Beliefs about Work in the Middle East and the Convergence Versus Divergence of Values

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In this paper, 365 managers and employees from Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Oman are queried about their work-related beliefs to determine the extent to which any of these countries may be experiencing a shift in cultural values. Results from the testing of various convergence versus divergence based hypotheses suggest that Saudi Arabia is more steadfast in its work beliefs while Kuwait and Oman appear to be more susceptible to influences by external forces.

W ill managers from different parts of the world continue to cherish their native cultural values or will they become more similar as we press forward into the new millennium? The

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study of managerial values has made a major contribution to the body of literature on worker behavior in an organizational setting and has aided in the tracking of shifting values around the globe (Adler, 1983a; Buchholz, 1977). Organizational scholars have also studied work beliefs from a variety of angles which include gender, age, and ethics (i.e., Gibson, 1995; Schlegelmilch & Robertson, 1995). This research stream has been extended internationally to explore different cultural perceptions of various work-related issues (Puffer, McCarthy, & Naumov, 1997; Ronen & Shenkar, 1985; Trompenaars, 1994). While both researchers and practitioners have benefited from the evolution of this research domain, the examina-

tion of beliefs about work in the Middle East has been limited to a number of select studies[1] (i.e., Ali, 1984; Ali & Al–Shakhis, 1989, 1991; Al–Kazemi & Zajac, 1999).

Indeed, the Middle East has been essentially left out of the recent surge of international and cross-cultural research. For example, an analysis of all articles from the *Journal of International Business Studies* from 1990 to1999 reveals that less than one percent of the 236 articles published in the decade focused on a Muslim country in the Middle East. Indeed, only a handful of organizational scholars have focused on managerial similarities and differences across borders and within countries in this part of the world (i.e., Ali, 1984, 1990, 1999; Rice, 1999). The limited research in the Middle East region is attributed to several factors such as burgeoning research costs, funding difficulties, cultural limitations which limit access to the adult population (particularly with females), and data gathering problems that range from sampling to fieldwork issues (Yavas, 1994; Yavas & Habib, 1986; Tuncalp, 1988).

The Middle East has "the potential to be a formidable international economic player. The vast natural and human resources and its strategic geographical position place the Middle East at the center of the global stage, an attractive theater for competing global powers" (Ali, 1999: 102). As trade continues to surge between industrialized countries and Middle Eastern states, U.S. exports to Saudi Arabia alone totaled $10.5 billion dollars in 1998, the significance of attaining a better understanding of these complex and diverse people will become dramatically more important (U.S. Department of Commerce, 1999). Moreover, despite the firm steps toward privatization and burgeoning policies geared toward the diversification of economies away from the traditional cash cow of oil, organizational and cross-cultural researchers have continued to neglect the emphasis on this dynamic and growing region of the world.

One recent debate among cross-cultural researchers stems from the *convergence* versus *divergence* controversy (Bond & King, 1985; Ralston, Gustafson, Cheung, & Terpstra; 1993). One side of the argument, convergence, poses that emerging economies, which include a number of Middle Eastern countries, will adopt the free-enterprise system and values of the West as they climb the developmental ladder (Bond & King, 1985). The opposing position, divergence, contends that culture is such a powerful force that it will continue to shape and define managerial values in diverse countries (Ottaway, Bhatnagar, & Korol, 1989). Ralston et al.'s (1993) contention that a third possibility named *crossvergence* exists, where a unique set of work values is formed as a result of both internal and external influences, adds another dimension to this debate. This topic has been primarily explored in various Far Eastern countries as well as Russia (Ralston, Holt, Terpstra, & Kai–Cheng, 1997) yet has been avoided in the Middle East. Additional research of this phenomenon has examined the restructuring of economic organizations when a country is in transition (Child & Czegledy, 1996). Factors such as man-

agement learning and the extent to which information is codified has apparently aided in the creation of new institutional forms such as network capitalism (Boisot & Child, 1996; Child & Czegledy, 1996). The question remains, how will the unique and vibrant cultures of the Middle East react and respond to an increasing level of interaction with Western business counterparts?

The purpose of this paper is to provide some insight into this question. Through our exploration of patterns of work-related beliefs in three Middle Eastern countries (Saudi Arabia, Oman, and Kuwait) we hope to reveal some interesting differences into how development and exposure to outside influences is shaping cultural patterns in each of these countries. Our primary objective is thus to examine the extent to which select Middle Eastern countries vary in their core work beliefs. A secondary objective is to examine demographic work belief differences within each country. By pursuing these objectives, and subsequently comparing and contrasting our results with those of prior studies of work beliefs, we hope to shed some light onto the state of convergence versus divergence in this region of the world.

The three countries that we analyze in this study were selected for a variety of reasons. First, they are relatively wealthy, as three of the top seven Middle Eastern countries in GDP per capita, and they possess over one-third of the world's oil reserves (CIA World Fact Book, 1999). Second, all three countries are in the process of diversifying and privatizing their economies. And third,

these countries have a somewhat presumed homogenous culture because of overlapping histories and a shared location on the Arabian Peninsula (Hofstede, 1980).

In the following section of this paper a definition of work beliefs and summary of the convergence versus divergence debate in light of Arab cultural values is presented. Next, we outline the methodology employed in our study. The paper concludes with an evaluation and discussion of the results. Managerial implications and future research directions are also provided.

