

Years in Revision!

Some thoughts on people and employment within Jordan's ICT sector

By: Doha Abdelkhaleq - ESKADENIA Software

I spent a good time digging into the question of who is who doing what serving which purpose in the area of human resources management in Jordan? In a country where the official forecast for unemployment could reach 17% and for inflation 15%, that is on the top of an unbalanced budget and decreased foreign investment, combined with an overall regional and international recession for year 2009. Reverting to and digging further deeper into key people's management issues makes more sense.

The bottom line is that we still lack ONE coherent Quarterly Labor Report that is conclusively synchronized with the overall status of affairs of the country. Where finance planning, commerce and trade and all sectors extract routinely labor figures and statistics that represent all Key market performance indications in relation to job creation within the country. Jordan does not have the one national depository that would reflect the how and the where about of the Human resources, a depository that would reflect sensitive data that put consistently the employment and people management on the forefront of the national agenda.

As governments, economies, sectors, business and even individuals within the private sector have started to reveal their down-sizing and reduction plans, the past economy started to look like a happy occasion where no one was really counting its cost and related bills! Thus the full impact of the economical crisis on people issues remains only an assumption.

Year 2008 witnessed for the record, a more engaged ministry of labor, well connected to the social security plans and organization. Although there were more labor unrests and strikes on the ground, the government could contain those. It also drove successfully the minimum wage law and many operational corrections went like-wise smoothly on several key labor fronts. Some corrections that touched the structure and the organization of the civil servant body were executed. In addition a noticeable support was being extended by

sub-organizations and several local and foreign funds that focused on people, competence development and on public/private local training within the country. Jordan passed laws regarding the minimum guarantees for handicaps in the working place and major initiatives were launched to increase women's penetration to the labor market.

One noticeable focus in 2008 was the introduction of a workable mechanism that would tap into the untapped vacancies and into the abundant young competencies currently existing within the country. We saw accurate programs and job finding missions that focused on introducing labor to market and vice versa, based on research, of which the most successful so far was the Maharat Program, a unique USAID sponsored job-finding mission that targeted new graduates and aimed to eliminate any barriers to their employment through early training, induction programs and support of the employers. This initiative was formally endorsed as part of the local effort by the Jordan's labor Ministry. There were also other successful initiatives as the Injaz Job city, job shadowing and the business leaders programs and technology parades. The increased number of open-days at the public campuses could also shorten employment lead time to the market.

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Labor and human resources issues for the ICT sector in Jordan were diligently being followed by information technology association in Jordan int@j since its inception in year 1999-2000 both as a strategic and as a tactical focus. Int@j's follow up included presenting the most reasonably accurate statistics regarding ICT employment and growth on yearly basis. Another focus was to monitor and issue early warnings to the market regarding the availability of competencies and the supply and demand indications. The long term exchange with the

academia resulted with a conclusive research on the issue and the private sector had allocated offices and focused efforts with the universities. Finally int@j maintained the highest level of co-operation with the HR initiatives and units nation-wide.

Our wish-list for 2009 on the labor and competence front for this sector would be; First, for Jordan to count its human resources and competencies as one would count each drop and barrel of oil in the neighboring gulf countries as being the wealth of the nation! With this end in mind int@j kicked off a project to manage statistical information in order to create a data base construction that taps on the status and the where about of people and their competencies. The second wish on the list is to strengthen and empower the HR organization represented by its director of human resources on the level of each single ministry and public office and report on results to the government in a structured manner.

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I do believe and despite the pessimists, that our university supply and the quality of education will improve in Jordan and that the demand for ICT will continue! One reason is that regional customers will be forced to drift away from expensive rates and prices typically being offered by their traditional suppliers and shift to other affordable choices. Jordanian IT companies and skilled human resources are currently well prepared to deliver based on their competitive pricing models.

Jordan will in year 2009 change if not be forced to change, its previous labor model that was based on exporting labor outside the country and shift that into a focused model of brain gain to the country. A contingency plan however presumptuous is now needed to accommodate for the come backs of the knowledgably Jordanian workers from the gulf.

A recent cartoon concluded that the winner of Nobel Prize in economy for 2008 is an insignificant person who kept his money home under his mattress as Cash is retroactively a king. The same would apply for the wealth of the human resources; We say now that a competent competence in hand will make the whole difference for Jordan in year 2009, and it may well reverse a bad cycle as we proceed ahead undistracted into building a strong ICT industry ■



The winner of Nobel Prize in economy for 2008

