperation with regulations and decisions, which indicates their awareness of their responsibilities in that regard, and their role in supporting the UAE's

strategic economic plans and sustainability-driven vision to strengthen Emirati talents' contribution to the national economy. This, in turn, boosts labour market competitiveness by driving sustainability, efficiency, and flexibility, spearheaded by a strong national labour force.

MoHRE asserted its commitment to preserving the progress achieved in the Emiratisation mandate, through sustained partnership with the private sector. The Ministry will continue to offer incentives to companies that comply with Emiratisation targets, including the privileges provided by the Nafis programme with its variety of initiatives and benefits.

Emirati citizens are currently employed across six main economic sectors, namely business services, financial intermediation, trade, repair services, construction, and manufacturing, among others. They hold positions in scientific, technical, and humanitarian disciplines, including roles such as specialists, managers, and administrative staff.

Emirati citizens are currently employed across six main economic sectors, namely business services, financial intermediation, trade, repair services, construction, and manufacturing, among others. They hold positions in scientific, technical, and humanitarian disciplines, including roles such as specialists, managers, and administrative staff.

The Ministry of Human Resources and Emiratisation is looking forward to further progress on the Emiratisation front in the second half of 2025, targeting a 1% increase in the number of Emiratis employed in skilled positions among companies with 50 or more employees. Additionally, companies operating in 14 specified economic activities and employing 20-49 workers in a suitable work environment are required to hire at least one Emirati by the end of the year.

The Ministry provides various channels for reporting negative practices that violate Emiratisation policies in the private sector. Reports can be submitted via the call centre at 600590000, or through the MoHRE smart application or official website.



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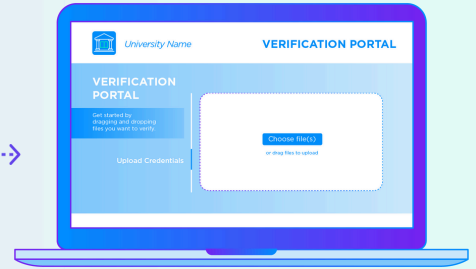
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**Afraa Al Shamsi**

Chief Information Officer at United Arab Emirates University



## Book Review: How Your Inner Game Reflects Your Outer Game

Dubai based author Kamran Tork releases his third book in June

At the core of every human being is a universal desire for fulfillment and Happiness. Regardless of our backgrounds, we all seek fulfillment and contentment that gives life meaning.

To guide you on this journey, the book focuses on two essential questions:

### First, what is my purpose?

This question shapes your actions and career. Without clarity about your purpose, recognizing and sharing your gifts becomes difficult. Your work may feel mundane, and you might struggle to find true motivation and fulfillment.

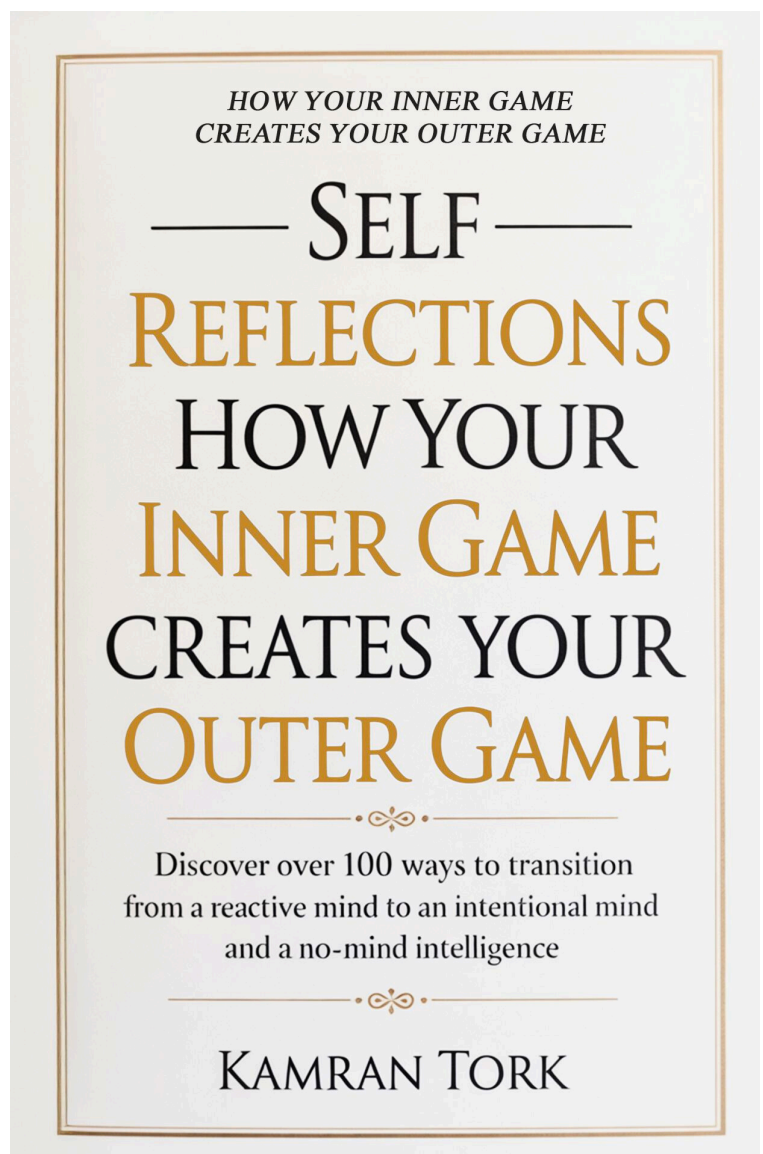
### Second, who am I?