WORK BELIEFS AND VALUES

While our focus is primarily on work beliefs it is also important to discuss values and how they relate to work beliefs. It is also essential to emphasize that a true distinction exists between beliefs and values. According to Buchholz (1977: 570), "beliefs define the world for an individual and constitute an information system to which a person looks for answers." This differs from values that have been defined as (Rokeach, 1968: 124), "abstract ideals, not tied to any specific object or situation, representing a person's belief about modes of conduct and ideal terminal modes." Puffer et al. (1998) argue that beliefs and values, while distinct constructs, are clearly related. Specifically, Puffer et al. state that (1998: 259), "the role of beliefs in a person's life make it clear that they must emanate from values." Thus, the study of values and beliefs simultaneously can reveal deep insights into how work is viewed

as an integral life. In this paper we will empirically focus on beliefs while injecting conceptual value evidence where related and appropriate.

CONVERGENCE, DIVERGENCE, AND CROSSVERGENCE

Have international business practices become more similar or more different as we enter 21st Century? A number of polycentric, comparative and geocentric studies have endeavored to address this important question (Adler, 1983b). As early as 1969 Webber argued that a homogenizing effect will occur because of the spreading of industrialization from developed to developing countries. Supporters of this *convergence* approach contend that managers in industrialized countries will exhibit common values regarding economic activity and work related behavior (Ralston et al., 1997). The basic premise of this economic development oriented phenomenon is that management plays a key role in the achievement of economic development in developing countries (Negandhi, 1983). The notion of convergence implies that as countries become industrialized values change significantly toward behavior that embraces free market capitalism (Webber, 1969). Other forces, such as economic and sociopolitical systems, have also been pointed to as potential sources of a more homogeneous global culture (Kelley, Whatley, & Worthley, 1987).

Essentially, the *divergence* view insists that individuals will preserve their culturally unique values despite the power of outside influences (Ralston et al., 1993). Driving the divergence view is the notion of cultural values. Supporters of this view contend that a country's cultural values will be strong enough to fend off any outside influences and will continue to shape managerial behavior regardless of economic changes or foreign influence (Ricks, Toyne, & Martinez, 1990). Thus developing countries will continue to hold on to their deeply seeded values throughout the process of economic transformation.

The *crossvergence* perspective depicts a blending of cultures that results when two diverse groups are interfaced (Ralston et al., 1993). The result is a new set of values, expectations and behavior based on the dual influences of the trading cultures. The supporters of crossvergence have argued that neither convergence nor divergence adequately explains the interaction effects of economic ideology and national culture (Ralston et al., 1997).

Empirical studies of this phenomenon have been mixed. Ralston et al. (1993), in a study of U.S., Honk Kong, and Chinese values, found that both culture and the business environment have interacted to create a unique set of managerial values in Hong Kong, thus lending support to the crossvergence view. Additional studies have concluded that cultural values still dominate beliefs about work (i.e., Ottaway et al., 1989) while others have suggested that a converging global business standard has emerged (Ricks et al., 1990). In the next section of this paper the work values of the people of the Middle East will be examined with an eye toward any pattern of converging or diverging values.

Table 1
Demographic Data for Saudi Arabia, Oman, and Kuwait

Country	Saudi Arabia	Oman	Kuwait
Population (millions)	22.0	2.5	2.0
Non-national (millions)	5.0	—	1.2
Life Expectancy male (female)	69.9 (73.4)	68.9 (73.3)	74.1 (78.2)
GDP Per Capita (US$)	9,000	7,900	22,700
Number of Universities	12	1	2
Independence	Unification 1932	Portugal 1650	U.K. 1961
Religions %	Muslim 99% Mostly Sunni	Muslim 99% Mostly Ibadhi	Muslim 85% (Sunni 45%) (Shia 40%) Other 15%
Gross Enrollment Ratio —Tertiary	16.3	6.4	19.3

Sources: CIA World Fact Book, 1991 and *www.unesco.org* (2001).
Note 1: Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER) = Total enrollment in a specific level of education, regardless of age, expressed as a percentage of the official school-age population corresponding to the same level of education in give school-year (www.unesco. org). The GER figures are for 1996.
Note 2: Life expectancy figures 91999) are from *www.un.org*.
Note 3: Independence = year granted independence from a Colonial ruler.

MIDDLE EASTERN WORK VALUES

The managerial values of the people of the Middle East are truly distinctive when compared to the rest of the world. Nevertheless, Arab management thought has been depicted as fragmented and directionless (Ali, 1990, 1995). Moreover, the rapid shift toward industrialization without the creation of a modernized managerial model has led to a number of problems in the Arab world such as cultural discontinuity which is currently impeding management thought in this region (Ali, 1990). The influence of strict Bedouin tribal codes of loyalty and honor combined with a strong patriarchal family structure has also been powerful on the Middle Eastern culture (Hickson & Pugh, 1995). The strong top-down authorita-tive structure, sometimes referred to as a 'Bedo-aucracy' or 'Sheikocracy', is highly traditional and pervasive (Kassem & Habib, 1989). Interestingly, according to Hickson and Pugh (1995), there are four unique influences on Arab management and values: foreign rule, the Western quest for oil, Bedouin/ tribal traditions, and Islam. The scope and magnitude of influence of each factor tends to vary from country to country and it is this variation that creates cultural and managerial differences across the region. The variation in these factors also determines the extent to which each country is more or less open to Westernization (convergence).

