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Article

How Wasta Practiced by HRM Employees Hampers Entrepreneurs’ Innovation and Sustainable Development: The Case of the MENA Region

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Abstract

This study examines Wasta practiced by senior human resource management employees, entrepreneurial creativity, innovation, and sustainable development in the MENA and why the MENA entrepreneurs and their home countries are not among the top 100 innovators in the Global Innovation Index. In addition, the study explains why senior human resource management employees’ Wasta practices impede sustainable development. The author used Amabile’s Componential Theory of Organizational Creativity and Amabile’s Model of Creativity and Innovation in Organizations, articles published in Wasta, secondary data from the Global Innovation Index (GII) in 2023, and the (GEM NECI) in (2023) to support the arguments. The author analyzed the secondary datasets using a qualitative comparative analysis (constant analysis technique) to analyses documents. The analyzed datasets include accessible online indices, electronic and databases from the Global Innovation Index (GII) in 2023, the World’s Most Innovative Companies Index (Forbes), and the Top 100 Global Innovators 2024 Rankings Report (Clarivate). The study results conclude that Wasta practiced by senior human resource management employees is more likely to explain why MENA entrepreneurs are less creative, less innovative, lag in acquiring sustainable development, and why their countries are not ranked in the top 100 innovative countries worldwide. Practices. Entrepreneurs should also understand why hiring fair human resource managers and supervisors when selecting candidates and promoting existing employees is critical. Moreover, the results might encourage policymakers to develop and implement new rules and regulations to tackle Wasta practices in the MENA region if they seek better innovative and sustainable development.

Keywords: wasta; HRM practices; global innovation index; sustainable development

1. Introduction

Innovation is the transformation and commercialisation of creative ideas into products or services. Strategically, innovation is a competitive advantage that entrepreneurs strive to keep so as to stand out and beat their competitors. The United Nations Trade and Development (UNCTAD) has reported a humble performance of nationwide innovation practices in several Arab MENA countries (Gonzalez-Sanz, 2015). According to the UNCTAD, innovation intake does not translate into innovation outcomes. Many of the wealthy MENA governments like Iran, UAE, Qatar, and KSA states work with a view to innovation input (i.e., they invest in ICT, infrastructure, human capital, etc). They exceed the global average and trends but have inefficient performance in multiple innovation output indicators, such as patents, knowledge creation, knowledge diffusion, technical and scientific publications, and creative outputs. Entrepreneurs and countries understand that a business competitive advantage is a cornerstone that can be achieved by sustainable innovation; they hope to achieve that since it opens new markets, increases sales, generates more revenues, diversifies a country’s economy, and increases a country’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP). On the other hand, Wasta a social network and interpersonal connections rooted in a family, tribe, and extended

relationships practised by senior human resource management (HRM), has negative influences on employee well-being and overall organisational performance (Khalfan, 2024). These negative influences include low motivation, low competency, no loyalty, low engagement, psychological distress, no commitment, high turnover, less creativity, and frustration (Talib, 2017; Ta’Amnha, Sayce, and Tregaskis, 2016).

According to the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor Releases Ranking of Countries for Conditions to Start a Business in 2023, it is evident that entrepreneurs in seven countries in the MENA region (Appendix 1) enjoy much support in terms of government support and financing of entrepreneurs. For example, Turkey, Morocco, Oman, United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Jordan, Israel, and Saudi Arabia have been ranked in the top ten countries that nurture innovation by spending almost all twelve entrepreneurial environment conditions (Appendix 1). However, none of these countries ranked in the top ten best intrapleural conditions to start a business ranks in the top ten among the most innovative countries in the world according to the Global Innovation Index 2023 (Appendix 2) or the World’s Most Entrepreneurial Countries, 2024 (Table 1). For example, Oman still ranks behind many countries that spend less on supporting entrepreneurs in terms of innovation ranking (Oman ranked number 69 in 2023). When it comes to the number of patents (i.e., it is a kind of intellectual property that provides a lawful privilege for the originator to ban others from making or selling an invention for a limited time) granted (Table 2) none of these countries ranked in top ten best intrapleural conditions to start a business ranks in top ten among the countries with the most significant number of patents. For example, Table 2 shows that only Saudi Arabia ranks number 20 (the last in the top 20 list) while the country ranks number 3 among the most governments supporting and financing entrepreneurs. This indices analysis leads to four research questions. First, why are some countries in the MENA region among the top spenders in entrepreneurial support and financing, but they rank behind in the Global Innovation Index (GII)? Second, can researchers use Amabile’s Componential Theory of Organizational Creativity and Amabile’s Model of Creativity and Innovation in Organizations to answer the first question? Third, does Wasta play a role in entrepreneurial innovation in the MENA region? Fourth, how does Wasta practice by senior HRM employees impede sustainable development?

Table 1. The Themes, Codes, and Factor Qualitative Comparative Analysis Techniques.

