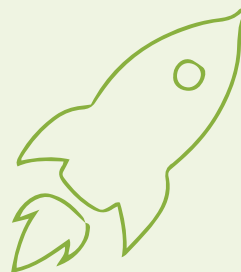


Thaka Jordan Education

# Staff Commitment through Trust-based Working Conditions and Overcoming Stereotypes Towards Male Teachers



**Published by the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH and UN Women**

**GIZ Registered offices**

Bonn and Eschborn, Germany

The United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women)

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The views expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH, the United Nations, including UN Women or UN Member States.

**Published**

June 2024

Amman

**Design**

Ahmad Diranieh

Amman

**Photo credit**

Rajif Raman © GIZ

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**Suggested Citation**

Lanfranconi, L. & Moden, A. & Abed AlNabi, M. & Al Qasem, L. (2024). Staff Commitment through Trust-based Working Conditions and Overcoming Stereotypes Towards Male Teachers. Amman, Jordan: Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH and UN Women.

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# FOREWORD: TOWARDS GENDER EQUALITY IN THE JORDANIAN LABOUR MARKET

The economic participation of women in the Jordanian labor market remains significantly low, with a decline observed in the post-COVID-19 era (Karbala & Kern, 2022). In order to motivate more women to enter the labour market and align with Jordan's Economic Modernisation Vision (EMV), it is crucial for companies to take the first step towards creating women-friendly and gender-inclusive work environments. Such an inclusive environment not only attracts and motivates well-qualified women but can also lead to a diverse, engaged and motivated workforce.

Overall, many studies show that investing in more women-friendly and gender-inclusive workplaces leads to higher productivity, innovation, improved corporate reputation and sustainable growth for businesses. Back in 2015, McKinsey showed that gender diverse companies are 15% more likely to outperform their competitors. This likelihood has increased over the years to 21% in the 2018 report and 25% in the 2020 report (McKinsey 2015; 2018; 2020). The benefits to companies are particularly high in a context where many women are not integrated into the labour market, as is the case in Jordan (UN Women 2018; World Bank 2020a; b; c).

GIZ and UN Women have joined forces to drive meaningful change in the private sector and the wider economy by developing business cases focused on SMEs in Jordan. The business cases document and showcase companies that have taken key steps towards becoming women-friendly and gender-inclusive. These cases highlight how these steps have paved the way for positive returns for these companies and the tangible benefits they have experienced. The focus is on SMEs as they are the largest (SMEs constitute approximately 99.5% of the total economic establishments and occupy approximately 60% of the total workforce (JCI 2024)) and most important part of the Jordanian economy.

The main objective of these business cases is to raise awareness among companies of the value and benefits of gender diversity and gender-responsive policies and practices for businesses by demonstrating the benefits for all – companies, their employees and the community – of employing more women and creating inclusive working environments.

The business cases were developed using a comprehensive methodology, including collecting data from company representatives, reviewing relevant documents, conducting field visits, interviewing CEOs and holding focus group discussions with employees.

Overall, these business cases cover seven different sectors, in line with the priorities set out in the EMV: food industry, engineering, plastic and packaging, education, financial services, hospitality, and information and communication technology. Each case focuses on a specific thematic area, highlighting the apparent strengths and the clear business value. Collectively, these topics play a pivotal role in advancing gender equality: gender-responsive recruitment, supporting women in leadership positions, women on boards, family-friendly working conditions and equal pay, trust-based leadership, flexible working arrangements and tackling male teacher stereotypes, effective anti-sexual harassment policies and safe commuting practices, empowering women from disadvantaged backgrounds and with disabilities.

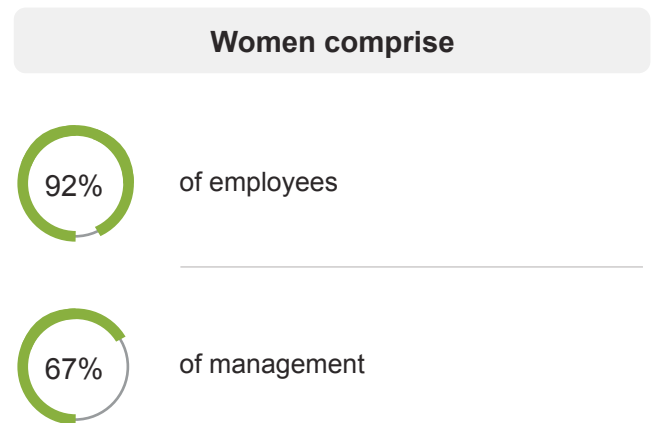
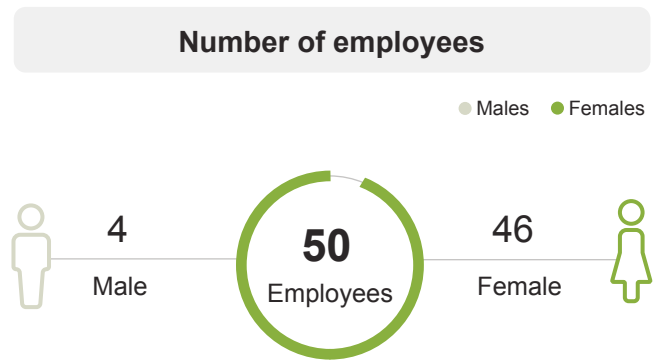
## 1. Company profile

