

## **SOCIAL CAPITAL IMPEDIMENTS IN THE UNITED ARAB EMIRATES: A CASE OF EMIRATI FEMALE ENTREPRENEURS**

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It is possible that when looked at from the outside, the Gulf Arab countries give an impression that they are not very supportive to female entrepreneurs. This perception may be pertinent to a certain degree; however, Emirati female entrepreneurs (EFE) in the United Arab Emirates demonstrate that enhancing co-operation and support is possible through increasing interaction and networking with men. Analysis is undertaken of the observations and actions of conveniently selected 17 EFEs. The scoping of the respondents reveal that EFEs who engage with indirect male ties require a ‘male contact facilitator’ from their family or relatives to do so. These men are facilitated by the entrepreneur to adopt the role of a ‘male network partner (MNP) and provide support in overcoming challenges and achieving business objectives. The paper sets new standards of support for Emirati women in business ventures as it attempts to describe Emirati female entrepreneurship in a different language and proposes that co-operation, interaction and networking with men help EFEs access and use key resources, alleviate or remove key challenges and achieve business objectives.

*Keywords:* Female entrepreneurship; United Arab Emirates; socio-cultural and legislative challenges; social capital; co-operation; self-organisation.

## **INTRODUCTION**

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) is a unique country in the Gulf region, with a clear need for new research into the gender self-attributes of Emirati women, their views about entrepreneurship, the implicit cultural values that underpin their entrepreneurial experiences and practices; and how these in turn may be reshaping the way entrepreneurship is conceptualized and

practiced in the UAE. The paper provides the global reader an overview of some of the distinctive realities which effect female entrepreneurship in the UAE. It may appear that these unique challenges form the basis of constraining women and the explanation to female disempowerment. Recently, the rise of collective activism within the Arab region has facilitated change towards welcoming women's participation and engagement, i.e. the unexpected but warmly received move from Saudi Arabia's King Abdullah Bin Abdul Aziz who announced that women in the conservative kingdom will be allowed to vote and run in municipal elections, and will have a role in the Shura (advisory) Council. The pronouncement is expected to increase women's opportunities to exchange their views and be a part of the collective decision making as they take their part as candidates in the municipal elections and have a right to vote. In comparison to certain neighbouring countries, the UAE is a country in which long-established female roles are rather more privileged, yet individual Emirati women entrepreneurs appear to not be flourishing in such an environment where the economy is booming on large oil revenues, massive infrastructure investment, imported expatriate labour, and a state-led development model.

While the UAE government states its commitment to promoting the pivotal role of women in the social, economic and political development, society's attitudes and values do not change easily. Apparently, the unique capabilities and assets of women entrepreneurs are not being harnessed and incorporated sufficiently. What appears to be needed is the development of a collective to help Emirati women overcome socio-cultural and legislative impediments to obtain and use the required social capital beneficial to all start-ups.

The paper examines the challenges that must be addressed if the UAE is to realize its long-term economic and social goals. These challenges are the socio-cultural barriers Emirati female entrepreneurs come across and the gap in public policies to assist them in their desires. The paper provides a summary of the experiences of increasing social capital, showing how some EFEs have been able to overcome certain challenges and enhance cooperation with men through interaction and networking — emphasizing the point that collaboration and coordination with MNPs facilitates access to different types of support. The paper proposes that Emirati women's entrepreneurial network infrastructure requires new standards of support, that may be operational by EFEs and aspiring EFEs to overcome some of the unique challenges they face.

## **SOCIO-CULTURAL CONSTRAINTS**

Most empirical research conducted is limited to identifying the problems within the environment EFEs operate in, but lack in providing a viable vehicle to help these women overcome the challenges they face. In the investigations of the challenges that may be holding Emirati women back from becoming entrepreneurs, many authors conclude that social norms, social positions, networking, family commitment — lack of family support especially from husbands (Haan, 2002, 2003, 2004; Baud and Mahgoub, 2001; Nelson, 2004; Al Khateeb, 1994; Sayed, 2002), lack of role models — as (almost) all their parents, brothers/sisters and other family members are government sector employees (Haan, 2003), appear to be some of the most common social and cultural challenges identified.

Based on the cultural norms of the UAE, there are peculiar barriers in regards to Emirati women's actions, activities and interactions which emerge out of 'restrictions on movement and work'. Naser *et al.* (2009) states that in the Arab societies, women's participation in the labour force is influenced by culture which is in turn shaped by the Islamic principles. For instance, restriction of movement, i.e. travelling appears to be constrained for many Emirati women (Haan, 2002, 2003, 2004; Baud and Mahgoub, 2001; Sayed, 2002; Kirdar, 2010). Considerable number of Emirati women are not allowed to travel abroad for work unless accompanied by their husband or a family member. Although Article 29 of the constitution guarantees all UAE citizens, men and women, freedom of movement within the limits of law, in practice, some restrictions on freedom of movement for both Emirati and foreign women still exist (Kirdar, 2010). Changing legislative policies may appear to set tone for desired outcomes; however, without facilitating change to take place at the individual or family level inhibits the usefulness and impact it may have. Kirdar (2010) states that Emirati women may be restricted from leaving the country if they lack permission from their husbands or guardians. She further claims that according to custom, a man may prevent his wife, children, and adult unmarried daughters from travelling abroad by confiscating their passports, and government institutions will not challenge a husband's right to do so. Although the constitution itself guarantees all UAE citizens, men and women, freedom of movement and residence within the limits of law, there seems to be constraints at the interactive level between individuals. Thus, by default, organizations become biased against working with Emirati women, disadvantaging them from gaining a competitive edge and limiting opportunities for their development. These provisions hinder a woman's