This question uncovers your true self beyond false societal labels.

It's a journey of self-discovery that liberates you from limiting, disempowering perceptions that bind you. It's the master key to a truly authentic and Happy life. Unless you find the answer to these questions, fulfillment and Happiness will elude you.

This insight-packed read is designed to help you discover your authentic voice while fostering a sense of fulfillment. At the same time, the book encourages you to tap into a profound inner state that enhances your decision-making and problem- to navigate our complex world. Every reading, every page, and

every moment of reflection serves as a gentle poke at the shell of old mind, until cracks begin to happen. The person you are when you start the book will undoubtedly differ from the person you become when you turn the last page-solving skills, providing you with the insights and intuition needed.



## Book Review: A Must Read Book for 2025 - Dubai Decoded

Cultural Intelligence Strategies for Thriving in Dubai By Emma Jordaan

Click here to buy: <https://www.infiniteconsultingme.com/dubaidecodedbook>

Dubai is a city like no other – a fast-paced, multicultural hub where opportunity and diversity meet at every turn. But behind the glittering skyline and global business deals lies a crucial truth: success in Dubai isn't just about what you know. It's about how well you understand the people around you.

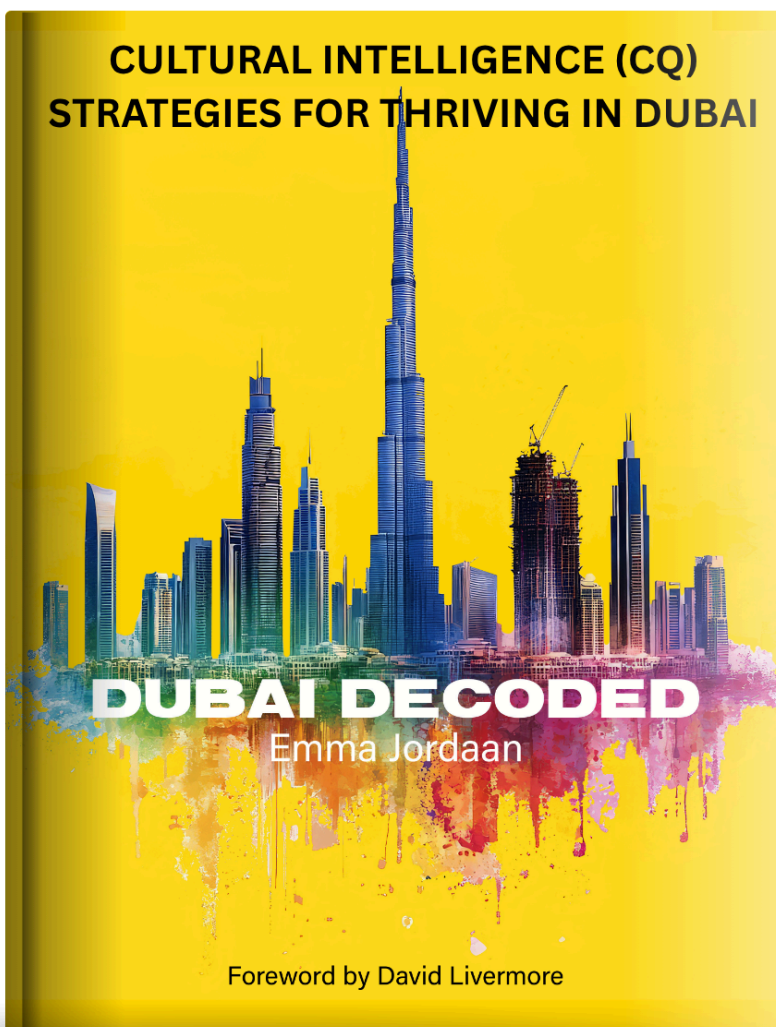
### That's where Dubai Decoded comes in.

This practical and thought-provoking book helps you navigate the rich, complex cultural landscape of Dubai – whether you're new to the region or looking to deepen your impact here.

From the boardroom to the majlis, from client meetings to team dynamics, Dubai Decoded explores how Cultural Intelligence (CQ) can be your most powerful professional advantage.

