



## **Insights into Key Determinants of Personal Initiative among Palestinian Professionals**

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**Abstract:** The aim of this study is to get an understanding of whether contemporary research on key determinants of employees' personal initiative is applicable in the context of a developing Middle Eastern country in the midst of a tumultuous period in its history – a country in which, in spite of it all, life continues for its residents and the organisations that serve them. We collected survey data from 144 office workers of several organisations operating in Palestine to examine the relationship between personal initiative and a list of its theoretical determinants, namely: self-efficacy, need for achievement, perceived supervisor support and cultural orientation towards individualism. Our findings support the conclusions of contemporary research about the effects of self-efficacy and the need for achievement on personal initiative - thus indicating that Palestinian office workers are, in many respects, quite similar to their counterparts in other parts of the world. But our expectations regarding the link between perceived supervisor support, the cultural value of individualism and personal initiative are not supported by our findings.

**Keywords:** Personal initiative, Palestinian professionals, Middle East, self-efficacy, need for achievement, individualism, supervisor support

### **1. Introduction**

Aside from coverage of new developments in Israel's turbulent political landscape, news coming from the Middle East in recent days tend to focus on the uneasy ceasefire between Hamas and the Israeli military. Images presented to international audiences paint a picture of a warzone ravaged by escalations of violence, devastated victims caught (through no fault of their own) on the crossroads between two warring forces, and a general sense of hopelessness and devastation. But through it all, life goes on; and it invariably does, not just in Gaza and the West Bank - but also in farming villages in Afghanistan, in the bustling markets of Somalia, and in the homes and camping grounds of herder communities in Yemen. Amidst prolonged conflicts, ordinary people resolutely strive to go on with their lives.

Businesses, community organisations, non-profit non-government organisations (NGOs) and civilian government bodies have no choice but to reflect this resilience by continuing to make do and go on with what they have available. For most people and organisations in places ravaged by conflict, maintaining a sense of business-as-usual is a courageous choice and a demonstration of defiance to the adversities unfolding all around them. This is something that does not often get covered in mainstream media – and, indeed, in academic journals. Though few and far between, articles like ours highlight the fact that non-military organisations still exist and do operate even amidst conflict; they have to. Their employees are, in some respect, quite similar to their counterparts in other countries. And, despite the relatively limited points of access that academics have to these individuals and organisations, they are worth studying, and insights from their experiences present worthwhile lessons.

We are interested in factors that contribute to professional staff's level of personal initiative in the workplace – particularly in the territories under the *de facto* jurisdiction of the State of Palestine. Despite the idiosyncratic set of circumstances that form the context of our subjects' working environments, they are still affected by global factors that affect the working lives of white-collared workers worldwide: i.e. the pressure to innovate, the increasing emphasis on taking individual over collective responsibilities and the push to display elements of an entrepreneurial mindset – all of

which are expected outcomes of a high level of personal initiative (Rooks, Sserwanga & Frese, 2014; Burn, 2001; Solesvik, 2017).

Now, the degree to which Western human resource management (HRM) practices can be successfully transplanted into a non-Western context – especially one in the midst of significant flux - has been a subject of considerable discussions (e.g. Ahlstrom, Bruton & Chan, 2001; Child, 2000; Ding, Goodall & Warner, 2000; Evans, Pucik & Barsoux, 2000; Gamble, 2006; Harris, Brewster & Sparrow, 2003; Rosenzweig & Nohria, 1994; Wong & Law, 1999). And whether non-Western employees' levels of personal initiative and innovative qualities can be maximised through measures that increase contributing attributes found in Western professionals is an example of such a debate worth looking deeper into.

Hitherto, the emphasis of international HRM literature tends to be on difficulties around successfully importing Western policies and practices into offshore operations of Western companies – and risks associated with cross-cultural interactions. Salk (1997) brings our attention to issues that can arise from cultural differences. Jin, Chen, Fosh and Chen (2014) find that incongruence between Western HRM practices and Eastern cultural values can negatively affect the former's implementation in Asia. Jackson (2004) suggests that Arab cultural approaches to management and bureaucratic administration can act as a barrier to the implementation of Western-style management practices (also see Al-Husan, Brennan & James, 2006).

But others, like Cooke (2004) and Gamble (2006), argue that these challenges should not be overstated. They give credence to the 'universalist' (Evans et al, 2002; Harris et al, 2003) argument that "best practice management translates remarkably well across cultures" (Gamble, 2006, p.342). The applicability of any HRM approaches and practices, of course, relies on the soundness of the assumptions on which it rests. The more similar host and home country workers are, the more likely Western management practices are to successfully be adopted abroad (Dalton & Druker, 2012; Jin et al, 2014; c.f. Gamble, 2006).