right to freely make decisions, treating women as if they are incapable of self determination in regards to their own safety and participation. [Kirdar \(2010\)](#) states that Article 34 of the constitution holds a woman's guardian responsible if he has consented to 'employment' or 'business' that violates these provisions. In so doing, women are treated as minors whom guardians have a responsibility to protect. By fostering the concept of a dependent female, this provision opens the door for guardians to have further control over the occupational choices of women.

In parallel to the above, there is also a general reluctance among families to restrict women's business choices and opportunities. For instance, although the degree and extent of reluctance varies across families, many do not permit their sisters, daughters and wives to open businesses that will require them to mix with men. [Kirdar \(2010\)](#) emphasizes that cultural rather than legal barriers are what constrains women from entering certain professions. She continues by stating in many instances, familial conflicts are cited as the cause of business discontinuation for many women. Women, particularly nationals, are inclined to join the public sector rather than start their own business because working for government requires less gender mixing, less effort in respect to balancing between home and work, and is deemed more appropriate — it shows commitment to the country. [Al Khateeb \(1994\)](#) mentions that social status is measured by the amount of leisure time a woman has, starting and maintaining a business is perceived difficult and time consuming. [Sayed \(2002\)](#) adds that a woman is not required by society, tradition, or religion to contribute financially to the family. Emirati women are not expected to earn an income, and when they do, what they earn is often considered to be disposable income [Kirdar \(2010\)](#). The responsibility for financial support of family is with men.

It is believed that national women who want to go into business often face active discouragement from the fathers and husbands ([Baud and Mahgoub, 2001](#), p. 41). The reason for the small number of Emirati women entrepreneurs are said to be due to the lack of encouragement by men ([Haan, 2004](#)). [Baud and Mahgoub \(2001\)](#) in their study asked what the main constraints are that needed to be "removed" to increase the number of businesses run by Emirati women, 27 per cent of the women mentioned that the husbands and family needed to be more supportive of women's attempts to start and run a business. According to [Baud and Mahgoub \(2001\)](#) the attitude of the family is described as 'watching to see whether a woman fails' it is claimed that this puts enormous pressure on woman and makes them hesitant to take up such ventures. Moreover, UAE nationals are said to

lack role models as government jobs attract approximately 90 per cent of the Emirati workforce — most parents, brothers/sisters and other family members are government sector employees (Baud and Mahgoub, 2001; Haan, 2003). This seems to be more apparent for EFEs as there is a far lesser number of Emirati women entrepreneurs within families or portrayed in the media — many young Emirati girls lack exposure to the experiences of entrepreneurship.

## **Gender Segregation**

In the Emirates, two cultural factors have been identified to be important in segmenting the labour market for women. Baud and Mahgoub (2001, p. 42). They state that these are the ‘seclusion ethics’ found in the whole region by which the high standards of female modesty are maintained, and the segregation of the sexes by which the spatial boundaries for activities of men and women are defined. Baud and Mahgoub (2001) mention that a woman’s role as a wife and mother are given more importance by other members of her family than her occupational and community roles (p. 42). All government and some private schools in the UAE are segregated at the secondary level and onwards. However, once students enter the workforce, interaction with the opposite sex becomes a must and many employees find this challenging. In an attitude and opinion survey distributed to 700 male and female university students throughout the UAE, Sayed (2002) found that merely 22 per cent of males and 37 per cent of female participants think that it is acceptable for men and women to mix socially. On the contrary, 65 per cent of the males and 45 per cent of the females believe that gender mixing is dangerous to society. In relation, 45 per cent of males and 14 per cent of females agree that good women do not speak in public and 42 per cent of the males and 20 per cent females agree that women should avoid public places. Sayed clarifies that UAE is unique in the sense that there is a common set of morals and principles, known and understood by virtually all in society. She further argues that “Individuals consciously choose whether or not to base their behaviour on these principles. Societal mechanisms ensure that deviance is both identified and dealt with in accordance with the degree of the deviance.” Clearly, the type of networking structure typical in western societies would not be operational by many EFEs in the UAE.

The UAE constitution provides every Emirati citizen with the right to freely choose his or her own occupation, trade, or profession within the

limits of the law and subject to regulations on that profession or trade. However, a mix of views and beliefs about the inherent nature of females as well as a tendency towards protectionism by family affects the movement and the activities of women (Al Khateeb, 1994). Moreover, Sayed (2002) mentions that families limit activities that women can participate in ‘because they are girls.’ Interestingly, Sayed found that “female participants in general, do not question or seem bothered by the differential treatment and see no inequity in the special constraints that they live by.” The differential treatment that generally occurs is based on traditions that have evolved over centuries, where the appropriate social behaviour of girls is scrutinized both privately and publicly.”