Source of Information	Themes	Factors Identified
Literature Reviewed Articles	Theme 1: Culture	1. PD, COL, HAR, UAE
	Theme 2: HRM Practices	1. Wasta
	Theme 3: HRM Impacts	2. Unfair Hiring
	Theme 4: HRM Impacts	2. Unfair Promotion
	Theme 5: Innovation	2. Unfair Development
		2. Unfair Compensation
		3. Low Morale
		3. High Turnover
		3. More Frustration
		3. No Commitment
		3. Low Motivation
		3. Low Competency
		3. Lower Engagement
		4. Creativity
		4. Innovation
		5. Sustainable Development

Conditions to start a business based on Global Entrepreneurship Monitor's National Entrepreneurship Context Index (GEM NECI) in (2023).	Theme 1: the quality of a particular economy's entrepreneurial environment that fosters innovation in a country Theme 2: Factors that enhance, hinder, or hinder entrepreneurial creativity and innovation.	1. Creativity 2. Innovation
The GEM's National Entrepreneurial Context Index (NECI)	Theme 1: Entrepreneurial conditions.	Innovation
Global Innovation Index by Country 2024	Theme 1: Innovation inputs.	Innovation outputs (patents, knowledge creation, knowledge diffusion, patents, technical and scientific publications)
The World's Most Innovative Companies Index (Forbes)	Theme 1: Innovation impact ranking.	Innovative companies
The World's Most Entrepreneurial Countries, 2024	Theme 1: Easy access to capital for entrepreneurs, Skilled workforce, and competitive business environment. Theme 2: Entrepreneurial environment.	Innovation
Patents by Country / Number of Patents Per Country 2024	Theme 1: requirements, Patent laws, procedures, national laws, procedures.	Creativity Patents

Source: The author's work.

Table 2. The World's Most Entrepreneurial Countries, 2024.

Rank	Country	Score
1	United States	42.88
2	Germany	41.05
3	United Kingdom	35.8
4	Israel	34.25
5	United Arab Emirates	31.01
6	Poland	29.75
7	Spain	29.01
8	Sweden	28.16
9	India	25.47
10	France	25.34
11	Australia	25.05
12	Estonia	24.64

13	Ireland	24.37
14	Malaysia	23.6
15	Saudi Arabia	22.98
16	South Korea	22.43
17	Canada	21.8
18	Philippines	21.62
19	Denmark	21.42
20	Switzerland	21.34
21	Taiwan	21.24
22	Japan	20.71
23	Singapore	20.05
24	China	20.04
25	Austria	19.92
26	Portugal	19.73
27	Belgium	19.72
28	Italy	19.46
29	New Zealand	18.55
30	Thailand	18.32
31	Colombia	18.25
32	Bulgaria	18.05
33	Chile	17.41
34	Czech Republic	17.37
35	Mexico	17.37
36	Norway	17.22
37	Cyprus	17.16
38	Argentina	16.96
39	Latvia	16.76
40	Serbia	16.55
41	Brazil	16.4
42	Romania	16.25
43	Hungary	16.19
44	Netherlands	16
45	Indonesia	15.42
46	Greece	15.23
47	Croatia	15.2
48	South Africa	15.12
49	Luxembourg	15.05
50	Rwanda	14.96
51	Turkey	14.95
52	Slovenia	14.86
53	Slovakia	14.8
54	Russia	14.79
55	Belarus	14.71

56	Peru	14.65
57	Iceland	14.65
58	Qatar	14.54
59	Armenia	14.41
60	Malta	14.4
61	Morocco	14.32
62	Moldova	14.23
63	Kenya	14.2
64	Nigeria	14.11
65	Azerbaijan	14.07
66	Finland	14
67	Kazakhstan	13.87
68	Puerto Rico	13.86
69	Uruguay	13.84
70	North Macedonia	13.59
71	Georgia	13.57
72	Lithuania	13.55
73	Ukraine	13.53
74	Vietnam	13.44
75	Jordan	13.38
76	Tunisia	13.38
77	Ghana	13.35
78	Ecuador	13.34
79	Bahrain	13.34
80	Sri Lanka	13.18
81	Dominican Republic	13.16
82	Albania	13.16
83	Costa Rica	13.06
84	Bangladesh	12.99
85	Jamaica	12.91
86	Botswana	12.85
87	Lebanon	12.8
88	Iran	12.66
89	Cameroon	12.65
90	Egypt	12.59
91	Uganda	12.59
92	Venezuela	12.59
93	Trinidad & Tobago	12.52
94	Paraguay	12.39
95	Bolivia	12.32
96	Algeria	12.28
97	Ethiopia	12.27
98	Zambia	12.27

99	Pakistan	12.24
100	El Salvador	12.18

Source. CEOWORLD Magazine - Latest - Special Reports - World’s Most Entrepreneurial Countries, 2024.

The modest innovation performance in the MENA region could be attributed to four factors: economic diversification, labor market inefficiency, poor quality of the educational system, and private sector role in research and development (R&D). The literature on innovation barriers in the MENA region has consensus on the influence of research and development (R&D) expenditure on a country’s innovation capability (Morrar, 2018). According to Morrar (2018), there is a significant concern in considerable of the MENA region countries concerning the shortcomings of innovation, precisely due to the lack of proper policy mechanisms, quality of these countries’ innovation systems, the absence of proper economic systems, the inadequate schooling systems and increasing unemployment among young graduates (i.e., the gap between the schooling system and the needs in the labor market) (World Bank, 2018; ESCWA, 2017). In addition, the announcement of the Global Innovation Index (GII) 2018 indicates that most of the MENA countries ranked at the bottom of the GII 2018 declaration indices, and the institutional framework in the MENA region is one of the leading barriers to innovation. The institutional framework includes regulations, laws, procedures, and stakeholders, along with their functions and norms, which shape the behavior and socioeconomic conditions in which employees in organisations work. However, there is a need to examine the influence of Wasta practiced by senior HRM employees in the MENA region on creativity and innovation and how that can hamper entrepreneurial innovation and impede sustainable development. The literature review shows that creativity and innovation relate to expertise, task motivation, creativity skills (Amabile, 1983b), resources, organisational motivation, and management practices (Amabile, 1988a). However, researchers have not explained why or how Wasta relates to creativity and innovation in the MENA. Hence, this study seeks to seal the gap in the literature by answering the above four research questions and developing a theoretical framework for the relationship between Wasta, creativity, innovation, and sustainable development in the MENA region. By answering the above questions, the study explains why Wasta hampers the MENA entrepreneurs’ innovation progress, and keeps the MENA region countries from being more innovative and acquiring better sustainable economies.