In Table 1 demographic data are presented for Saudi Arabia, Oman, and Kuwait. A deeper analysis of this data re-

veals some fundamental differences across the three groups, stemming primarily from foreign rule, the influx of foreign labor, and the religious and ethnic homogeneity/heterogeneity. While each of the three countries has been influenced by tribal norms this phenomenon is perhaps strongest in Oman and Saudi Arabia. The Western influence on Kuwait has been phenomenal when compared to its two neighbors. Not only was Kuwait a British colony until 1961 but it also has a massive proportion of non-nationals living in the country (the term *non-nationals* refers to anybody who is not a citizen of a given country. While dual citizenship is not allowed in any of the three countries examined in this study, eligibility for the citizenship is possible and lawful and the likelihood of achieving it varies greatly among the three countries in terms of complexity and requirements. Also, although it is possible for nonethnic Arabs to obtain citizenship this is extremely difficult, especially in Saudi Arabia, and success varies considerably from case to case). Kuwait has been exposed to Western traditions and business practices at a much higher rate than Saudi Arabia and Oman. Much of Kuwait's US$22,700 GDP per capita is driven by a broad range of European and U.S. foreign direct investment (CIA World Fact Book, 1999). For example, in 1998 U.S. foreign direct investment to Kuwait and Saudi Arabia was US$1.1 and US$8.0 billion, respectively (Country Commercial Guide, 1999). Similar to Kuwait, Oman has been exposed to colonialism and the influx of foreign labor, however, at a much lesser magnitude (the presence of Portuguese and British cit-

izens in Oman dates back 400 years). Indeed Saudi Arabia also has a large number of non-nationals primarily because of the oil business, yet the percentage is much lower when compared to Kuwait. However, unlike Kuwait and Oman, Saudi Arabia has never been colonized and the Saudis have made a conscious effort to shelter the indigenous population's national and religious identity (Rice, 1999).

Perhaps the genesis of value variation across these three countries stems from *Islamic* beliefs and the extent to which each country upholds these beliefs in their respective legal, political and business environments. One key study (Ali & Al–Shakhis, 1989) of beliefs about work found that Saudi managers are more individualistic, less egalitarian, and less humanistic than Iraqi managers. A noted distinction that may play a role in these differences is the Islamic inclination of each group: the majority of Iraqis are Shiite Muslims while Saudis are predominantly from the Sunni sect (Ali & Al–Shakhis, 1989). Saudi Arabia is arguably the most fundamental and devoted Muslim state (Hickson & Pugh, 1995). Additionally, the religious and ethnic homogeneity of Saudi Arabia has made it a much easier task, politically and socially, for the Saudi government to reinforce a strict Islamic code of conduct among its people. As the birthplace of Islam the Saudis have assumed the religious leadership position for Muslims around the globe. In fact, Saudi Arabia takes the Qur'an to be its constitution (Hickson & Pugh, 1995). The Qur'an is the record of the exact words revealed by God through the Angel Gabriel to the prophet Mo-

hammed. The Qur'an is the prime source of every Muslim's faith and practice. It deals with all of the subjects that concern human beings: wisdom, worship, and law. The basic theme in the Qur'an is the relationship between God and his creatures. At the same time it provides guidelines for a just society, proper human conduct, and an equitable economic system (Saudi Arabia, 1989).

While the Islamic faith dominates the region of the Middle East, there are different degrees of adherence to its teachings and Saudi Arabia arguably maintains the highest level of fidelity.

Despite the great unity that exit among Muslim in all the basic tenants of Islam, the death of the prophet Mohammed created division among Muslims regarding the issue of successorship of his leadership. The result of such disagreement was the split of Muslims into Sunni and Shia. The Sunni wanted and did elect a leader through the process of consensus among the community. The Shia wanted Ali, the son in law of Mohammed and a close follower of his teachings, to be appointed to succeed Mohammed. They believe that Mohammed prepared Ali for such leadership role. The Shias differ from the Sunni with regard to their imamate (religious leadership) and the subsequent elevation of the family of the Prophet Mohammed to leadership. Certain religious practices and rituals and that Shias believe in that Sunnis do not (Barswell, 1996).

While Arab values tend to be complex and diverse we will outline some work beliefs that are common in all societies in the next section. This will be followed by the development of specific hypotheses directed toward our Middle Eastern sample.

BELIEFS ABOUT WORK

To better understand the state of the convergence versus divergence dilemma in the Middle East we have elected to analyze beliefs about work in more depth. In the study of worker beliefs the concept of belief systems must be employed to differentiate among the many interrelated elements of a worker's beliefs (Buchholz, 1977). Thus we employ the notion of a belief system as defined by Rokeach (1960: 33): "the belief system is conceived to represent all the beliefs, sets, expectancies, or hypotheses, conscious or unconscious, that a person at a given time accepts as true to the world he lives in." In his study of 366 managers from the United States, Buchholz (1977) developed and empirically tested a conceptual framework for measuring beliefs. The framework was subsequently tested and validated in other venues that include Scotland (Dickson & Buchholz, 1979) and Russia (Puffer et al., 1998). Because of its strong validity over time and across borders Buchholz' theory was selected as the conceptual foundation for the present study. His framework is centered on six belief systems, or clusters, which are defined as follows (Buchholz, 1977):

Humanistic beliefs: Work is to be taken seriously as the way in which individuals discover themselves and ful-

	fill themselves as human beings.
Organizational beliefs:	Work takes on meaning only as it affects the group or the organization.
Work ethic:	The extent to which work is viewed as good in itself and bestows dignity on a person.
Participation beliefs:	The extent to which management and staff should engage in mutual decision-making.
Leisure ethic:	Work has no meaning in itself, but only finds meaning in leisure.
Political beliefs:	Productive activity or work is basic to human fulfillment through social interaction and the expression of political views (It should be noted that this belief was originally named "Marxist" beliefs by Buchholz and while the items used to measure this variable were the same for the present study the construct was renamed to the broader "Political" beliefs to enhance readabilty and generalizeability).

It would appear logical that if differences in these constructs have existed in the past across both demographic (Buchholz, 1978) and national groups (Puffer et al., 1998) then they may also exist in the Middle East. Further, as managerial values converge or di-verge work beliefs, as high correlates of work values, should also shift accordingly.