## LEGISLATIVE CONSTRAINTS

Within the literature insufficient and defective policies and programs Haan (2002, 2003); Rhoudi-Fahimi and Moghadam (2007); Sayed (2002); Abouzeid (2008) appear to play an important role in inhibiting female entrepreneurship in the UAE. Although some federal policies that have been excluding or preventing women from taking initiative to act have been discussed under socio-cultural constraints, some municipalities have also created barriers that prevent women from applying for licenses without the signature of a male guardian. For instance, in issuing a ‘Mubdiah license’ (a license to start a home-based business) certain terms and conditions need to be fulfilled. One of these conditions is to get the “approval by husbands or guardians to start the home-based business.” Kirdar (2010) mentions that the support for advancements in women’s rights varies, and societal and familial perceptions of a woman’s proper role continue to pose a significant barrier to advancement.

Sayed (2002) mentions that some of the barriers EFEs come across are not always as apparent at first glance. In the case of the Sheikh Mohammed Bin Rashid Establishment for Small and Medium Size Enterprise Development, business capital is provided for residents of any emirate provided that the business itself is based in Dubai. This presents a challenge to Emirati women who live with their families outside of Dubai. While they are technically eligible for such grants, they face social challenges if they were to move away from home to pursue a business.

In the UAE the family is the basis of society — Article 15 of the constitution and Article 16 requires welfare and social security legislation be promulgated to protect “childhood and motherhood,” as well as those who

are unable to look after themselves. The UAE Constitution which guarantees the principles of social justice for all, in accordance with the precepts of Islam stipulates that:

The family is the basis of society, which shall be responsible for protecting childhood and motherhood. Laws shall be formulated in all fields to observe this protection and care, in a way which safeguards the dignity of women, preserves their identity and secures for them the conditions appropriate for a prosperous life and suitable work which is in accordance with their nature and capabilities as mothers and wives and as workers.

(United Arab Emirates Yearbook, 2006)

While Islam supports equality, the culture, laws and policies tend to reinforce traditional roles for women rather than encourage true equality between the genders. This creates the need to play a duality for women — working at home as a mother and at work as a woman. Women are left in situations where they have to choose between their work and the responsibilities at home. When they perform the duality of work, it can produce a limitation in their professional development. The legislation itself may seem to communicate a constraining message. Therefore, frustration can arise due to the roles that they have to play. UAE society is strongly influenced by religion and tradition, especially in respect to women's role in society and, even today, some conservative sections of the society are said to frown upon females running their own businesses (Preiss and McCrohan, 2006).

The literature abounds in reasons of low female entrepreneurial activity, yet little research is devoted to how an individual Emirati woman manages to secure support within the Arab Gulf context. Exploring how some EFEs succeed in doing this will contribute to entrepreneurship theory and make it possible to provide a model to facilitate aspiring EFEs to engage in building their own models of entrepreneurship. The social network approach is adapted to identify the role of networking and the development of an appropriate networking system for EFEs to operationalise in a society where peculiar challenges exist and gender segregation is practiced. It is argued that entrepreneurship and social capital are related to one another in two ways: First, social capital provides entrepreneurial access to resources that are useful, reliable, exclusive as well as less redundant information (Bruderl and Preisendorfer, 1998; Ostgaard and Birley, 1996). Second, social capital impacts social embeddedness so that networks become the



medium of exchange (Johannisson, 1988; Johannisson and Lanstrom, 1997; Weick, 1987). Although, entrepreneurship theory informs that social capital is vital in facilitating entrepreneurial activity. In the UAE, the socio-cultural and legislative constraints explored in this paper are claimed to prohibit Emirati women from utilising and developing social capital in order to undertake some form of entrepreneurial activity. Social capital deficiency resulting from these impediments naturally deprive Emirati women who wish to start business with the needed social capital that the literature suggests is beneficial to all start-ups. Although, entrepreneurship theory informs that social capital is vital in facilitating entrepreneurial activity. In the UAE, the socio-cultural and legislative constraints explored in this paper are claimed to prohibit Emirati women from utilising and developing the required social capital in order to undertake some form of entrepreneurial activity. Social capital deficiency resulting from these impediments naturally deprive Emirati women who wish to start business with the necessary social capital that the literature suggests is beneficial to all start-ups.