Thaka Jordan is a child education company established in 2007 with the goal of enhancing the lives of the young generation. Their first offering in Jordan was the Malaysian franchise Universal Concept of Mental Arithmetic System (UCMAS). They gained approval to integrate UCMAS into school curricula, organised 12 national competitions and 9 national leagues and participated in 9 international competitions. One notable success was the 2016 World Champion title in the listening competition, won by Jordanian student Sulaf Abdel Nabi, a first for an Arab student.

In 2017, Thaka introduced the Journey of Entrepreneurship (JOE) programme, which shapes an entrepreneurial mindset and teaches young learners successful business concepts. In 2019, Thaka Jordan became the exclusive representative of Kidproof in Jordan, a Canadian organisation dedicated to child safety. One of Kidproof's key programmes, Protect ED, educates students between the ages of 3 and 18 about safety, health, well-being and social emotional learning.

Thaka understands that ensuring a successful future for children is a long-term endeavour that requires immediate action. They firmly believe that shaping children's futures depends on the steps taken today, emphasising the sentiment encapsulated in their slogan: "The Future Starts NOW!" With a strong gender

lens, Thaka remains committed to promoting gender equality and empowering young girls and boys to realise their full potential, both academically and in their future careers.



### Summary of key initiatives



- Deliverable-based work arrangements regardless of time & location
- Overcoming stereotypes against male teachers



Flexible work arrangements

### Summary of business benefits



Enhanced employee engagement and productivity



Improved financial and corporate performance



Talent attraction and retention



Challenging gender-based stereotypes



THAKA establishment

2007

Signing of Women's Empowerment Principles (WEPs)

2021

Adoption of gender-responsive policies

2022

Launch of human resources manual

2024

## 2. The business context of flexible and team-based working conditions

Thaka Jordan has consistently maintained a commitment to gender-inclusive and flexible working practices, giving team members the autonomy to manage their daily schedules based on results rather than rigid working hours. This approach has been fundamental for attracting a highly qualified workforce and creating a positive working culture.

“



*Rather than exerting control over team members, it's essential to select employees who fit the company's culture, share its values and understand their roles in achieving the company's vision. Treating employees as responsible decision-makers and offering real work-life balance are the cornerstones of a unique corporate culture.*

”

Interview with the CEO Moataz Azar



The dynamic of working from home was not part of Thaka's original work culture. However, when the COVID-19 pandemic forced closures and remote working became a necessity, the team turned this challenge into an opportunity and adapted quickly. This change had a positive impact on the quality of work.

“



*When the pandemic hit, I trusted my employees and realised that maintaining a physical office space might not be a necessity.*

”

Interview with the CEO

## 2a | Flexibility in terms of time and place

As an organisation that values collaborative decision-making and inclusivity, Thaka Jordan engaged its team members in a discussion about returning to the office when the restrictions eased. The majority of the team expressed a preference to continue working from home, leading to the decision to support and institutionalise remote working.

Many Thaka team members have continued to work from home after the pandemic, fostering a more inclusive and flexible work environment that accommodates diverse needs and preferences. This approach is in line with the organisation's commitment to gender inclusivity, as it takes into account the unique circumstances and work preferences of all team members, regardless of their gender.

“



*My aim is to ensure inclusivity for all employees through flexibility in when and where people work.*

Interview with the CEO

”

“



*During the pandemic, we realised that we could accomplish more by working from home because it was less time-consuming: we spent less time commuting, which allowed us to spend more time with our families or at work.*

Focus group interview with employees

”



Evidence from international research on remote working and its impact on workers' well-being and work-life balance is mixed. Further research is therefore needed to gain a clearer understanding of its impact. Initial research suggests that remote working can lead to greater well-being for workers and provide opportunities for better work-life balance. However, research also suggests that remote working can lead to employees working longer hours, taking fewer breaks and experiencing more health problems. In addition, remote working can lead to more work-life conflict than working in the office, particularly for those with young children at home (Hipp, 2023).



Gender lens research also suggests that remote working can be a double-edged sword for female employees (Alon, 2020; Lanfranconi, 2021). While it is generally associated with many benefits that are widely valued by women, there are also concerns that remote working could widen the gender gap and roll back equality gains (Bohrer, 2022). Studies during and after the pandemic show that mothers, particularly those working as teachers and white-collar workers, were disproportionately likely to leave the labour market in 2020 and 2021 compared to women without children or men, even if they could work remotely (Heggeness & Suri, 2021).