By answering the above-mentioned questions, this study’s results contribute to the literature by expanding a Wasta theoretical model (Figure 1) that explains the relationship between Wasta, creativity, innovation, corruption, and sustainable development for advanced conceptual future research, examining and applying the Amabile model of organisational creativity and innovation in the MENA context, and identifying two direct and indirect factors that could be barriers for entrepreneurial innovation and sustainable development. For policymakers, this study’s results could help create more effective educational laws, implementations, and policies to reduce the influence of Wasta on HRM practices and, therefore, a country’s innovation capabilities, sustainable development, and improved GDP. Entrepreneurs should also understand why hiring HR managers and supervisors who are fair in hiring and promotion is critical.

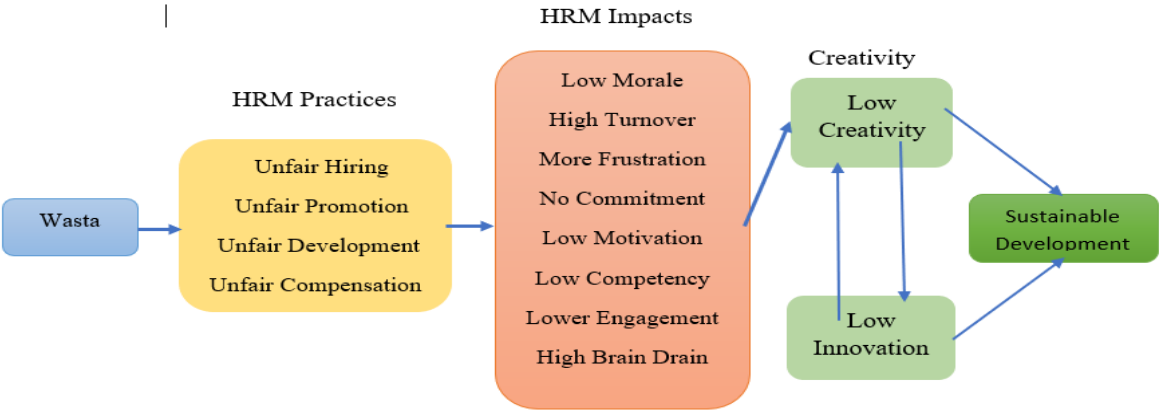


Figure 1. The Theoretical Framework for the Relationship between Wasta, HRM Practices, Creativity, Innovation, and Sustainable Development in the MENA Region Countries.

2. Literature Review

2.1. The Global Innovation Index Versus the MENA Region Countries' Ranking

The GII is an annual ranking of nations worldwide founded on their features and performance in innovation (Dutta et al., 2018). GII is one of the most extensive surveys for drawing international comparisons in innovation geographies and was created by Cornell University, the European Institute of Business Administration and the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO). GII 2018 retains precise metrics for 133 nations (around 93% of the world's countries). It contains four significant dimensions: the general GII, the Input and Output Sub-Indices, and the Innovation Efficiency Ratio. However, the broad GII is the standard of the Input and Output Sub-Indices (Dutta et al., 2018). In the overall GII Index, MENA region countries lag after Europe, South East Asia, East Asia, North America, and Oceania. Moreover, considerable numbers of Arab countries have shown the following trends in the GII since 2011. The GII lists 21 MENA region countries for which GII, innovation input and output, and the innovation efficiency ratio indices were available in the GII 2024 Report. Concerning the GII index, the author finds that Israel is the only country among the top 20 most innovative countries, only the United Arab Emirates, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia are in the top 50 most innovative countries, and only Iran, Morocco, Kuwait, Bahrain, Jordan, Oman, Tunisia, Egypt, and Lebanon are classified by the GII in the top 100 most countries.

2.2. Wasta in the MENA and Human Resource Management Practices

Wasta is the social network phenomenon of utilising personal connections to get a job and acquire government services, tenders, licenses, etc., which would usually take a lot of effort or time to get (Alenezi, Hassan, Abdelrahim, & Albadry, 2023). In other words, Wasta is a shortcut for people who use Wasta individuals to get what they want without being qualified for a specific need. According to Cunningham and Sarayrah (1993), Wasta is a social network and interpersonal relationships implanted in family, kinship, tribe, and family relationships. Families are the base and the spine of society in MENA and the Arab communities (Barakat, 1993). That is why a family is an undisputed value in the MENA region.

Regardless of lineage association, the MENA communities and the Arab Society specifically are a relation-oriented culture that concentrates mainly on building and reinforcing connections within the business instead of closing a deal (Gesteland, 2005). Wasta in the MENA is built on social relationships and impacts business decision-making (Cunningham and Sarayrah, 1993, 1994). Some of these business decisions are the HRM senior employees' decisions, including hiring, promoting, compensating, or developing employees.