## **EMIRATI FEMALE ENTREPRENEURS' EXPERIENCES OVERCOMING CONSTRAINTS THROUGH SOCIAL CAPITAL DEVELOPMENT**

A descriptive approach dominates the literature in explaining how the social network approach has been used in many disciplines to understand human behaviour and the relationship between people and organizations. Early studies defined networks as “the set of linkages among persons and contacts as the set of persons connected by these linkages” (Mitchell, 1969, p. 4). Entrepreneurial networks have been defined as the sum total of relationships in which an entrepreneur participates, and which provides an important resource for his, or her, activities (Dodd and Patra, 2002). The social network perspective holds that behaviour is dependent on the nature and structure of a person's social relationships (Burt, 1982). By focusing on social network analysis attention is given to relationships between the entrepreneur and others that provide resources and support which are necessary in starting a business (Johannisson, 1998). Entrepreneurial networks provide psychological and practical support (Johannisson, 1988), and are a host to other resources, including finance and information (Ostgaard and Birley, 1996). Entrepreneurship, has embraced the social network theory as a mechanism for exploring the creation and development of new



ventures (Johannisson and Monsted, 1997). It is argued that as the presence of entrepreneurial opportunities in a network increases, the odds of entrepreneurial behaviour increases (Burt, 1992).

This paper suggests that increasing interaction and networking with male network partners (MNP) not only increases the likelihood of overcoming some socio-cultural constraints and legislative obstacles, but also increases the presence of new entrepreneurial opportunities which require further interaction and networking. The paper suggests a prescriptive approach in designing a network infrastructure for aspiring EFE — descriptions of networking activity is in connection to increasing entrepreneurial opportunities by increasing interaction to overcome key challenges, such as the socio-cultural and legislative challenges discussed in the literature, to achieve business objectives necessary for start-up.

The selection of respondents for the empirical research was made using referrals. A total of 17 EFEs were interviewed. These women were entrepreneurs who started up and now manage successful businesses in the UAE. The in-depth interviews served to enable the respondents to describe their experiences as entrepreneurs. After each interview, the respondents were asked if they could recommend another EFE to interview. Not all of the entrepreneurs were in a position to refer to another EFE, and in some cases they were not in a position to provide up-to-date contact details for their referrals. To this effect, the use of a referral system also served to document that the respondents do not generally draw on the support of other EFEs. On the collective level, it is apparent that the respondents clearly do not belong to some form of Community of Practice comprised of female entrepreneurs in the UAE. In other words, these established EFEs are not part of a network of women who assist each other in overcoming challenges and achieving business objectives.

### **Rationale of Scoping Actions, Activities and Interactions**

From the existing literature, it is apparent that ‘men’ have traditionally been regarded as an ‘obstruction’ for women who aspire to become entrepreneurs in the UAE. Accordingly, the literature focuses on the lack of support women receive from men and other sources of potential support in the UAE which, in turn, is considered the principal reason why more women are not becoming entrepreneurs. Clearly, the literary position on men stands in stark contrast to the assumption that, in some cases, men play a key role in assisting Emirati women to become an entrepreneur. To explore these

two conflicting positions, the findings of the scoping conducted with established EFEs in the UAE serve to examine the experiences of 17 EFEs showing how these women have been able to overcome certain socio-cultural and legislative challenges and enhance cooperation with men through interaction and networking. The aim is to determine a conceptual net applicable to develop a network infrastructure that aspiring EFE may operate and develop. Table 1 provides a hierarchy of EFEs Business Activities, Business Objectives and Key Challenges in regards to its business entities, selection process, interaction and networking needs and development of the venture.

### **Challenges Encountered During Business Start-Up**

Akin to other female entrepreneurs, Emirati women entrepreneurs face challenges as mentioned earlier which can be crucial for aspiring a career in entrepreneurship and/or the survival of business.

The paper is responsive to the actuality that some challenges may be an outcome of gender/power relations and as a consequence the activities and interactions appearing from them may be conditioned to these relationships. As one EFE states:

‘I feel like this is a tough time for Emirati women, in the generations before they knew exactly how to act and talk, now women are not sure what they can do and what they cannot do. They do not know the boundaries, some women who are more outgoing can push these outer boundaries but there is not a lot. I think a book or something is needed for women on some of these things... how to go about doing this stuff, going for their first interview, a first meeting with clients, how to act in a room of men, you know things that we probably just take for granted.’ (Maisea)

The new generation of Emirati women find themselves in a state of extreme flux due to the novelty of the situation of finding their place in the public sector and this within a society and economy which are mutating exponentially. Today there are families and parts of society who have begun to accept the breaking down of constraints on women, yet there are others who hold on making it difficult for women to be active members of society.

In regards to family-related difficulties, Fathiya mentioned that “finding the time to balance between work and family” was not easy. Leyla also

Table 1. Hierarchy of EFEs Business Activities, Business Objectives and Key Challenges.