National Differences

While the cross-cultural research train has picked up speed in the past two decades it has yet to establish a regular stop in the Middle East. Hofstede's (1980) seminal study of cultural values did include Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. However, he grouped these two countries into a category titled "Arab" countries that also included five other countries. Along Hofstede's four dimensions this Arab group scored high in power distance, high in uncertainty avoidance, low in individualism, and high in masculinity. Ronen and Shenkar (1985), in a synthesis of cross-cultural attitudinal research, also grouped six Middle Eastern countries together in an Arab cluster (that included Kuwait, Oman, and Saudi Arabia). While Hofstede's (1980) and Ronen and Shenkar's (1985) results are interesting, the grouping of Middle Eastern countries into one homogenous entity serves as a cultural panacea for the problem of understanding diversity in this region.

Subsequent research has indicated that the grouping of these Arab states into one cluster may not be appropriate (Hickson & Pugh, 1995). As mentioned above the intense Saudi commitment to Islam and the scope and breadth of influence that Islam has in nearly every aspect of the Saudi Arabian culture differentiates this country from Oman and Kuwait. Islamic law, or *Shari'ah*, is fully observed in Saudi Arabia and there are no churches, synagogues, tem-

ples or shrines in the country: only mosques (Hickson & Pugh, 1995). In addition, 99% of Saudi nationals are Sunni Muslims resulting in a more pure, fundamental, group. Many cultural traditions such as gender segregation at work and school are fully upheld in Saudi Arabia yet are relaxed or nonexistent in other Arab states such as Kuwait and Oman. It appears that because of cultural and religious traditions the Saudi culture would be more likely to retain its cultural heritage and less susceptible to convergence. Stated formally,

> *H1:* *Work beliefs in Saudi Arabia will be more divergent than those of the Arab states Oman and Kuwait, therefore differences will exist between Saudi Arabian managers and managers from Oman and Kuwait.*

Gender

The impact of demographic variables on countless organizational constructs has been well documented in the cross-cultural management literature (i.e., Gibson, 1995; Hofstede, 1997). Both men and women have been found to express values that differ in a number of stereotypical ways (Connor & Becker, 1994). Generalizations about gender and ideas about the woman's traditional role in society which have hampered the advancement of female managers worldwide are perhaps even more pronounced in the Arab Gulf region because of the prevailing strict Islamic traditions. The status of women in Islam is subject to interpretation, varying

widely between the modernist and fundamentalist perspectives (Haddad, 1998). Nonetheless, the dominant social customs and cultural norms regarding women in this region are commonly attributed to the Qur'an and hadith (the recorded words and deeds of the Prophet Mohammed) (Roded, 1999: 48–57). Some examples from the hadith are (Hashim, 1973):

Exalted Social and religious status of women: "Paradise lies at the feet of mothers" (p. 25)

Male/Female relationship: "Admonish your spouse with kindness" (p. 62)

The right to choose in marriage: Mohammed invalidated the marriage of a woman who came to him complaining of her parents forcing her to marry a man of their choice. (p. 65)

Equality of men and Women: "— Since men and women came from the same essence, they are equal in their humanities". (p. 67)

As to the seclusion of Women, It is not specifically known when this practice started in Islamic societies. What is known is that during the early day of Islam and before the death of Prophet Mohammed gender-based segregation was not practiced. In fact, women were encouraged to go to the mosque to perform prayers along with men and the prophet's spouse was a successful merchant who ran a very prosperous business. However, about 150 years after the death of the prophet, women were secluded. This seclusion was not practiced among nomadic tribes. (Barswell, 1996). Today in contemporary Muslim societies the practices of veiling and gender segregation are influenced by cultural traditions causing varying

forms and degrees of adherence to them. For example, in Egypt women walk unveiled and gender segregation in educational institutions and work places are not heard of. In recent years the country of Pakistan had a woman Prime Minister (Barswell, 1996).

The business world has traditionally been exclusively male in the Middle East. Since men are more likely to be exposed to Western ways because of this social structure then it would appear consistent that men would also be more likely to have their values and worldviews shaped by foreign influences. Thus,

> **H2:** *Regardless of nationality, men in the Middle East are more likely to differ in their work beliefs than women.*

Segregation of the sexes in public or social venues is yet another Arab cultural norm derived from Islamic tradition that may affect the acceptance of women in management. The Qur'an does not explicitly prescribe segregation of the sexes, although it is implied in numerous passages (Roded, 1999). Although some Islamic cultures have made excellent strides in the global quest for gender equality (such as Pakistan or Bangladesh), in certain sectors of Islamic society two nearly parallel worlds exist: one for men and one for women. This notion of gender differentiated lives is more prevalent in Saudi Arabia and upheld to a less strenuous code in Oman and Kuwait. The most obvious example of variation in gender roles is the female participation in the political life in Kuwait and Oman and the lack of it in Saudi Arabia. Women in Kuwait run for and get nominated for political offices like the Kuwaiti Parliament. Unlike Saudi Arabian educational institutions and work places, the Kuwaiti and Omani are not segregated by gender. This is mainly because the diverse ethnicity of the population and the larger dependence on foreign labor in Kuwait and Oman. Therefore,

> **H3:** *The difference between male and female work beliefs is more likely to differ in Saudi Arabian than in Oman and Kuwait.*

Age

Researchers have revealed that as individuals age they acquire and retain more information that leads to a greater accuracy and/or diversity of beliefs (Puffer et al., 1998). In both the American and Scottish sample in Dickson and Buchholz's (1977) study there was a tendency for the endorsement of the political and leisure beliefs to decrease with age. Dickson and Buchholz (1977) concluded that younger workers feel they are alienated from decision-making processes in the organization and therefore feel less committed. Moreover, individuals under the age of thirty were not found to be more humanistically oriented and less accepting of a traditional work ethic as presumed (Dickson & Buchholz, 1977). In the Middle East it is expected for this pattern to continue, yet with a stronger likelihood of differences between Kuwait and Oman because of the convergence of values. This leads to our next hypothesis:

H4: *Kuwaiti and Omani workers are more likely to experience differences in beliefs by age than Saudi Arabian workers.*

Management Level

The assumption concerning the effect of management level on work beliefs is that feelings of presumed exploitation and lack of participation in the decision-making process decrease as managers climb the corporate ladder (Dickson & Buchholz, 1977). The Saudi Arabian culture in particular has a unique system of managerial hierarchy because of the prevalence of its hereditary monarchy structure and the fact that members of the extensive royal family dominate executive level positions throughout the country (Hickson & Pugh, 1995). The royal family members and educated technocrats control top level executive positions in the public sector and the public sector contributes 52% to Saudi Arabia's total GDP. (Saudi Arabia, 2000). The dominance of family-owned and operated businesses, where senior executive positions are reserved for wealthy and well-educated immediate family members, typically includes strong job security and room for personal fulfillment in Saudi Arabia. Thus,

H5: *The difference between executive level and staff level workers is more likely to differ in Saudi Arabia than in Oman and Kuwait.*

Education

Prior research has suggested that increasing education may lead to an in-

crease in a person's responsibility and authority both on the job and at home (Buchholz, 1977). Research has suggested that education compensates for feelings of exploitation and alienation by providing a sense of power and control over one's individual affairs. Moreover, educated persons see a lesser need for others to participate in decision-making processes and place a lower value on group dynamics in the organization (Dickson & Buchholz, 1977). Since Oman has only one university, and has lagged behind Saudi Arabia and Kuwait in higher education, it would appear consistent for fewer Omani's to have graduate degrees. Based on this premise,

H6: *Middle Eastern managers from Saudi Arabia and Kuwait with graduate level degrees will have more work belief differences than compatriots with less education when compared to Oman.*

METHODOLOGY

Sample and Data Collection

Individuals from Saudi Arabia, Oman, and Kuwait were selected for participation in the study. The individuals were selected from a wide variety of organizations and every attempt was made to have a broad distribution across the demographic categories of gender, management level, age, and education. In each country individuals were sampled from numerous locations and a representative sample of industries,

such as banking, insurance, oil, travel/ tourism, and manufacturing, was obtained. Participation in the study was restricted to citizens of the respective countries. Local "data captains" were selected in each country and trained in data collection techniques by two of the study's authors. The data captions included a mix of local business professors and MBA students, and each individual was either previously trained in research methods or updated on this important issues related to the present study. Although it is more difficult to obtain female responses intentionally targeted a number of female work zones to bolster the diversity of our sample. Because information regarding nonrespondents was not provided it is difficult to discern if any nonresponse biases exist. However, it has been argued in prior studies of cultural phenomenon across borders (i.e., Shane et al., 1995) that no theoretical evidence exists that suggests a significant nonresponse bias influence on culturally generated data.

A total of 600 surveys were initially distributed, 200 to each country, which led to 365 usable surveys and an overall response rate of 60.8%. The surveys were six pages in length (in Arabic). To overcome problems associated with data collection such as unreliable postal services in these countries, the personal delivery followed by a later pick up methodology suggested by Tuncalp (1988) was adopted. Each potential respondent was hand delivered the questionnaire by members of the data collection team, approximately one week later the data collection team returned to collect the completed surveys.

The sample sizes (and response rates) for each country are as follows: Saudi Arabia 107 (53.5%), Oman 104 (52%), and Kuwait 154 (77%). As revealed in Table 2 a strong majority of the respondents were men in the Saudi Arabian (69.8%) and Omani (74.8%) groups while the Kuwaiti group had a relatively even distribution of men (46.1%) and women (53.9%). For all three countries only a small percentage of the individuals identified themselves as executives (ranging from 6.8% to 13.7%). Strong diversity existed in the middle management and staff groups. The percentage of male executives was much higher than that of women in Saudi Arabia (64% male) and Oman (83% male) and close to equal in Kuwait. This pattern held true at the middle management level just for Oman. A number of the women that participated in the study were involved in running small businesses which explains some of the atypical higher management levels in Saudi Arabia. The age distributions were also disparate across the three countries with a very young population in Oman (74% between the ages of 20–29), a strong "thirty-something" group in Saudi Arabia (71% between 30 and 39), and a fairly even distribution in Kuwait. With the exception of Oman (45.6%), the majority of the individuals were college educated.

Survey Instrument

To obtain reliable information from the respondents an established scale was selected for data collection. The instrument was originally developed in the U.S. by Buchholz (1977) and later

Table 2
Characteristics of Respondents

	Saudi Arabia (n = 107)	Oman (n = 104)	Kuwait (n = 154)
Gender			
Male	69.8%	74.8%	46.1%
Female	30.2%	25.2%	53.9%
Management Level			
Executive	13.7%	6.8%	10.3%
Middle Management	12.7%	35.0%	59.5%
Staff	73.6%	58.3%	30.2%
Age			
20–29	11.2%	74.0%	34.7%
30−39	71.0%	24.0%	48.3%
40+	17.8%	1.9%	17.0%
Education			
High School	6.7%	41.6%	23.0%
Some College	20.0%	12.9%	21.6%
College Degree	60.0%	41.6%	49.6%
Graduate Degree	13.3%	4.0%	5.8%
Management Level by Gender			
Executive—male	64.2%	83.3%	41.6%
Executive—female	35.8%	16.7%	58.4%
Middle mgt—male	38.5%	94.4%	46.4%
Middle mgt.—female	61.5%	5.6%	53.6%
Staff—male	75.7%	63.3%	45.7%
Staff—female	24.3%	36.7%	54.3%

validated in various countries that include Scotland (Dickson & Buchholz, 1977) and Russia (Puffer et al., 1997). This scale was selected because it measures a full-range of work beliefs through 37 Likert-scale items. Respondents were queried about the extent to which they agree with the statements provided. In addition, respondents completed a section on demographic information that included questions about age, gender, nationality, educational and managerial levels.