According to Hofstede (1983), the Arab countries in the MENA region Score high in collectivism (COL), harmony (HAR), and power distance (PD), which is an unequal distribution of power. These national dimensions of COL, HAR, and PD influence Wasta practice in the MENA and the Arab society (Aldossari & Robertson, 2014). For instance, PD in Arab culture promotes the usage of Wasta as a tool for acquiring access to high-level people in society (Hutchings & Weir, 2006b). Wasta also relates to harmony, which is highly valued in the MENA region, where people are more likely to participate in behaviors that assure harmony and refrain from conventions that risk harmony (Matsumoto, 2000). In addition, uncertainty avoidance (UAE) may play a vital role in making decisions to negotiate with friends, family members, or strictly known strangers (Hutchings & Weir, 2006 b). The impact of culture on Wasta is confirmed by Yahchouchi (2009), who argued that Lebanese nationwide culture fosters relations-oriented leadership in firms rather than encouraging task-oriented leadership. Wasta is spread widely across the board in the Gulf Cooperation Council countries (GCC), a part of the MENA region (Ramady, 2016). Moreover, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Sudan are some countries where Wasta has been empirically tested and confirmed by Alenezi, Hassan, Abdelrahim, and Albadry (2022, March) and Abdelrahim (2023). Ramafdy (2016) and Iles, Almhedie, and Baruch (2012) argue that Wasta is practiced widely by the HRM senior employees in the MENA region since people need Wasta to secure jobs or get a promotion. The MENA region's culture is a family-based culture where the wealth and prestige of families decide the status of power and impact. In other words, Wasta is used not only to arrange for family members and close ones to be in preferred jobs but also to affect their employment promotion (Stefanidis, Banai, and Dagher, 2023).

HRM in the MENA region is significantly affected by national politics, global politics, national culture, religion, and Wasta (Iles et al., 2012); according to Ile et al. (2012), Wasta, cronyism, favoritism, personal considerations and conflicts of interest influence HRM employees in the MENA region countries. For example, favoritism and comforting merit, salary recommendation, obedience, competence measures in a partisan manner, allowing liking, and exchanging favors impact performance ratings and development places. Customary practices include utilising nepotism to acquire favors and advantages for family, relatives and friends in selection, promotion, training, delegation, discipline, and reward.

As in the GCC countries, Wasta is used widely in the MENA because it maintains a sense of fulfillment, pride, gratification, and prestige (Barnett et al., 2013). According to the Hedonism theory developed by Bentham (1996), the feelings of fulfillment, pride, gratification, prestige, and the lack of discomfort when using Wasta are the keys to Wasta practice by the HRM senior employees. The theory proposes that individuals seek pleasure and bypass pain or sadness. Accordingly, a considerable number of people in the MENA exercise Wasta to seek happiness. The sensation of joy and happiness made by Wasta is disseminated by Wasta seekers and the Wasta people. According to Hunting's and Weir (2006b), Wasta is a state of social capital (Routledge & Von Amsberg, 2003) that entitles people to exert their social power of networking to overpower the barriers to firm businesses (Xin & Pearce, 1996).

In conclusion, nowadays, Wasta's intention has changed in the last few decades from the intermediary (i.e., helping in solving intergroup disputes) to intercessory (i.e., helping individuals obtain employment, get a promotion, etc.). Intercessory Wasta has opened the doors for wrongfulness such as favoring relatives and friends (Wunderle, 2008). Wasta allows people to use their connections for personal interests (Matsumoto, 2000). Following the above-mentioned discussion and conclusion, the author posits proposition 1 and 2 (P1 and P2).

P1: *Some cultural values such as COL, PD, UAE, and HAR, influence Wasta practice in the MENA region.*

P2: *Wasta as a cultural norm is more likely to influence HRM senior employees who work for entrepreneurs in the MENA region when it comes to hiring, promoting, and developing employees.*

2.3. Human Resource Management Wasta Practices Versus Employee Behavior and Entrepreneurial Innovation

In Arab and Middle Eastern nations, sacred and cultural elements are believed to be powerful in tailoring and shaping HRM approaches or practices (Branine & Pollard, 2010; Budhwar & Mellahi, 2007; Metcalfe, 2007). For example, some cultural issues create a particular threat to the advancement of corporate performance in Saudi Arabia (Assad, 2002; Idris, 2007). Aldossari and Robertson (2016) suggest that the overall tradition of Wasta practice in Saudi Arabia is due to the powerful cultural collectivism in the Saudi community. Saudi Arabia is just one example of several MENA region countries that follow the lead. The same happens in other countries such as Sudan, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, etc. Hence, Wasta created through family relations influences the appraisal approach in this country (Branine & Pollard, 2010). One of the core areas of Wasta practice in organisations is senior HRM employees (Alsarhan, Ali, Weir, and Valax, 2021). For instance, employees in SACO have a general perception that managers' loyalty and performance evaluations are higher towards employees who are linked to them by Wasta. Accordingly, the author believes that senior HRM managers working for entrepreneurs in the MENA region are more likely to be influenced by Wasta when evaluating employee performance and appraisal (i.e., hiring and promotion). According to Alsarhan and Valax (2021), Wasta practice has damaging consequences for firm performance through its effect on worker morale, frustration, motivation, turnover, job satisfaction, brain drain, and workplace diversity (Alsarhan & Valax, 2021). Hence, the author Wasta practice by HRM senior employees working for entrepreneurs in the MENA region are more likely to influence employee job satisfaction, motivation, engagement, commitment, turnover, performance, frustration, drain brain, morale, and organisation citizenship behavior and posits proposition 3 (P3).