Experiences Related to...	Business Entities	Selection	Interaction & Networking	Development
Business Activities	Identify business objectives to achieve Identify key challenges to overcome Identify available key resources to access and use	Select network partner expected to be useful	Exchange of views to access and use key resources, overcome key challenges and achieve business objective Expand network and distinguish on-going network partners Increase interaction & network activity to achieve new actions & entities	Identify alternative and new actions and business entities
Business Objectives	Accessing and Obtaining Money Obtaining Licenses and Legal Papers Finding Location Accessing Operational Support	Identifying and Selecting Suppliers Contacting Customers Hiring Employees	Accessing Valuable Information and Advice	Preparing and Beginning Production

Table 1. (Continued)

Experiences Related to...	Business Entities	Selection	Interaction & Networking	Development
Key Challenges	<p>Developing cooperation from their family members to meet contacts who may be useful in starting business.</p> <p>Developing cooperation from their family members to help access and use available resources.</p> <p>Developing and maintaining relations with suppliers who are competitive and trustworthy.</p> <p>Developing language and cultural awareness to deal with people from other cultures.</p> <p>Accessing and using a variety of channels to develop relationships with others to get help in hiring employees, finding a location, increasing useful contacts and locating other needed resources.</p> <p>Accessing information on suppliers, contractors and competitors.</p> <p>Developing commitment from key individuals (e.g. family members, especially key figures such as fathers, brothers or husbands) that could be useful in starting their own business.</p> <p>Developing interaction with customers to improve fulfilling their needs.</p> <p>Developing competence in balancing between home and work. Developing capacity to travel to close deals as well as build and maintain relations.</p> <p>Developing interaction and networking to select useful people from on-line resources such as websites, blogs and forums.</p>			

mentioned that managing between her family and business was one of her greatest challenges. She said that the need of constantly having to travel to Europe for purchasing products was particularly difficult. Five of the respondents said the attitudes and behaviour of some individuals in their environment were 'negative' towards them, whereby this negativity was ascribed to 'cultural factors' within UAE society. Fathiya mentions the difficulty she faced "working against the culture where it is not acceptable to stay out at night." In running and maintaining their businesses, five respondents said a lack of family support was a difficulty. For example, Rima describes how when she first started her husband warned her if it affected their family-life she should stop immediately. Rima says, "due to this my family comes first . . . if there is any family condition no matter how big or small it is, I don't work that day at all. Although, the social environment of female entrepreneurs is not always supportive, these negative influences have not prevented these entrepreneurs from achieving business start-up.

EFEs demonstrate that they are capable of overcoming traditional and conservative viewpoints by utilising MNPs and developing co-operation with them in doing so.

Latifa says:

'Certain people today, prefer dealing with me because they have realised how competent I am. They've seen my husband having to come to me for decisions or further information. It's my business, now they understand.'

The majority of the respondents discussed how they facilitated support from men, especially from their male family members.

Maryam said:

'From time to time, I need to explain to my husband that we are in this together . . . I left the kids with him, I told him I have an important meeting and that I would not be able to take the kids with me. I asked him to find a solution. He actually took them to work with him.'

EFEs are able to interact in ways to gain the support of the men around them such as their fathers, husbands, brother and others. This support for many determines greatly the success of their entrepreneurial career. Categorically, spotting coordination opportunities with MNPs is an ability that EFEs develop, consequently through facilitation it is likely that aspiring EFEs may develop a coordinating language with MNPs.

A brief discussion of the observations and experiences of EFEs are gathered below outlining EFEs feelings, values, intentions and actions:

### **The Role of Men and Access to Different Types of Support**

Accordingly, the literature's notion of 'men' as an 'obstruction' suggests that EFEs are severely diminished in their capacity to rely on the same kinds of networks that can be maintained by male entrepreneurs in the UAE.

Contrary to the existing literature, the respondents documented that men in their familial and social environment provide them with varied forms of support that range from emotional and practical support to on-going supportive encounters, see Table 2 below.

Emotional support to the woman as an aspiring or established EFE:

'My husband supported me with motivation and optimism.' (Umalya) 'My sons believed in my abilities and capabilities.' (Maryam) 'I know I can trust my uncle, he is always ready to help me when i go to him' (Manal)

Operational Support to the EFE:

'My [male] cousin helped me register the business.' (Maitha) 'My uncle helped me find the equipment I need and decorate the shop' (Rana) 'After opening my business, my father helped me decorate the place.' (Rana) 'My husband is an accountant and helps me part-time in my business.' (Maryam) 'It is my [male] cousin's job to renew registration next year.' (Maitha) 'My brother provides support in managerial issues.' (Leyla) 'My father assured me that I can count on him if I needed any financial help.' (Rana)

Apparently, based on the different types of operational support given men may take on a further role in the business, for instance, as 'co-owner', 'administrative assistant', 'accountant'.

Informational Support to the EFE:

'My father has even helped me getting coloured scarves . . . he has a lot of contacts' (Tarifa) 'My [male] friend provides me knowledge and ideas.' (Leyla) 'My father helps me think of new ideas. . .' (Fathiya)

The common perception in the UAE is that women are restricted in the extent to which they engage in new direct contacts with men (in

Table 2. The Role of MNP.

<b>Importance of MNP</b>	<b>Provides different types of support</b>	<b>Contact Facilitator</b>	
Increases legitimacy and credibility to the business	Emotional Operational Informational	Acquires the legitimacy required	Acquires the credibility required
Increase connections to the wider social context	Contact facilitator	Creates accepted social connections	Collects resources

their business environment) and rely on men from their ‘accepted’ familial or social environment to make such contacts for them. Consequently, the support of men in their ‘accepted’ environment may be considered vital for EFEs to forge the necessary connections in the wider social and business context. The notion of men adopting the role of a ‘contact facilitator’ for EFEs in the UAE is a far cry from the literary concept of men as an ‘obstruction’.