The good news for many MNCs is that globalisation and technological advancements in communication platforms – even in the face of new restrictions to labour mobility in the face of COVID-19 - are creating a degree of convergence in workforce attributes, values and expectations. This allows for convergence in institutions and practices worldwide (Ralston, 2008; Friedman, 1999; Mayrhofer, Brewster, Morley & Ledolter, 2011). Increasingly today, leading employers tend to emphasise a common set of attributes in their employees, among which are: adaptability, willingness to learn and personal initiative (Suarta, Suwintana, Sudhana & Hariyanti, 2017; Tien & Wang, 2017).

Our study focuses on one of these key attributes, namely: personal initiative (per Andrisani, 1977; Frese, Kring, Soose, and Zempel, 1996; Frese & Fay, 2001), an important element of an innovative mindset, entrepreneurial behaviour, and responsible action (Rooks et al, 2014; Burn, 2001; Solesvik, 2017). Specifically, we seek to understand whether contemporary research on key determinants of employee personal initiative is applicable in the context of a highly unstable socio-political environment – particularly in the Middle East. These key determinants are: self-efficacy, need for achievement and perceived supervisor support (Chiaburu & Carpenter, 2013; Hong, Liao, Raub & Han, 2016; Frese & Fay, 2001; Frese, Fay, Hilburger, Leng, & Tag, 1997; Frese et al, 1996).

In addition, we also wanted to test our current understanding of the impacts of culture on personal initiative (specifically, cultural orientation towards individualism). As a construct, personal initiative has mostly been studied in Western societies, and there is limited research on it in developing economies – especially in the Middle East. This study assists in addressing the gap.

We collected survey data from 144 employees of four large Palestinian organisations, and then performed correlation and regression analyses to examine relationships between the aforementioned key variables. Our findings support the conclusions of contemporary research about the effects of self-efficacy and need for achievement on personal initiative - thus indicating that management approaches which rely on these relationships are likely to translate well into organisations, even ones operating in a very different geopolitical context. But our expectations regarding the link between perceived supervisor support, the cultural value of individualism and personal initiative are not supported by our findings.

Under the next heading, we examine extant literature on key factors that influence personal initiative, with a particular focus on self-efficacy, need for achievement, perceived supervisor support and individualist cultural orientation. We also

lay out our six hypotheses which were tested using the methodology narrated under the following heading. Subsequently, we present the results of our analyses and discuss insights that can be drawn from this study. Acknowledgements of major limitations are also presented in the discussion.

## 2. Literature Review

Personal initiative is an individual attribute that, in the context of the working environment, prompts a worker to take a proactive approach to their employment. This includes going beyond what is required by their specific contractual duties and coming up with creative ways to deal with issues (Andrisani, 1977; Frese et al, 1996; Frese et al, 1997; Frese & Fay, 2001). Personal initiative has been found to contribute to job satisfaction (Gamboa, Gracia, Ripoll & Peiró, 2009), as well as performance – both at the individual and organisational levels (Bledow & Frese, 2009; Grant, Nurmohamed, Ashford & Dekas, 2011; Herrmann & Felfe, 2014; Lisbona, Palaci, Salanova, Frese, 2018). In the context of a developing economy, it is positively associated with socially-responsible entrepreneurial endeavours (Nsereko et al, 2018) and business growth (Jacob, Frese, Krauss & Friedrich, 2019). A worker with personal initiative exhibits three characteristics; they are: self-starting, proactive and persistent (Frese et al, 1996; Frese et al, 1997).

A worker who is self-starting tends to take action, if they deem such action to be suitable, without having to receive clear instructions from their supervisor (Fay & Frese, 2001; Frese & Fay, 2001). A self-starter is also unrestrained by the details of their formal job description when deciding what action needs to be taken. A worker who exhibits the character of being proactive takes a long-term focus and acts on their own volition to address issues without having to wait until the issues becomes more substantial (Frese & Fay, 2001; Hakanen, Perhoniemi & Toppinen-Tanner, 2008). They consider repeated problems, emerging opportunities and new demands, and then take the initiative to start addressing these issues independently (Crant, 2000; Grant & Ashford, 2008). Persistence, as a core feature of personal initiative, refers to an individual's ability to sustain effort, and overcome obstacles and setbacks to achieve planned goals. It also incorporates resilience against resistance to proposed changes that result from new initiatives.

Research suggests that the display of these indicia of personal initiative is positively affected, at the individual level, by the worker's self-efficacy, need for achievement and perceived supervisor support: Self-efficacy because "people need to believe in their own capacity ... to act competently in self-starting some changes in working conditions" (Lisbona et al, 2018, p.99); need for achievement because without it the motivation to display such attributes is missing (Frese & Fay, 2001; Warr & Faye, 2001); and perceived supervisor support because it serves as a resource or supportive environment to enable such display. Cultural value seems to also influence whether personal initiative is displayed in the workplace (Frese et al, 1996) in the sense that an individualistic cultural orientation (as opposed to a collectivist orientation) strengthens the effects of self-efficacy and need for achievement. These four constructs, and their effects on personal initiative, are further discussed below alongside our hypotheses for our empirical study.