P3: *Wasta practice by HRM senior employees working for entrepreneurs in the MENA are more likely to influence employee job satisfaction, motivation, engagement, commitment, turnover, performance, frustration, drain brain, morale, and organization citizenship behavior negatively.*

2.4. How Wasta Influences Entrepreneurs' Creativity, Innovation, and Sustainable Development

HRM practices are firmly linked to innovation because they foster intrinsic motivation, loyalty, employee commitment, and learning, which are conducive to innovation (Easa & Orra, 2021). In addition, the latter authors believe that HRM practices–innovation relationship via creativity as a mediator also exists (Seeck & Diehl, 2017). According to Loewenberger (2016), HRM is a vital part of organisational creativity and innovation, and therefore, it is a vital part of sustainable performance and development. Wasta constitutes an important component of the national culture of the MENA region (Kassab, 2016). The most familiar context of the usage of Wasta in the HRM is the recruitment procedure and other HRM practices (Alsarhan & Valax, 2020) that lead to hiring unqualified employees. Some scholars such as Aladwan et al. (2014), and Branine and Analoui (2006) argue that the practice of Wasta is the main, and arguably the most effective way for Arabs, in general, to get employed. The Arabs make up the majority of the population in the MENA region. Some scholars such as Alkhanbshi and Al-Kandi (2014) have argued that female workers are impacted by Wasta practice. This is the overall utilisation of Wasta in the workplace and the central role it takes in any HRM practice. For instance, private and public banks in Saudi Arabia are endlessly battling against Wasta practice (Fawzi & Almarshed, 2013). In addition, evidence also indicates that increased levels of Wasta practice is considered corruption that lowers levels of effective entrepreneurship and vice-versa" (Avnimelech et al., 2013). Furthermore, Wasta has adverse outcomes on the general performance of firms via the effect it exerts on employee turnover, frustration, motivation, job satisfaction, workplace diversity, morale, commitment and brain drain (Alsarhan & Valax, 2020). Adoption of innovation requires employee commitment and effort. The adoption of inventions mandates employee commitment and endeavor, which is an innovation barrier (Madrid-Guijarro, Garcia, and Van Auken, 2009). Hence, the lack of employee commitment to creativity and innovation caused by HRM Wasta practices negatively impacts entrepreneurial innovation. Accordingly, the author argues that the practice of Wasta by HRM managers in the MENA region could negatively

impact entrepreneurial innovation through employee management practices that impact motivation (Amabile, 1983b). The Componential Theory of Organizational Creativity and Innovation (Appendix 3) postulates that organisational creativity is a result of employees' or teams' expertise, task motivation, and creativity skills, and creativity feeds organisational innovation, which in turn, a result of the organisation management practices (Amabile, 1982, 1983a, 1983b, 1988a, 1988b). Since HRM management practices in hiring and promotion are influenced by Wasta among the Middle Eastern entrepreneurs, and innovation is usually a product of entrepreneurial activities, the author expects that Wasta hampers innovation in some businesses in the MENA region and posits propositions 4 and 5 (P4 and P5).

P4: *The practice of Wasta by HRM managers among the MENA entrepreneurs influences the Middle Eastern and North African Entrepreneurial innovation.*

P5: *Lower employee motivation that resulted from Wasta practiced by senior HRM employees in the MENA region will negatively influence employees' and team creativity, and therefore, entrepreneurs' innovation.*

When it comes to how Wasta is practiced by the HRM senior employees hampers entrepreneurs' innovation, and therefore, sustainable development, the author first relates Wasta to corruption and then links corruption to sustainable development, according to Aidt (2010), sustainability which is gauged by an increase in a country's real prosperity per capita. Empirical examination consistently uncovers that cross-national corruption lowers growth in actual prosperity per capita. Corruption is strongly and negatively related to sustainability (Aidt, 2010) and Wasta is corruption (Abdelrahim, 2023). Wasta has also proved to be favoritism (Alenezi, Hassan, Abdelrahim, and Albadry, 2022) and favoritism is corruption (Tytko, Smokovych, Dorokhina, Chernenchenko, and Stremenovskyi, 2020). Hence, the author believes senior HRM employees' Wasta practice as a new HRM practice hinders entrepreneurs' sustainable innovation and entrepreneurial performance in the MENA region (Waheed, Miao, Waheed, Ahmad, and Majeed, 2019). (Appendix 4). The author argues that Wasta practiced by senior HRM employees will impede entrepreneurial sustainable development because Wasta causes corruption, which hinders sustainable development in the organisation and posits proposition six (P6).

P6: *Wasta practiced by senior HRM employees will impede entrepreneurial sustainable development in the MENA region because Wasta causes corruption, which hinders sustainable development in the organisation and posits the proposition.*

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

The author used a case study as a mythological approach to gather meaningful data and analyse it. The author uses a methodological research approach to generate an in-depth understanding of Wasta as a contemporary issue or phenomenon in the MENA region, which is a bounded cultural system. The MENA region countries include Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, Jordan, Israel, Kuwait, Iran, Bahrain, Qatar, Saudi Arabia (KSA), United Arab Emirates (UAE), Oman, Yemen, Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Morocco, Sudan, Tunisia, and Morocco-Western Sahara. In social science qualitative research, researchers widely use case study qualitative research as a method of data analysis (Coombs, 2022). Researchers in social sciences are particularly suited to utilise it because there is a need to obtain an in-depth appreciation of Wasta as an issue of interest in its natural real-life context in the MENA region countries. In addition, the author believes that a case study provides the author with a possibility for greater depth of understanding of Wasta practice as an issue that hampers entrepreneurial creativity and innovation, and therefore, sustainable development in the MENA region. Furthermore, the author believes that the case study design is preferred as a research strategy since the author seeks to answer when "how," "why," and "what" questions, which are the questions of interest of the researcher.