‘My cousin helps out through his connections in exporting of goods.’ (Khawla) ‘My husband and sons help me with the delivery and the clients.’ (Zainab)

EFEs have demonstrate that it is possible to interact and network with men in overcoming challenges and achieving business objectives. An entrepreneurial network with men is something achievable for some EFEs. Moreover, EFEs have distinguished between men who are a part of their network in achieving business objectives and ones who are not. This distinction denotes network partners who are viewed as useful and committed against one’s who are not. It appears as the usefulness and commitment of network partners are facilitated through increasing interaction and networking with them as a means to enhance co-operation and support compared to the ones who may not be useful and committed. Lack of co-operation and support are ‘distinguishing features’ for many EFEs. Men who provide co-operation and support in achieving business objectives give the feeling of trust.

Maryam states:

‘My brother is good ... whenever I design a bag he is the first one I ask cause his opinion is important for me cause he



will not say ahh . . . its good . . . you know he will tell me the truth if he like it or not or what I can add or change.'

Evidently, this distinction of 'co-operation and support' and 'commitment and trust' carries both a 'functional and rather emotional' perception. In addition, some EFEs require both distinguishing features to be apparent. For instance, Eman explained that two men who were both functionally contributing to the business development were distinguished on the matter if they were 'just doing their job' or if 'they really cared for the entrepreneur and her business.'

Men also appear to be useful in facilitating the needed legitimacy and credibility from the wider social context.

According to Shaima:

'Some people don't accept dealing with women on the other side, they don't accept seeing women doing certain things. People get shocked seeing me, an Emirati woman on the construction site.' (Shaima)

It appears that traditional, conservative viewpoints act as challenges for some EFEs. Through increased interaction and networking with MNPs, it is possible for some EFEs to overcome these challenges.

For instance, Shaima adds:

'... this is where my husband steps in for me, without him it would not be possible, even now with some people. The same places I would go, he would go later, let us say a few weeks after and we would get the business. We wouldn't get the business all of a sudden because things have changed in those 2 to 3 weeks but because now they have a man in front of them and this way they take it seriously.' (Shaima)

Shaima's experience reiterates the role MNPs have in supporting EFE's overcome challenges and achieve business objectives. Godwin *et al.* (2006) argue that a woman entrepreneur within a male-dominated industry or culture may carry the invisible-yet-cumbersome baggage of sex-based stereotypes when she attempts to secure resources, develop business networks, and gain legitimacy for her business venture (p. 624). Male presence is given a certain weight that translates into the ability to collect resources, create accepted social connections, and acquire the legitimacy required for a new venture Godwin *et al.* (2006, p. 625). Similarly, Shaima's experience with some men may have to do with them seeing business ownership as something not suitable for women.

Shaima states that:

‘I use my husband from time to time, I have him set-up a meeting, let’s say he sets the first meeting and then afterwards I take control — I cut my husband off and the clients start dealing with me.’ (Shaima)

Shaima demonstrates that once these men get to know her, they do not hesitate further in their business dealings with her. MNPs may be useful in developing the needed legitimacy and credibility to the business owned by EFEs. The findings reveal that EFE’s can develop and maintain the legitimacy and credibility needed by developing networking activities with MNPs.

### **Selecting and Distinguishing MNPs**

Afra mentions how important her brother is to her business. She says, he is very supportive to her endeavours and understands what is required for an Emirati female to start and maintain their business. Apparently, this relationship has developed out of Afra’s intentions to increase her interaction and networking with her brother to facilitate him to support and co-operate with her so that she can achieve her business objectives.

‘My brother has a group of companies. He understands that Emirati women at this moment are not the same as before. He knows that we have to share our ideas with men, we have to meet them and discuss with them. He knows that I am now meeting you, he knows that this is for business. We sit and discusses things, even little things, what exactly I am doing, what I need to be doing, if am on the right steps, changes I need to make it..he helps me by telling me what he thinks I need to..this is what I need from him.’ (Afra)

Afra further states that although her brother is very supportive as a network partner for business purposes, this does not necessarily mean that she expects him to be useful, supportive or co-operative in other matters. This demonstrates the power of Afra’s selection criteria. She demonstrates that her selection criteria for entrepreneurship is based on ‘being useful in achieving her business objectives’; however, establishing this selection criteria took time. Afra developed her support system and the required social capital through interaction and networking with her

brothers, she was able to exchange her views on a variety of matters. It is from these same exchanges that provided her the means to distinguish her criterion for selecting one over the other, based on the referent of discussion.

Afra continues:

‘The funny thing is when it comes to personal things, like my personal life I talk to my other brother and not to him (the one who helps with business). My other brother is more open when it comes to my personal life. From the way my brother helps me with my business, it would seem he would also be very close to me in terms of my personal life but that isn’t the case. Figuring this out took a while, I mean his reactions. So I’m basically this brother is for this and this brother is for this. Brother A is for work and brother Y is for personal life.’

In other words, the support that Afra receives from her brother or brother’s depends on Afra’s ability to distinguish men who may be useful for her business.