### What's Inside:

- Real-life stories and lessons learned from over a decade of working in Dubai
- Practical strategies to navigate cultural differences in business and leadership
- Insights into how cultural values shape communication, trust, and collaboration
- Tools to help you build stronger relationships with clients, colleagues, and communities
- A roadmap for building your own CQ so you can thrive in any setting



Whether you're an executive, entrepreneur, expat, or emerging leader, this book is your field guide to understanding Dubai's unique cultural DNA — and how to work with it, not against it.

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## WOW HR & Learning Awards 2025

Recognition for exceptional initiatives dedicated to improving HR & Learning

As part of a new Initiative in 2025 ME HR & Learning set out to recognise individuals and or their organizations who are making exceptional contributions in the **World of Work (WOW)** in HR & Learning throughout our region.

If you recognise individuals', external organisations, or your own please contact us with a short paragraph and photo describing one, some, or all of the questions below:

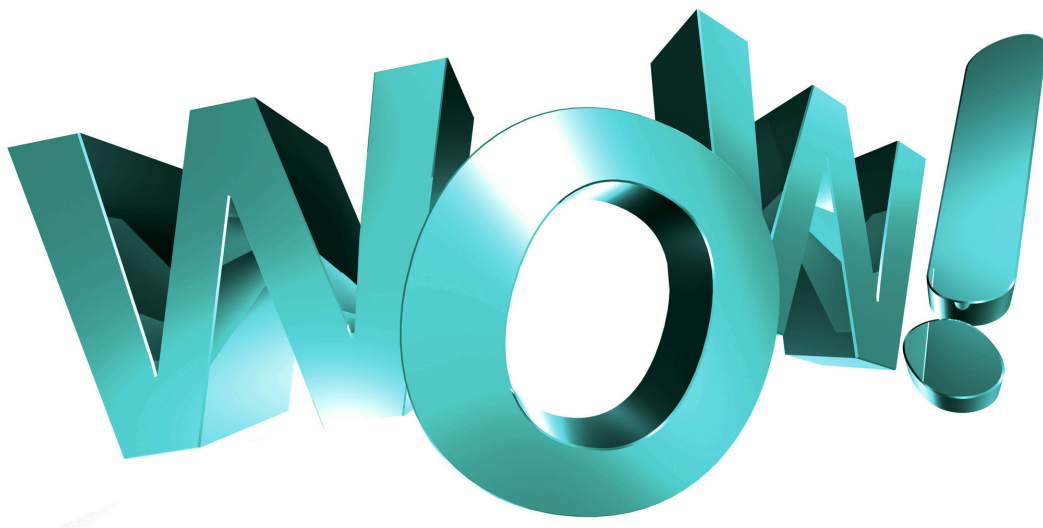
- 1) What new initiatives are you introducing in 2025?
- 2) How are you able to build a better culture of L&D in your organisations?
- 3) What are your key measurements of success in 2025 for HR & Learning?

**We will then:**

- a) Publish this on our site
- b) Add to our next virtual magazine issue
- c) Enter you into the 2025 Annual Awards at the end of the year.

We would love to hear how you are contributing to HR & Learning in 2025.

Email us at [info@me-hrl.com](mailto:info@me-hrl.com)







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## WELCOME TO THE ME HR & LEARNING AWARDS 2025

**The Nominations are now open**

### Introduction

The **ME HR & Learning** Achievement Awards will recognize the region's most outstanding **HR & Learning achievements for 2025**. The winners will be announced before the end of 2025. There is no entry fee for nominations. The selection of winning organizations will be based on comprehensive research, ratings from industry experts, and careful deliberations on their innovations, services, and solutions.

**Awards Entry Submission Deadline date 30th November 2025**

### HR & Learning Award Categories

- HR team of the year
- L&D team of the year
- Best Learning & Development Strategy
- Best Talent Management Strategy
- Best HR technology strategy
- Best recruitment strategy
- Best CSR strategy
- Best Reward & Recognition Strategy
- Best career planning & management strategies
- Best approaches in Talent acquisition
- Best use of Diversity/Inclusion/Equity/ Equality
- Best Talent spotting approaches
- Best advances in gaming/gamification / simulation technology
- Best uses of Mobile learning technology
- Best approaches to being a full-fledged partner to the businesses
- Best blended learning program strategies
- Best Employee engagement & retention strategies
- Best advances in leading a remote workforce
- Best approaches in L&D implementation strategies
- Best approaches in learning measurement
- Best use of support structures post training
- Best onboarding strategies
- Best HIPO strategies
- Best approaches to experiential learning
- Best performance management strategies
- Best use of technology in training
- Best internal awards strategy
- Best flexible work strategy
- Best on-the-job training structure
- Best learning measurement strategies
- Best TNA strategies
- Best use of AI / VR / AR
- Best practices for internal E-learning

### Submission Criteria and details

Name of Organisation

Award category either selected from the above list or create a new one

Your reason why you should win the awards (minimum 100 to a maximum of 1000 words)

Contact email address and telephone number and role of applicant

**GOOD LUCK!!**

email with the subject "**ME HR & Learning Award 2025**" to [info@me-hrl.com](mailto:info@me-hrl.com) with the details completed above.

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