To answer the “why”, “what”, and “how” questions, the author employs a qualitative analysis technique for analysing records in several indices using qualitative comparative analysis (constant analysis technique). Qualitative comparative analysis compares two or more data sets, documents, resources, or other objects, such as indices. Decision-tree analytics, filtering, and pattern analysis are types of comparative analysis. Qualitative comparative analysis systematically analyses dissimilarities and similarities across discrepancies, letting a researcher assemble connections among earlier built classifications, particularly in evaluating conclusions across various sources. The secondary datasets analyzed include accessible online indices, electronic and databases from the Global Innovation Index (GII) in 2023 (<https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/global-innovation-index-by-country>), the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor’s National Entrepreneurship Context Index (GEM NECI) in 2023 (<https://www.gemconsortium.org/reports/latest-global-report>), the World’s Most Innovative Companies Index (Forbes), and the Top 100 Global Innovators 2024 Rankings Report (Clarivate) (<https://www.forbes.com/innovative-companies/list/#tab:rank>), the Most Entrepreneurial Countries (<https://www.usnews.com/news/best-countries/rankings/entrepreneurial>), the top 100 Global Innovators 2024 Rankings Report (Clarivate) (<https://clarivate.com/top-100-innovators/>), the World’s Most Entrepreneurial Countries, 2024 (<https://ceoworld.biz/2024/04/05/worlds-most-entrepreneurial-countries-2024/>), and the Patents by Country / Number of Patents Per Country 2024 (<https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/patents-by-country>).

3.2. Secondary Data Collection

This section identifies diverse global innovation ranking indices worldwide at the country level and the organisational level. These indices include the Global Innovation Index (GII) in 2023, the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor’s National Entrepreneurship Context Index (GEM NECI) in 2023, the World’s Most Innovative Companies Index (Forbes), and the Top 100 Global Innovators 2024 Rankings Report (Clarivate), the Most Entrepreneurial Countries, top 100 Global Innovators 2024 Rankings Report (Clarivate), the World’s (Most Entrepreneurial Countries, 2024), and the Patents by Country / Number of Patents Per Country 2024 aiming to unravel the relations between Wasta practiced by HRM senior employees, entrepreneurial creativity, innovation, and sustainable development in the MENA region countries. The focus is on identifying and understanding key indicators that are crucial in shaping innovation rankings among countries and entrepreneurs, including innovation inputs and innovation outputs.

3.3. Exploring Ranking Indices

Delving into the nuances of different global innovation ranking indices and systems provides rich insights into their different distinctive approaches to ranking the most countries and companies. From the quantitative measures to qualitative comparative analysis compares two or more data sets, documents, resources, or other objects, this analysis aims to unravel the ranking criteria that form the foundation of the GII index as the main innovation index ranking yearly, allowing for a comparative evaluation of its of inputs and outputs with other innovation indicators. For example, the key innovation inputs indicators are the following as defined by the GII:

- 1) Institutions (Institutional environment, Regulatory environment, Business environment)
- 2) Human capital and research (i.e., Education, Tertiary education, Research and development.
- 3) Infrastructure (Information and communication technologies, General infrastructure, Ecological sustainability)
- 4) Market sophistication (Credit, Investment, Trade, diversification, and market scale).
- 5) Business sophistication (Knowledge workers, Innovation linkages, Knowledge absorption).

Innovation input pillars grasp parts of the economy that promote and encourage innovative activities. The argument is that today’s innovation inputs equip the foundation for tomorrow’s

innovation outputs.

On the other hand, the key innovation outputs indicators are the following as defined by the GII:

- 1) Knowledge and technology outputs (Knowledge creation, Knowledge impact, Knowledge diffusion).
 - 2) Creative outputs (Intangible assets, Creative goods and services, Online creativity).
- Innovation outputs (Knowledge, technology, and creative outputs) are the outcomes of innovative economic actions and activities.

The general GII innovation score is the average input and output based on which the GII economy ranks counties worldwide.

The National Entrepreneurial Context Index (NECI) and number of Entrepreneurial Framework Conditions (EFCs) developed by Global Entrepreneurial Monitor (GEM) ranks the most entrepreneurial countries every year as scored sufficient or better (score ≥ 5) on the scale ranged from zero (the least sufficient) to ten (the most sufficient). The GEM's National Entrepreneurial Context Index (NECI) represents the quality of a particular economy's entrepreneurial environment that fosters innovation in a country. The MEM NECI is based on the average of the thirteen Entrepreneurial Framework Conditions (EFCs) that can enhance or hinder new business creation and that policymakers pay attention to. These thirteen EFCs include Entrepreneurial Finance, Government Policy (support and relevance), Entrepreneurial Education at School, Research and Development Transfers, Ease of Entry (market dynamics), Physical Infrastructure, Social and Cultural Norms, Ease of Access to Entrepreneurial Finance, Government Entrepreneurial Programs, Government Policy (Taxes and Bureaucracy), Entrepreneurial Education Post-School), and Commercial and Professional Infrastructure.

In addition, the World's Most Entrepreneurial Countries Index, 2024, developed by CEOWORLD Magazine ranks 190 country economies worldwide based on their entrepreneurs' innovation. The index analyses eighteen indicators, which are classified into six leading classifications based on infrastructure, openness to business, competitiveness, innovation, access to capital, and labor skills. Furthermore, the World's Most Innovative Companies Index (WMICI) ranks the most innovative companies worldwide; therefore, the WMICI indirectly also ranks the most innovative countries worldwide every year. Finally, the Top 100 Global Innovators Ranking Index (T100 GII), developed by Clarivate, ranks the world's most innovative companies yearly. The T100 GII measures innovation accumulation, contribution, and global innovation worldwide. Companies that rank in the top 100 innovators gain a place in research organisations that invest in innovation with passion and consistency. The companies demonstrate excellence.

3.4. *Choosing Constant Comparison Analysis Technique*

Constant comparison analysis is well known and used by renowned researchers such as the developers of grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 2017), Glaser (1978), and Strauss (1987). These researchers have been credited with creating constant comparison analysis. According to Strauss and Corbin (1998), constant comparison analysis has five principal characteristics:

- 1. to construct theory as opposed to examining it;
- 2. to equip investigators with analytic instruments for dissecting data
- 3. to help researchers comprehend numerous implications from the dataset(s) presented
- 4. to deliver researchers with a methodical and creative technique for interpreting dataset(s)
- 5. to aid researchers in pinpointing, creating, and interpreting the relationships among the dataset parts when forming a theme.

