



## Conference Proceeding: Introducing the #iBringGCC Campaign

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**Abstract:** There is a need to address youth employment in the Middle East/North Africa (MENA) region; yet, a mismatch remains between stakeholders. Educational institutions consider themselves to be adequately training students for the future job market and students themselves are overconfident in their work readiness. Yet, private industry, the final arbiter, unanimously says no, youth are not prepared. They lack the right work attitude, mindset and behaviors to make them and the companies for which they work, successful. Given their lack of work experience, relevant educational experiences, such as internships and practicums, something is needed to bridge the gap. The development of character strengths may be the missing key; the #iBringGCC campaign is a regional movement helping bridge the gap between youth and industry by identifying and building upon the right attitudes and mindsets that are relevant and needed in the workplace.

ملخص البحث: هناك احتياج لتناول موضوع توظيف الشباب في منطقة الشرق الأوسط/ وشمال أفريقيا. فلا زال هناك تباين ما بين أرباب العمل والمؤسسات التعليمية، فالأخيرة تعتبر بأنها تقوم بتدريب الطلبة بشكل كافي للانخراط في سوق العمل ويتمتع الطلبة بدورهم بثقة زائدة بأنفسهم وبجاهزيتهم للعمل. لكن، يأتي القطاع الخاص، صاحب الكلمة الفصل، ليقول "لا"، معتبراً أن الشباب غير مؤهلين ولا يتمتعون بالجاهزية للعمل. فالمفهوم الحقيقي للعمل غير موجود لديهم بالإضافة لغياب عقلية التفكير والسلوكيات التي يمكن أن تسهم في تحقيق النجاح لهم وللشركات التي سيعملون لديها. وتبرز الحاجة لسد الخلل إذا ما أخذنا بعين الاعتبار نقص الخبرة المهنية، وضعف الخبرة التعليمية ذات الصلة، تلك المتمثلة بفترات التدريب والتأهيلي العملي خلال الدراسة. وهنا قد يبدو تطوير مكامن القوة في الشخصية هو الحل، لذا تم إطلاق حملة #iBringGCC وهي حملة إقليمية تساعد على سد الفجوة بين الشباب وبين قطاع العمل من خلال ترسيخ التوجهات الصحيحة وتأسيس العقلية المرتبطة واللازمة للانضمام للعمل.

**Keywords:** positive psychology; character strengths; education; workplace; labour market; UAE

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The GCC and MENA region will need an estimated 85 million new jobs by 2020 (International Finance Corporation, 2011) to meet the development of its post-oil knowledge-based economies (Forstenlechner & Baruch, 2013). Young adults will play a role in this economic development and their success will not rest on mere knowledge and skills, but character. Fairness, integrity, honesty, social intelligence, leadership, self-regulation are examples and incidentally, what employers want and what universities are tasked to provide. While strengths are realized through practice in activities like sports, volunteering, competition, travel, work, military service, and recreation clubs like photography and public speaking, they are difficult for youth to come by given the absence of summer and part-time job opportunities, volunteer positions, and internships that place youth at a disadvantage compared to international peers (Al-Waqfi & Forstenlechner, 2012).

Nationalization plans across the GCC region require enhanced character strength development as well. Youth want to work; yet, few are prepared for it and experience a sense of disillusionment, failure, and insecurity instead, with many realizing they did not choose their jobs for the right reasons and their chosen careers do not suit their personalities. A lack of engagement, commitment, and innovation are inevitable. Yet, there are a few bright stars who fail to be recognized. Stereotypes plague the employment of nationals. How can those who show integrity, persistence, and resilience, among other strengths, get noticed?

**What are character strengths?** Character strengths are not the skills one learns like architectural drawing or math, but the traits used in actions, thoughts, and feelings that lead to individuals being *able* to do math, such as persistence, courage, honesty, and self-regulation, which lead to excellence over time (Wood, Linley, Matlby, Kashdan, & Hurling, 2011). Think of them as personality traits, or psychological identities by which individuals are best known (Harzer & Ruch, 2015; Littman-Ovadia, Lazar-Butbul, & Benjamin, 2014). Using one's character strengths appropriately, in the right dose, at the right time and context, brings positive outcomes. For example, young adults who received strengths-based career counselling are much more likely to be employed three months post-intervention than those who receive traditional services (Littman-Ovadia et al., 2014), while the development of character strengths not only increases the chances of employment, but the earning power of individuals too (Lindqvist & Vestman, 2011; Mohanty, 2010). When strengths are used at work, job satisfaction increases as does the ability to deal with work stress (Harzer & Ruch, 2015; Littman-Ovadia & Steger, 2010). Their use also leads to greater student engagement (Madden, Green, & Grant, 2011), wellbeing (Oppenheimer, Fialkov, Ecker, & Portnoy, 2014), as well as better school achievement and social functioning (Shoshani & Slone, 2013). Higher scores also correlate positively with life satisfaction, suggesting that good character is related to living a happy life (Ruch, Huber, Beermann, & Proyer, 2007).