### **Improving Experiences — Developing Social Capital**

Rima’s husband created challenges and was not interested in her aspiration to become an entrepreneur, Rima was able to overcome her challenges by developing her interaction and using language that initiated negotiating with him. She managed to interact with him and eventually together find alternative ways of achieving her business objectives. Although Rima had a very unsupportive spouse at the beginning, she was able to become an entrepreneur by successfully interacting with him and organising her network to help her overcome the challenges she faces. Rima’s ability to keep thinking and exchange views with her husband and refine helped her gain his attention and co-operation. This seems to be very important that certain Emirati women can overcome something that they first see as a barrier or something that others see as a barrier. For instance:

‘... I think it is new in the culture — in many families the father or husband is prime decision-maker. If he says yes it means yes, if he says no it means no — there is no negotiation, but I always find a way.’ (Rima)

It is particularly interesting to explore how at the beginning the language of barrier changes to a language of overcoming a challenge through self-organisation:

‘My husband was a major difficulty. He was against the idea of a working woman. It was impossible for him to listen. I went and bought all the needed equipment and he couldn’t say no after that, but I know that he didn’t like it at all. He was looking at reasons to stop me. Having my work at home helped him a lot.’ (Rima)

Although Rima did not initially receive support from her husband, she was able to reorganise her network members to facilitate new activities through the provision of support from her sisters:

‘My sisters are my main supporters. They encouraged me to face my husband and make him listen. Plus they brought my first customers.’ (Rima)

How Rima was able to do this and the behaviour that she used in order to achieve her goals is evidently a key contribution to support the objectives of this research. It is a clear example of how Emirati women can overcome the lack of support or other challenges they may face and go on to become successful entrepreneurs.

Similarly, Afra describes her interactions with her father and how she manages to overcome them.

Afra states that:

‘If I don’t agree with him I’ll try to change his mind. I try to understand why he disagrees with me. I find solutions for the things that he mentions and I go back to him and say, “I am doing it.” Having already let’s say found answers to his concerns. So, if I approach him with a solution, he’s usually fine and he may make suggestions to improve it.’

Afra does not only ‘keep thinking’ of the conditions and challenges, but she acts on them by exchanging her views with her father. She scopes ways of overcoming her challenges on the basis of self-organising her observations and actions to achieve her business objectives in relation to her MNP. In other words, her solutions are not independent of her MNP’s views.

EFEs in this paper have demonstrated that MNPs are important providers of different types of support and take on the role of ‘contact facilitator’.

Table 3. EFEs Experiences Facilitating MNPs to Develop Social Capital.

<b>Facilitating MNPs to Develop Social Capital</b>	<b>Utilise MNPs</b>	<b>Increase Interaction and Networking with MNPs</b>	<b>Spot Coordination Opportunities with MNPs</b>	<b>Distinguish MNPs from Other Men</b>
	Keep thinking of conditions and alternatives	Reorganise network members, observations and actions	Achieve collective views	Develop self- organisation

Furthermore, EFEs have demonstrated that they are responsive to utilising men by increasing their interaction and networking with them through spotting coordination opportunities. Table 3 summarises the experiences of facilitating MNPs and developing social capital. Within the table, the notion of ‘keep thinking of conditions and alternatives’ to maintain development; moreover, develop improvement through self-organisation are abilities that can be developed and improved. The reorganising of network members, observations and actions are an indication of improvement and self-organising — the EFE strives to develop a support system that is modifiable to new observations, actions and experiences.

These experiences of EFEs may apparently be a part of the building blocks in developing support systems to help aspiring EFEs overcome challenges and achieve business objectives.

The scoping of EFEs experiences reveals that they are able to overcome challenges by utilising men in their personal networks. EFEs are able to interact and network with others in helping them overcome challenges; moreover, they are able to interact and network with men who may be seen as barriers at the beginning and negotiate with them in ways that facilitate men to adopt a positive role and begin helping the woman achieve her business objectives.

**Emirati Women’s Entrepreneurial Network Infrastructure**

Based on the observations and experiences of 17 EFEs, most MNPs appear to be mainly from the EFE’s family, relatives, close friends and colleagues as they are providers of trust, advice and support that is needed at the initial