Constant comparison analysis has been revised to be used to examine data collected in one round and a single document from a single case, making it an exceptionally adaptable analytical technique.

3.5. Data Analysis and Procedures

To accomplish a consistent comparison analysis of the indices collected from digital or printed documents or published articles on country and company innovation ranking, the author collected secondary datasets to analyze include the accessible online indices, electronic and databases from the Global Innovation Index (GII) in 2023 (<https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/global-innovation-index-by-country>), the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor's National Entrepreneurship Context Index (GEM NECI) in 2023 (<https://www.Gemconsortium.org/reports/latest-global-report>), the World's Most Innovative Companies Index (Forbes), and the Top 100 Global Innovators 2024 Rankings Report developed by Clarivate (<https://www.forbes.com/innovative-companies/list/#tab:rank>), the Most Entrepreneurial Countries (<https://www.usnews.com/news/bestcountries/rankings/entrepreneurial>), the top 100 Global Innovators 2024 Rankings Report (Clarivate) <https://clarivate.com/top-100-innovators/>, the World's Most Entrepreneurial Countries, 2024 (<https://ceoworld.biz/2024/04/05/world-s-most-entrepreneurial-countries-2024/>), and the Patents by Country/Number of Patents Per Country 2024 (<https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/patents-by-country>).

3.6. The Study Results

The author followed Frels's (2010) procedures as guidelines to achieve a constant comparison analysis of text in digital form (e.g., a set of electronic indices, articles, etc.), before using qualitative comparative analysis (constant analysis technique index by index, the researcher chunks the information into smaller, concise, and meaningful parts. The author first read through the whole set of information chunked earlier at a time. Next, the author chunked the information in the indices into even shorter, meaningful components. Then, the author labelled each piece of information with an illustrative tag or a code such that the author labelled the matching information with the identical codes (Table 1). The author then systematically compared each unique piece of data with earlier codes, such that matching or comparable chunks of information are labelled with the exact code. After the author had coded all the information, the author clustered codes by similarly identified themes, and each theme was based on each identified cluster. Table 1 illustrates themes of innovation inputs (support) in indices. The author concludes that most innovation inputs are focused on supporting innovation, which, in turn, helps entrepreneurs and countries achieve sustainable development. As per the grounded theory, the study data theoretical saturation was reached when no further or pertinent information about innovation ranking seemed to add new knowledge to the topic (Morse, 1995; Strauss and Corbin, 1990)

In conclusion, the study results presented in the table provide valuable insights into the diverse factors and themes shaping innovation and innovation. From the GII, the World's Most Entrepreneurial Countries, 2024, Patents by Country, the World's Most Innovative Companies Index (Forbes), and the Top 100 Global Innovators 2024 Rankings Report (Clarivate), these results underscore the multifaceted nature of entrepreneurial innovation, creativity, and sustainable development. Furthermore, the emphasis on innovation, creativity, and HRM Wasta practice show how these factors are critical for sustainable development.

4. Conclusions

Throughout this research study, the author proposed an assessment of Wasta and its influence on HRM senior employees, entrepreneurial creativity, innovation, sustainable development in the MENA region. The author endeavours to explain the notion of Wasta as a hampering factor of entrepreneurial innovation and sustainable development and explores its relationship with Amabile's Componential Theory of Creativity and Innovation in Organizations. Additionally, this study's outcomes confirmed the damaging influence of Wasta on the general performance of firms through the literature review and a theory. The findings of this study are consistent with the broad findings of Overton (2020) and Abdelrahim (2020), who confirmed that national culture directly

influences a country’s levels of innovation. However, this study claims that national culture relates to innovation and sustainable development via Wasta practices. In addition, this study displayed that the damaging consequences of Wasta on the prevalent performance of firms come as unavoidable outcomes of its effect on employees’ morale, brain drain, frustration, motivation, job satisfaction, diversity, and turnover. The findings of this study are consistent with the Componential Theory of Creativity and Innovation in Organizations developed by Teresa Amabile (1983b). Furthermore, these study results are compatible with the outcomes of several aforementioned studies conducted in the MENA region, which affirm how Wasta creates negative impacts on organisations, given the broad variety of hostile influences, which not solely fall on people in the workplace but also spread to the entirety of society, as well as the country’s rates of innovation and sustainable development. It appears ever more critical for entrepreneurs, business leaders, and HRM experts to understand the complex nature of Wasta and reach a new and innovative strategy for it. Finally, this study’s results contribute to the literature by developing a Wasta theoretical model that explains the relationship between Wasta, HRM practices, creativity, innovation, and sustainable development. For policymakers, this study’s results could help create more educational policies, laws, regulations, and implementation mechanisms to reduce the influence of Wasta on HRM practices. Entrepreneurs should also understand why it is critical to hire human resource managers and supervisors who are fair in hiring and promotion. International managers wanting to conduct business with the Arabs should do their research well (Rice, 2004); Hutchings & Murray, 2002). This study is exploratory and is limited to theory and literature to support the arguments. Future research should examine more studies empirically using primary or secondary datasets. Moreover, the study results conclude that Wasta practiced by senior human resource management employees is more likely to explain why MENA entrepreneurs are less creative, less innovative, lag in acquiring sustainable development, and why their countries are not ranked in the top 100 innovative countries worldwide.

Table 3. Patents by Country / Number of Patents Per Country, 2024-Ranking of 100 countries.