The reliabilities for each variable in the present study are as follows: humanistic beliefs 0.79, organizational beliefs 0.74, work ethic 0.67, beliefs about participation in managerial decisions 0.70, leisure ethic 0.41, and political beliefs 0.60. The minimum reliability criteria threshold suggested by Malhotra (1999) of 0.60 was met by all of the variables with the exception of leisure ethic. The instrument was translated into Arabic by a bilingual Arabic-English speaker who is currently working in Saudi Arabia and speaks Arabic as a first language. Based on proper survey design protocol, the survey was subsequently

back-translated by both a bilingual Arabic-English speaker who is working in the United States, and a native English speaker (Alreck & Settle, 1995). For Kuwait and Oman bilingual assistants were contacted in each country to ensure that any adjustments to local idiom were made.

RESULTS

In Table 3 the means, standard deviations, and results from one-way analysis of variance procedures for the overall sample are provided. For the group as a whole, humanistic beliefs were the strongest (mean = 4.34) followed by organizational beliefs (3.99). Although this is consistent with the top two beliefs for Russian managers (Puffer et al., 1998); U.S. managers ranked humanistic beliefs the highest and leisure beliefs second (Buchholz, 1977).

To test Hypothesis 1, that Saudi Arabian work beliefs will differ from those of Oman and Kuwait, an ANOVA was run for each belief cluster to test for any differences in means across the three groups. The Omnibus F test was significant for both the work ethic ($F = 3.47$; $p < .05$) and participation ($F = 2.85$; $p < .05$) dimensions that suggests differences in these clusters. Subsequent multiple comparison (Scheffé) tests yielded significant differences ($p < .05$) between the Saudi Arabian and Kuwaiti groups in work ethic. This suggests that Saudis tend to have a stronger work ethic than Kuwaitis do and are more independently motivated in the workplace. Post hoc Scheffé tests performed on the participation dimension revealed

that Saudi workers are more open to decision-making across levels of an organization than their Omani counterparts. This may be attributable to the strong Islamic belief in egalitarianism that has been less tainted in Saudi Arabia by outside influences. In earlier studies using the same scale the U.S. and Scotland had mean scores much lower than the three Middle Eastern countries in work ethic. For example, U.S. managers scored between 2.32 and 2.86 while Scottish managers scored between 2.44 and 2.55 in studies by Dickson and Buchholz (1977). The Omani and Kuwaiti means of 3.48 and 3.40, respectively (significant at the 0.05 level) are lower than that of Saudi Arabia (3.67) which is supportive of Saudi values being further away from those of the West. The same pattern holds for the participation variable. Based on these findings and comparisons it appears that certain Saudi beliefs do appear to be more divergent than beliefs of their Middle Eastern neighbors. Thus Hypothesis 1 is supported.

The second Hypothesis stated that regardless of nationality men in the Middle East will be more likely to differ in their work beliefs than women. The results of twelve ANOVAs performed across the six work beliefs (six for men and six for women) appear in the final two columns of Table 3. As predicted, and in support of Hypothesis 2, no significant differences were revealed in the testing of work beliefs for women, while significant differences ($p < .05$) were revealed in three work beliefs for the male group: work ethic, participation, and political beliefs. Similar to the results from the overall tests in Hypoth-

Table 3

Results of One-Way Analysis of Variance Comparing Beliefs about Work for Saudi Arabia, Oman, and Kuwait[a]

Dependent Variables	Mean	SD	Source	df	Sum of Squares	Mean Squares	F	Scheffé: Overall group	Scheffé: Women	Scheffé: Men
Humanistic	4.34	0.51	Between	2	0.56	0.28	1.06	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.
			Within	354	93.79	0.27				
Organizational	3.99	0.66	Between	2	1.20	0.60	1.40	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.
			Within	350	149.90	0.43				
Work Ethic	3.50	0.81	Between	2	4.53	2.26	3.47*	S.A.>Kuwait*	n.d.	S.A.>Kuwait*
			Within	354	230.75	0.65				
Participation	3.79	0.77	Between	2	3.38	1.69	2.85*	S.A.>Oman*	n.d.	S.A.>Oman* S.A.>Kuwait*
			Within	351	207.99	0.59				
Leisure	2.77	0.64	Between	2	0.30	0.15	0.37	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.
			Within	338	138.16	0.41				
Political	3.21	0.56	Between	2	1.13	0.56	1.82	n.d.	n.d.	S.A.>Kuwait*
			Within	319	98.99	0.31				

p < .05.
[a]N varies from 322 to 357. n.d. = no difference.

esis 1 all differences noted revealed Saudi men scoring higher than their counterparts from Oman and Kuwait.

Because the possibility of interaction effects was present we also performed some exploratory testing. We created two new multiplicitive variables, gender times management level and gender time age, and performed OLS linear regression with each work belief as a dependent variable while controlling for the other demographic variables. This was done for each country for a total of 18 regression models. Only three significant interaction effects were present: (1) for the Humanistic variable gender/age was significant for Kuwait ($p < .05$; $F = 2.48$), (2) for the Organizational variable gender/age was significant for Oman ($p < .01$; $F = 3.39$), and for the Participation variable gender/ management level was significant for Saudi Arabia ($p < .05$; $F = 2.24$).