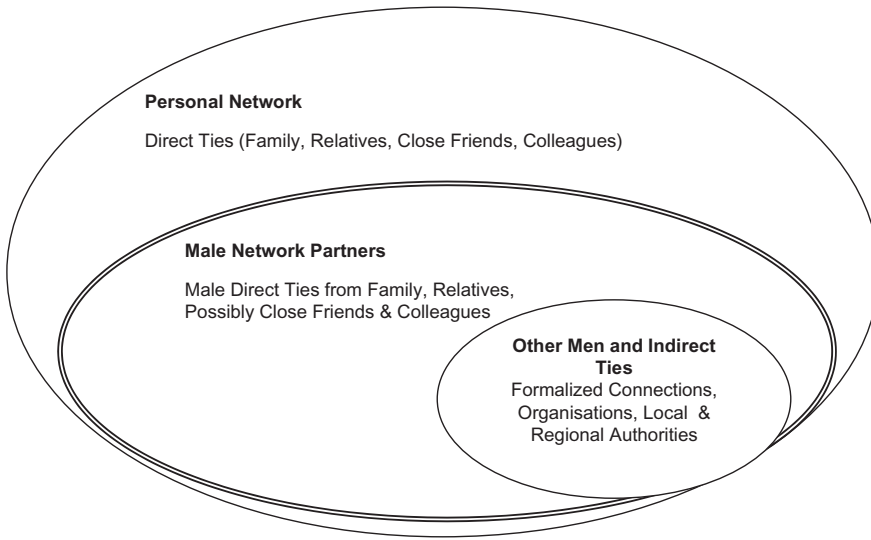


Figure 1. Emirati Female Entrepreneurs Network Infrastructure.

stages of entrepreneurship. The findings from the scoping indicate that MNPs have a special relationship and are an important part of EFE's supportive infrastructure. Figure 1 represents the network infrastructure of EFE's given the findings from the in-depth interviews. The relationships are shown between the ties of EFE's network and the network infrastructure.

The first circle is the personal network of EFEs which consists of family members, relatives, close friends, and colleagues. The relationships tend to be more direct, reliable and longer in duration. The findings from the interviews revealed that men from direct relations who adopt the role of MNP are useful for 'accessing key resources, overcoming key challenges and achieving business objectives'. The network of men who are described as MNPs have attributes necessary and useful to EFE's. In other words, men from direct ties who have been facilitated and distinguished as useful to help overcome key challenges and achieve business opportunities adopt the role of 'MNP.' Furthermore, they act as contact facilitators to indirect ties.

Indirect relations are considered to be shorter in duration and possibly less reliable; however, they are necessary because they offer access to new and useful information. They may be useful in starting new businesses based on the interviews conducted with EFEs in this thesis, indirect relations are usually developed through male direct ties — MNPs act as a liaison between the EFE and indirect male ties. These relationships are

developed and maintained with the support of male direct ties. Figure 1 displays EFEs relationships and their network infrastructure.

The challenge of ‘perceiving’ men to be preventing female Emiratis from starting their own business can be overcome by facilitating women to interact with men and expand their networking activity to develop an infrastructure that adopts the role of (male) network partner. The investigation has provided a means to develop a resource for aspiring EFEs based on the network infrastructure of EFEs.

Certainly, gender differences in entrepreneurship activity are well documented in the literature, the UAE Ministry of State for Federal National Council Affairs (MFNCA) outlines both the developments and challenges associated with women’s progress in the country, yet policy-makers overlook the fact that Emirati women entrepreneurs due to their unique social positions need different programs than men. Policy makers in general consider business to be gender neutral, and they experience difficulty implementing different credit and training programs based on gender. Usually such programs are implemented universally, without regard to the gender of the participants. As a result, many women find themselves excluded from these programs. In the UAE, in some cases, cultural barriers prevent parts of society from considering women as equals to men, or as capable of running a serious business. Still it is taken for granted that the man will be the chief breadwinner, and that the woman’s job is voluntary source of income for the family. Therefore, enabling women entrepreneurs to start successful businesses and expand.

The challenge lies in creating incentives and building programs that engage women in participating to raise the awareness of society and policy makers alike. The distinction of policies and programs should be set in the separate Chambers of Commerce in the various Emirates where Women Business Councils are clearly distinguished as separate entities with their own set of membership criteria, policies and programs. This separation needs not only be safeguarded by the overarching Emirates’ Women Business Council, but supported by policy changes and recommendations. EFEs make up an important new market segment, it is clearly in the interest of all stakeholders to not discriminate against women and provide them the support and services required for start-up and business development. Certain policies rather than promote and encourage female entrepreneurship, have either constrained women’s ability to improve or they have solely focused on improving the financial and physical resources without considering how to improve these women’s social capital impediments. The literature is short of exploring how to help develop collectives in which



women can improve their experiences and self-organise support systems to overcome constraints and achieve their desired outcomes. Complementary vehicles are needed to contribute to entrepreneurship theory and make it possible to design new standards of overcoming social capital deficiency.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

Men appear to have an important role for EFE's in the UAE from the standpoint of the literature — men as obstructions and from this papers investigation — men as resources. The notions of support, co-operation and coordination are evident in the experiences of EFEs interacting and networking with men, family members and others. The language of collaboration and coordination provides indication that developing the required social capital for EFEs entails facilitating men to adopt the role of MNP. This facilitation takes place by means of discussing matters to achieve collective views and by viewing men as partners rather than obstacles.

The socio-cultural and legislative challenges that EFEs come across require the development of a support system — this space may serve as a viable vehicle for individual EFEs to develop the required social capital. Evidently, solely focusing on legislative changes on modifying financial and physical resources have not helped improve the experiences of individual EFEs. Consequently, the support of ego-centric approaches in the UAE may help aspiring EFEs in developing network infrastructures that fulfil social capital requirements as a viable and complementary vehicle to overcome their constraints and achieve their business objectives.

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