Rank	Country	Total Patents Grants/Number of Patents
19	Israel	5,358
22	Turkey	3,449
23	Saudi Arabia	2,684
26	Iran	2,250
37	United Arab Emirates	1,048
43	Algeria	610
46	Morocco	579
48	Egypt	495
56	Bahrain	197
73	Syria	65
75	Jordan	61
98	Oman	23
99	Kuwait	19

Source: The author’s work derived from the Global Entrepreneurial Monitor 2023/2024 Global Report.

Appendix

Table A1. The Summary of the Global Innovation Index Ranking, 2024, for the MENA Countries.

Number	Rank	Country	Score
1	15	Israel	52.7

2	32	United Arab Emirates	42.8
3	37	Turkey	39.0
4	47	Saudi Arabia	33.9
5	49	Qatar	33.9
6	64	Iran	28.8
7	66	Morocco	28.8
8	71	Kuwait	28.1
9	72	Bahrain	27.6
10	73	Jordan	27.5
11	74	Oman	27.1
12	81	Tunisia	25.4
13	86	Egypt	23.7
14	94	Lebanon	21.5
15	115	Algeria	16.2
16	127	Mauritania	13.2
17	NA	Iraq	NA
18	NA	Yemen	NA
19	NA	Sudan	NA
20	NA	Syria	NA
21	NA	Libya	NA

Source: The author’s work based on the Global Innovation Index Database, WIPO, 2024.

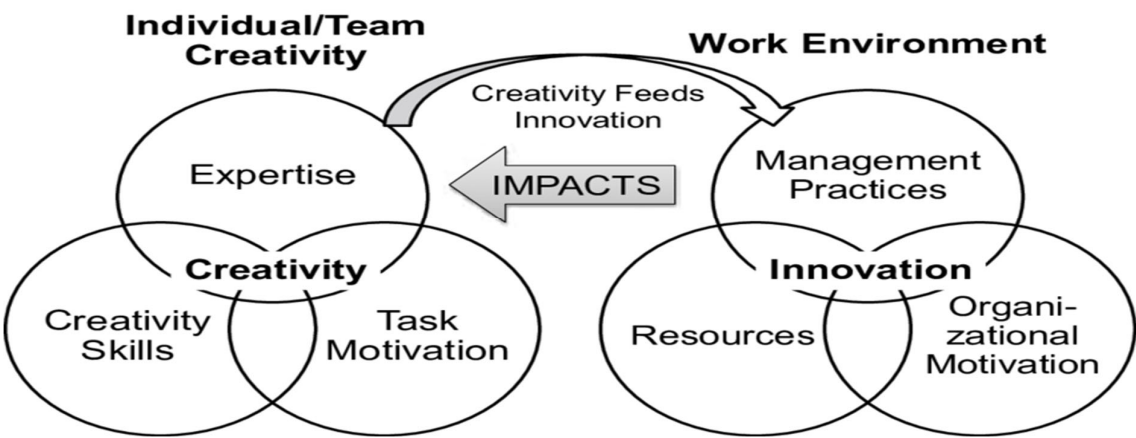


Figure A1. The Componential Theory of Organizational Creativity and Innovation.[Source: Amabile (1988a)].

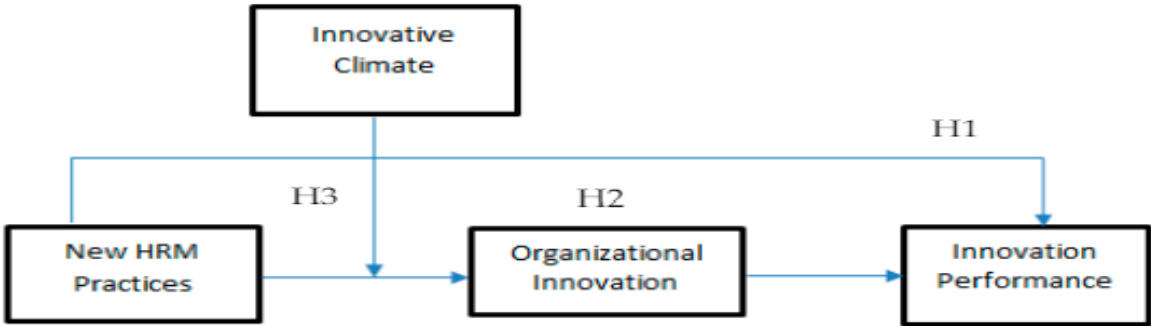


Figure A2. shows how new HRM practices hinders organizational innovational and performance [Source: Waheed, Miao, Waheed, Ahmad, and Majeed (2019)].

The Datasets Sources and their website links:-

1. Conditions to start a business based on Global Entrepreneurship Monitor’s National Entrepreneurship Context Index (GEM NECI) in (2023). <https://www.gemconsortium.org/reports/latest-global-report>
2. the Most Entrepreneurial Countries <https://www.usnews.com/news/best-countries/rankings/entrepreneurial>
3. Global Innovation Index by Country 2024 <https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/global-innovation-index-by-country>
4. The World’s Most Innovative Companies Index (Forbes) <https://www.forbes.com/innovative-companies/list/#tab:rank>
5. Top 100 Global Innovators 2024 Rankings Report (Clarivate) In this report, we rank the top 100 organizations leading the world in technology research and innovation. We measured global innovation by combining modern analytical architecture with our 60 years of experience to identify the top innovators transforming the world as we know it. <https://clarivate.com/top-100-innovators/>
6. The World’s Most Entrepreneurial Countries, 2024 <https://ceoworld.biz/2024/04/05/worlds-most-entrepreneurial-countries-2024/>
7. Patents by Country / Number of Patents Per Country 2024 <https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/patents-by-country>
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