

BUSINESS

Attract Talent to Remain Competitive

ABU DHABI - As the global economy becomes more competitive, the UAE, like other peer nations, will be challenged to attract and retain the brightest talent, as well as provide the necessary skill training and education opportunities to stay competitive.

If the UAE is viewed as a place less open to, immigrants or young people, the country will fall considerably behind other creative global giants, says Richard Florida, Author, *Who's Your City* and Director of the Martin Prosperity Institute, University of Toronto, in an interview with the *Khaleej Times* here.

Excerpts of the interview.

Tell us a little bit about your new book, *Who's Your City*?

In *Who's Your City*?, I make an argument about the importance of place in the global economy and how it is creating a spiky world. The place we choose to live in the single most important decision we make. It has a profound impact on the jobs we have access to, our career path, our social networks, family and lifestyle choices and ultimately the wealth we accumulate as well as our overall happiness.

What/who is the 'creative class' and how it influence of the city/region?

The Creative Class includes two segments of workers:

- 1) **Creative Professionals** — These professionals are the classic knowledge-based workers and include those working in healthcare, business and finance, the legal sector, and education.
- 2) **Super-Creative Core** — These workers include scientists, engineers, techies, innovators, and researchers, as well as artists, designers, writers and musicians.

Worldwide there are more than 150 million Creative Class workers. They are the core force of economic growth in our future economy.

How do we assess the level of creativity in a country and in an organization?

For a place to prosper in the Creative Age, communities in Turkey have to approach the global economy utilizing a comprehensive framework for community and economic development. In the *Rise of the Creative Class*, I presented a 3T approach to economic development that provides communities with a strategy for positioning their community for growth in the global economy and assessing the level of creativity.

Talent: The driving force behind any effective economic strategy is talented people. We live a more mobile age than ever before. People, especially top creative talent, move around a lot. A community's ability to attract and retain top talent is the defining issue of the creative age. As the global economy becomes more competitive, UAE, like other peer nations, will be challenged to attract and retain the brightest talent, as well as provide the necessary skill training and education opportunities to stay competitive.

Technology: Technology and innovation are critical components of a community or organization's ability to drive economic growth. To be successful, communities and organizations must have the avenues for transferring research, ideas, and innovation into marketable and sustainable products. Universities in UAE are paramount to this and provide the innovation infrastructure necessary for the creativity and technology transfer.

Tolerance: Economic prosperity relies on cultural, entrepreneurial, civic, scientific, and artistic creativity. Creative workers with these talents need communities, organizations, and peers that are open to new ideas and different people.

UAE has to be a place that is receptive to immigration, alternative lifestyles, and new views on social status and power structure.

How can creativity be linked to compensation packages?

Rather than thinking about linking creativity to compensation, managers must develop an environment that furthers organization creativity. Effectively managing creative talent is the most important decision companies can make for their future. Creative employees spur economic growth. They will invent new technology, develop increased expertise, and stimulate scientific thinking. In an interview with the Harvard Business Review, James Goodnight, founder and CEO of SAS Institute, I outlined three principles employers can use to guide their management of creative types.

First, an employer must eliminate distractions for its creative workers. This allows employees to remain fully engaged in their work. Goodnight did this at SAS by creating a campus setting equipped with a Montessori school and high school.

Second, managers are responsible for sparking creativity. Goodnight built a campus that included public art, landscape sculpture, and jogging trails.

Finally, employers must engage creative workers as invested equals in the company's future. At SAS, Goodnight gave each of his employees' individual challenges and tasks instead of stock options or bonuses. "It's [a challenge] different for a salesman than it is for a software coder."

Goodnight says that long-term employment is essential. Creativity is embedded in relationships, and it thrives among people who have worked together a long time. If he keeps people for 20 or 30 years, that human capital forms creative capital.

Is there anything you would suggest to make the companies and the UAE as a whole creative, especially in the backdrop of the predominance of the expatriate community here?

First, the government and organizations must continue to invest in science and technology. Supporting laws and legislation that limits advanced research, science, and innovation is worrisome for the future.

Second, companies and the government must embrace strategies to better train, educate and prepare the UAE workforce.

We need a new paradigm for education; we must embrace concept learning everywhere. By this I mean we need to approach learning more holistically — a hands on approach beyond just the classroom, in the case of education of children.

If kids are interested in science, get them into laboratories next to innovators and scientists. We need to focus more on the strengths of our children rather than their weaknesses. At the workplace the staff must be encouraged to view their "job" as an opportunity to push their creativity and learning. Embrace new technologies and innovation that will improve processes and make service and industrial sector jobs more fulfilling.

Third, companies must set the climate for tolerance. If the UAE is viewed as a place less open to, immigrants or young people, the country will fall considerably behind other creative global giants.

Many globalisation scholars such as Thomas Friedman argue that globalisation has led to an increasingly levelled economic playing field worldwide. In *Who's Your City*, however, you present an economic landscape that is, as you describe it, spiky. Cities and regions are increasingly specialised. In your view, how "flat" is the globalised world?

Economic activity is concentrating in a select group of mega-regions, which are new and incredibly powerful economic units. A mega-region is an area that hosts business and economic activity on a large scale, generating a lion's share of the world's economic activity and an even larger share of the world's innovation and technological discoveries.

Worldwide there are just 40 significant mega regions, which are home to 1/5 of the world's population, 2/3's of the global economic output and 85pc of all worldwide innovation. Comparatively to each other, these regions are relatively flat – competing with each other for technology and a higher state in the global economy.

However, the gap between the mega regions and the rest of the world is extremely spiky.