To test Hypotheses 3 through 6 sub-group analyses were performed for each of the demographic groups for each country. Again, one-way ANOVAs and follow up Scheffé tests were used for each group; whereas *t* tests were employed to test for gender differences.

In Table 4 the results from the demographic tests of all three groups are presented. Hypothesis 3 posed that gender differences are more likely to exist in Saudi Arabia than in Oman or Kuwait. *t* tests by country revealed that men in Saudi Arabia scored significantly different from women on three of the six dimensions: organizational ($p < .05$), leisure ($p < .05$), and political ($p < .05$) beliefs. In all three instances the Saudi males scored higher than females thus indicating a stronger belief along each

variable. The Kuwait and Oman analyses revealed only one significant work belief difference between men and women thus Hypothesis 3 is supported.

The next Hypothesis, H4, proposed that Kuwaiti and Omani workers are more likely than Saudi workers to experience age differences. The results from six one-way ANOVAs per country support this claim. No significant differences were identified for the Saudi group, while Oman experienced one difference, political beliefs ($p < .05$), and Kuwait experienced three differences, humanistic ($p < .05$), organizational ($p < .05$), and leisure ($p < .05$). These findings are consistent with the general pattern of Omani and Kuwaiti values converging into a more Western direction (age differences were also found in the U.S., Scotland, and Russia) while Saudi values are diverging and maintaining independence.

Testing of the management level hypothesis, H5, revealed more differences between executive and staff level workers in Saudi Arabia as projected. The results from Table 4 show two Saudi differences between executives and staffers (humanistic, $p < .05$ and work ethic, $p < .05$) whereas the other two groups only experienced a total of one difference (Oman, organizational, $p < .05$). Hypothesis 6 received mixed support as only Saudi managers with graduate degrees had significant differences in work beliefs: they displayed a stronger work ethic than less educated workers ($p < .01$) and less interest in leisure time ($p < .01$). Based on these empirical findings a pattern of convergence appears to be burgeoning in Kuwait and Oman while the traditional Islamic val-

Table 4

Beliefs about Work for Saudi Arabia, Oman, and Kuwait

Managerial Groups	Humanistic			Organizational			Work Ethic			Participation			Leisure			Political		
	SA	OM	KU	SA	OM	KU	SA	OM	KU	SA	OM	KU	SA	OM	KU	SA	OM	KU
Country Mean	4.40	4.29	4.33	4.08	3.98	3.94	3.67	3.48	3.40	3.94	3.71	3.74	2.79	2.80	2.74	3.30	3.20	3.16
Age Groups																		
20–29	4.50	4.32	4.44*	3.97	3.98	3.73*	3.61	3.44	3.51	4.00	3.71	3.82	2.63	2.82	2.56*	3.48	3.18*	3.09
30–39	4.34	4.24	4.20*	4.08	4.00	4.01	3.59	3.61	3.38	3.85	3.76	3.65	2.82	2.74	2.92*	3.23	3.34*	3.22
40+	4.54	4.00	4.45	4.24	3.64	4.19*	4.13	3.10	3.21	4.29	2.88	3.65	2.75	2.90	2.62	3.44	2.25*	3.06
Gender																		
Men	4.39	4.24*	4.27*	4.18*	3.99	4.04*	3.64	3.51	3.31	3.98	3.69	3.68	2.90*	2.83	2.72	3.37*	3.19	3.11
Women	4.43	4.43*	4.38*	3.86*	3.94	3.87*	3.71	3.48	3.48	3.82	3.76	3.81	2.55*	2.74	2.72	3.14*	3.28	3.22
Mgt. Level																		
Executives	4.72*	4.30	4.23	4.35	4.55*	3.91	4.17*	3.40	3.08	3.98	3.85	3.66	2.76	2.63	2.85	3.21	3.36	3.28
Middle Mgt.	4.29	4.35	4.39	3.92	4.05	3.97	3.46	3.53	3.33	3.88	3.78	3.74	2.83	2.83	2.69	3.27	3.26	3.08
Staff	4.33	4.26	4.28	4.02	3.88*	3.87	3.58*	3.46	3.48	3.93	3.65	3.81	2.72	2.80	2.68	3.30	3.14	3.25
Education																		
High School	4.16	4.31	4.20	3.88	4.02	3.92	3.80	3.64	3.35	4.18	3.61	4.01	2.86	2.74	2.68	3.64	3.10	3.12
Some College	4.41	4.00	4.35	4.02	3.65	3.94	3.39**	3.04	3.48	4.00	3.52	3.76	3.30**	2.91	2.78	3.58	3.06	3.27
College grad.	4.33	4.39	4.33	4.08	4.06	3.87	3.55***	3.52	3.34	3.90	3.87	3.61	2.62**	2.93	2.68	3.20	3.35	3.09
Grad. degree	4.63	3.94	4.34	4.21	3.57	4.18	4.25***	3.28	3.70	3.95	3.45	3.78	2.64***	2.28	2.85	3.15	3.10	3.25

$p < .05$, **$p < .01$.
Note 1: One-way ANOVAs performed on all groups (except Gender—t-tests).
Note 2: Harmonic mean sample sizes used for post-hoc Scheffé analyses.

ues of Saudi Arabia may indeed be diverging away from those of their Arab neighbors. In the next section this phenomenon will be explored in more depth and additional issues related to the study will be revisited and evaluated.

DISCUSSION

The results of this study appear to identify some interesting patterns both across and within the three sampled countries from the Middle East. While earlier comparative studies in the Middle East have focused on countries with a number of perceived differences (i.e., Iraq vs. Saudi Arabia, Ali & Al–Shakhis, 1989) the focus of this study was on three countries that have traditionally been considered quite similar. The specific objectives of this study were (1) to examine the extent to which select Middle Eastern countries vary in their core work beliefs and (2) to explore for demographic work belief differences within each country.