This is due to the double burden of working and caring for children and the household. As the distribution of paid and unpaid work in Jordan is strongly divided along gender lines (UN Women, 2022b), the risk of widening the gender gap with remote work is real. Particular attention needs to be paid by employers to the health and well-being of female employees (Chung et al., 2021).

“



*I like the flexibility we have, so I can be with the kids during the day and work in the evening.*

Focus group interview with employees

”

In the focus group interview at Thaka, only few negative effects of remote working were mentioned, and the positive effects and work-life balance benefits were emphasised.

“



*Personally, I really like working from home. I think it is just challenging for new employees to start in such a working environment.*

Focus group interview with employees

”



## 2b | Team-based decisions

An important element of how Thaka fosters an inclusive and gender-responsive working culture is through its collective decision-making practices, ensuring that all voices, including those of women, are valued. The company holds monthly meetings where important questions are discussed with the entire team, taking into account the diverse needs and perspectives of both men and women.

For example, in a current discussion about introducing an 'office day' amidst the prevalence of remote work, considerations are being made to ensure the policy supports work-life balance and addresses potential gender-specific challenges, such as caregiving responsibilities, to create an equitable working environment.

“

*We take decisions together and listen to each other's perspectives.*

Focus group interview with employees



”

“

*We prioritise collective decision-making within our teams, ensuring that every voice is heard and valued, contributing to an inclusive working culture.*

Interview with the CEO



”



The combination of a gender-inclusive working culture and team-based decision-making processes is key to realising the positive effects of remote working and flexibility of time and place.

## 2c | Challenging stereotypes against male teacher

A future project for Thaka is to increase the involvement of men in teaching. To date, attracting more male teachers has proved challenging due to the perception in Jordan that teaching is predominantly a female profession (UN Women, 2022b). Another obstacle is men's reluctance to work part-time. However, Thaka's CEO believes that these stereotypes need to be challenged.

“



*Promoting greater male representation in teaching roles is a strategic step in challenging and breaking gender stereotypes.*

Interview with the CEO

”



However, getting more men into the classroom is an investment. In Thaka's case, this may mean investing in the training of male teachers. However, Thaka's CEO is confident that this investment will yield positive returns.

### 3. Vision and profit: return on investment

Prioritising flexibility within the organisation is highly valued by employees and fosters a **culture of trust and inclusivity**. This in turn increases **employee engagement and productivity**.

The introduction of flexible working arrangements has contributed significantly to **improved retention rates and long-term employee loyalty**.

“



*All 7 fulltime employees have been working with us for over 12 years.*

Interview with the CEO

”

“



*I love the task-oriented work we have here. It feels like you are working for yourself.*

Focus group interview with employees

”



Providing a supportive framework for working mothers and fathers to effectively balance their professional and personal responsibilities has led to **improved talent acquisition** and overall **employee job satisfaction**.

The time saved by eliminating commuting is redirected to **more productive work** and **quality family time**, underscoring a strong commitment to work-life balance and gender-responsive practices. This has led to **increased productivity**.

A culture of trust through flexibility empowers individuals to take on higher levels of responsibility, leading to better decision making.

“



*When we introduced these practices, I noticed that employees took much more ownership of their work and were more motivated and productive.*

Interview with the CEO

”

## 4. Yes – but: challenges and solutions

The main challenges that Thaka faces due to remote working include reduced team cohesion and interpersonal relationships as well as limited access to team members for real-time communication and problem solving.

- Implementing a structured "Office Day" once a week to encourage in-person interactions among team members, strengthening teamwork and collaboration.
- Investing in work culture with initiatives such as monthly book clubs.
- Leveraging a variety of communication tools such as phone calls, WhatsApp and Zoom to ensure quick and effective interactions, bridging the gap created by working remotely.

Overcoming stereotypes against male teachers is another challenge.

- Promoting gender diversity and breaking down stereotypes by actively recruiting and training more men as course instructors is an effort to create a more balanced workforce.

Keeping motivated parents in the workforce, even with the option of working remotely, is a final challenge.

- Introducing subsidised childcare services for working mothers and fathers to support work-life balance and promote an inclusive workplace culture that values and accommodates diverse needs.



*To me, diversity and inclusion is a right and I think there should be a legal mandate for companies to adopt diversity and inclusion practices as it is vital for the business performance.*

Interview with the CEO



## 5. About the Women's Empowerment Principles (WEPs)

The Women's Empowerment Principles (WEPs) are a set of 7 Principles offering guidance to business on how to advance gender equality and women's empowerment in the workplace, marketplace and community. Established by UN Women and UN Global Compact, the WEPs are informed by international labour and human rights standards and grounded in the recognition that businesses have a stake in, and a responsibility for, gender equality and women's empowerment.



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