**What's in it for universities and organizations?** Educational institutions are increasingly criticized for failing to equip graduates with skills that matter (Sander, 2017). Youth are socially ill at ease, cannot communicate, make poor decisions, lack integrity, and avoid effort. Positive psychology research shows that knowledge, IQ and classroom skills are not enough to succeed; rather, character, grit and critical thinking count for far more (Butler, Pentoney, & Bong, 2017; Duckworth, Kirby, Tsukayama, Berstein, & Ericsson, 2010; Ericsson, Nandagopal, & Roring,



2009; Kautz, Heckman, Diris, ter Weel, & Borghans, 2014). Boosting character strengths is not only good for student success, but for universities looking to gain credibility in preparing students to succeed not only in class, but in the office, boardroom, in meetings, with customers, their families, and co-citizens. As both universities and organizations look for ways to stand out and recruit talent, the offer of such a program can be attractive, translating into a competitive edge in the marketplace.

The #iBringGCC campaign. “*iBringGCC*” is about showcasing character in youth across short video clips across visual and digital media whereby strengths like integrity, resilience, and persistence are celebrated. Youth identify their strengths and describe when they exhibit these in daily life (i.e., “*I Bring Integrity. At university, I’m the guy who sits in front of the class by myself and refuses to cheat or help others to cheat. I get laughed at for doing it, but it matters to me. I prefer to take a B or a C because I don’t have to worry.*” Mohammed, 19 years old, engineering student, Fujairah). Taking the character strengths quiz helps students become aware of what they can offer in workplaces beyond the mere promise of a high GPA; they are asked to consider what value they expressly deliver. The video clips and postings made by students serve to create a new narrative where good character is celebrated. Finally, the #iBringGCC campaign also serves to engage private industry who can begin to dialogue directly with students. They too can post video clips and comments highlighting what character strengths are valuable in their industry. The campaign is a way for organizations to pre-recruit young adults soon entering their workplaces and helps to sensitize them to prevailing corporate cultures. Industry, educational institutions and students can take part in the campaign across Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn and Twitter. The quiz is free and can be taken here <https://www.viacharacter.org/survey/pro/rsh8ms/account/register>

“Welcome to the #iBringGCC campaign! A movement for Middle East/North African youth to discover who they are and what they bring to the workplace! To participate, complete the character strengths assessment here. As this assessment gives you a chance to understand yourself, it's important to be honest. The assessment will give you a report outlining your top 5 strengths. Once you've got your results, think about how your top 5 strengths can be an asset to a workplace and consider examples of how you use this strength in your daily life. When you have an idea, make a short video of yourself describing one or two of your top strengths, an example of how you use it and how it would benefit a workplace. Be as specific as possible. Your video shouldn't be longer than 30 seconds. Upload it to #iBringGCC and watch what happens in that space!”

يمكنهم وماذا هم من لاكتشاف الأوساط الشرق للشباب حركة #iBringGCC حملة إلى بك وسهلا اهلا نظرًا. (دقائق 10 حوالي يستغرق) لغة هنا بأي الشخصية قوة تقييم أكمل للمشاركة! العمل مكان إلى إحضاره تقريرًا التقييم يعطيك سوف. بأمانة عليه تجيب أن المهم من نفسك، لفهم فرصة يمنحك التقييم هذا لأن القوة نقاط بها ستكون التي الطريقة في فكر نتائجك، على حصولك بمجرد. العليا الخمس نقاط القوة يوضح يكون عندما. اليومية حياتك في القوة استخدامك هذه لكيفية أمثلة في وفكر العمل، موقع في الأولى الخمس على ومثالًا ، لديك القوة نقاط من أكثر أو واحدًا يصف نفسك عن قصير فيديو بعمل قم ، فكرة لديك الفيديو يتجاوز ألا يجب. الإمكان قدر محددة تكون أن. العمل مكان من الاستفادة وكيفية كيفية استخدامها المسافة هذه في يحدث ما وشاهد #iBringGCC هاشتاغ مع بتحميله قم. ثانية 30 بك الخاص



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