In our pursuit of these objectives we focused on the convergence versus divergence of values. The majority of our hypotheses were developed based on the potential divergence of Saudi Arabian values, and to a lesser extent the convergence or crossvergence or Omani and Kuwaiti values. Our support of Hypotheses 1, 3, 4, and 5 strengthen the claim that Saudi work beliefs are unique, or divergent, and somewhat independent of the beliefs of Omanis and Kuwaitis. In fact, when contrasting the group means from each dimension for all three countries with earlier studies

the Saudi scores are undoubtedly more distant from Russian, Scottish and U.S. scores than the scores of the subjects from Oman and Kuwait (Buchholz, 1977; Puffer et al., 1997). The only dimension where the Saudi beliefs are not on the extreme of the continuum is leisure ethic, where the scores for all three countries were extremely close (and this variable's reliability was rather poor). The results from the Saudi sample are not surprising given the deeply rooted Islamic traditions among people of this country.

Upon revisiting the comparative results that tested for diversity across countries (Hypothesis 1) the differences are clearly present among these groups. While only the variables of work ethic and participative decision-making showed significant differences, the Saudi Arabian values and beliefs appear to be consistently diverging away from those of Oman and Kuwait at a number of demographic levels. Interestingly, prior studies have suggested that work ethic is deeply related to individuality in the work place (Puffer et al., 1998). While the Middle East may be collectivistic in general, some countries, such as Saudi Arabia, may have a stronger emphasis on individuality in the work place. Thus, overall it seems that the Saudi group's beliefs are more unique when compared to more traditional Middle Eastern values.

An examination of demographic differences within the three countries also uncovered a range of diversity in work beliefs. One interesting pattern existed in the perceptions of men versus women. No differences were found

across women of the three countries while men differed along the work ethic, participation, and political dimensions. Comparisons within each group revealed that this gender gap is strongest in Saudi Arabia that again supports the claim that traditional Islamic values remain less influenced by outside forces in this country. This pattern may change in the future as the result of new technology. Since it is difficult for women to enter the workforce in Saudi Arabia many have turned to the Internet as a viable alternative (The Economist, 1999). Apparently two-thirds of Internet users in Saudi Arabia are women (The Economist, 1999). Other findings in the age and management level analyses also revealed a pattern of Saudi work belief divergence when compared to its neighbors. Perhaps Oman and Kuwait are at a crossvergence point and are developing their own unique cultural paradigms as a result of a combination of internal and external factors (Ralston et al., 1993).

Limitations

As with any exploratory study in cross-cultural management limitations are inevitable and a risk that must be taken to extend our current boundaries of knowledge. The inclusion of only three countries surely hampers generalizability in the present study. Procurement of data from more diverse countries in the Middle East, such as Lebanon, Iran, and Egypt, would undoubtedly add to the appeal of the existing database. Social desirability bias may have been a factor in responses to some of the questions and may have

experienced variation across groups such as age and gender (despite the fact that all attempts to prevent this potential pitfall were made). Further, measuring cognitive beliefs as opposed to actual behavior, although common in management studies may lead to less than accurate generalizations about workers' actions in given situations. The collection of firm and industry data would have been beneficial to our study as well. In particular, the foreign versus locally owned status of the sampled individual's organizations is something that should be considered by future researchers.

IMPLICATIONS

International managers may find the results of this study intriguing for a number of reasons. First, scant information is available on work beliefs in the Middle East and the findings presented here may help in cultural and sensitivity training for potential expatriates. Second, firms that anticipate commerce in this region may want to consider altering their policies to incorporate some of the demographic differences that have been revealed (such as the facilitation of a participative decision structure when working with Saudi firms). Also, firms may want to obtain more information about potential host country managers when faced with hiring decisions. On a global scale the pattern of convergence versus divergence of values has significant implications for Multinational firms that view the world as one market. Any information on the shifting of values has a multitude of marketing, pro-

duction and strategic implications. Also, consistent with Ali and Al–Shakhis' (1989) earlier study the commitment to leisure beliefs was minimal in all three countries. This reinforces the notion that Arabs tend to prefer other activities, such as philosophical debates, over leisure given the current state of recreational facilities available.

An abundance of future research directions are evident at this point in time. It would be interesting to extend this study into other countries of the Middle East, which may confirm or negate some of the current findings. While similar research endeavors have examined Iraq and Morocco (Ali & Al–Shakhis, 1989; Ali & Wahabi, 1995), an exploration of work belief and managerial phenomena in countries such as Tunisia, Syria, and Lebanon would add to the burgeoning body of knowledge in this region of the world. The analysis of perceptions of other behavioral phenomena, such as leadership or ethics, within Saudi Arabia, Oman and Kuwait may also be attractive to researchers. Over time, the longitudinal monitoring of any additional shifts in work beliefs and values in the countries of this study will clearly provide a more refined understanding of the state of convergence versus divergence in the Middle East. Promise about economic development in the Middle East may indeed lead to an influx of research in the future, as one expert states (Richards, 1995): "Our library shelves sag with books about the 'Asian Miracle.' Perhaps, 30 years from now our children will browse among volumes on the Middle East Awakening."

NOTES

1. The term "Middle East" employed in this study is used in two forms: as a general reference point for the 22 countries which comprise this region and as a specific reference to the three sampled countries of Kuwait, Oman, and Saudi Arabia. It should be noted that very real diversity exists in this region and our study is geared toward generalizations about the queried countries (Ali, 1999).

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