### 2.1 Self-efficacy

Self-efficacy describes an individual's assessment of their ability to perform (Bandura, 2006; Gist & Mitchell, 1992; Judge, Jackson, Shaw, Scott & Rich, 2007). It also reflects the individual's belief in their skills and capabilities to proactively tackle challenges that go above and beyond the strict boundaries of their job description (Axtell & Parker, 2003). For this reason, people who exhibit self-efficacy are also likely to exhibit higher levels of personal initiative. Simply put, people who think that they can do well on a task are more likely to take on new initiatives and do better than those who think they cannot (Gist & Mitchell, 1992).

Empirical studies from various parts of the (mainly developed Western) world consistently identify a clear link between self-efficacy, personal initiative and performance (Hong et al, 2016; Speier & Frese, 1997; Lisbona et al, 2018) - in that self-efficacy has a positive effect on personal initiative, which in turn, has a positive effect on job performance. None of the studies presented above involve organisations that operated in the Middle East – or in the context of a volatile socio-political landscape. So the applicability of their findings to such an environment, like in Palestine, is interesting to investigate. In line with the results of the abovementioned studies in Western contexts, we hypothesised that within the Palestinian organisations that we sample, there is a positive relationship between an individual's sense of self-efficacy and their display of personal initiative.

Hypothesis 1: There is a positive relationship between self-efficacy and personal initiative

## 2.2 Need for Achievement

Intrinsic motivation is also a key antecedent to the development of personal initiative (Frese et al, 1996; Frese et al, 1997). The specific aspect of intrinsic motivation that has been found to be positively related to personal initiative is an individual's need for achievement. Need for achievement is distinguishable from other facets of intrinsic motivation - such as altruism - in that the former is internally driven by a determination to excel, envisioned by higher standards for success and fuelled by persistence (Chiaburu & Carpenter, 2013; McClelland, 1975; Frese et al, 1996; Frese et al, 1997; Frese & Fay, 2001).

Need for achievement prompts an individual to demonstrate personal initiative by internally stimulating the desire to find a better way of performing a task, address an existing issue or achieve a better outcome. An employee who has a higher need for achievement, for example, is more likely to offer problem solving assistance to a colleague without having been asked to do so (Frese & Fay, 2001; Warr & Faye, 2001). They would also be more willing to promote ideas to improve on existing processes and give above and beyond what is required of them in their job description. Given strong empirical support for the link between need for achievement and personal initiative in the West (Frese et al, 1996; Frese et al, 1997), we hypothesised that we would also be able to find a positive relationship between an individual's need for achievement and their display of personal initiative among employees of our Palestinian sample organisations.

Hypothesis 2: There is a positive relationship between need for achievement and personal initiative

## 2.3 Perceived Supervisor Support

Another key determinant to the display of personal initiative is the perceived availability of resources. Hakanen et al (2008) finds that resources available to a worker help to reduce the negative effects of job demands and stimulate personal growth. These result in a higher level of job engagement, which in turn encourages the development and display of personal initiative.

The role of a work supervisor is critical in making necessary resources available for an employee to do their job, and develop and display personal initiative. Supervisory support can also be regarded as a resource in its own right. Moreover, supervisory support helps to convey appreciation, employer commitment and a caring attitude – thus adding a human touch to the firm-employee relationship, which an incorporated entity employer by definition cannot offer on its own (Eisenberger, Stinglhamber, Vandenberghe, Sucharski & Rhoades, 2002; Kottke & Sharafinski, 1988; Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison & Sowa, 1986). This in turn leads to greater motivation and, therefore, the display of personal initiative and improved performance.

Empirical studies in the West have confirmed that employees' perception of their supervisor's support and appreciation does indeed have a positive effect on work performance (Eisenberger et al, 2002; Kottke & Sharafinski, 1988). Studies by Frese et al (1996) and Frese et al (1997) show a strong and direct relationship between perceived supervisor support and employee personal initiative. Conversely, they argue, a supervisor who is perceived to be non-supportive can discourage an employee's display of personal initiative by creating barriers and unproductive procedural rigidities. Against this background, we hypothesised that within the Palestinian organisations in our sample, perceived supervisor support will moderate the relationship between personal initiative and the two aforementioned independent variables, namely: need for achievement and self-efficacy.

Hypothesis 3: The relationship between need for achievement and personal initiative is positively moderated by perceived supervisor support

Hypothesis 4: The relationship between self-efficacy and personal initiative is positively moderated by perceived supervisor support

## 2.4 Individualistic Cultural Values

Cultural values can also affect the display of personal initiative (Frese et al, 1996), which in turn affect job performance (Hofstede, 1980; Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005). A comparative study on workers from East and West Germany finds a positive relationship between individualistic cultural values (per Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005) and the display of personal initiative; and, conversely, a negative relationship between collectivist cultural values and the display of personal initiative (Frese et al, 1996). The reason seems to be that an individualistic mindset promotes innovative thinking (Taylor

& Wilson, 2012), which is strongly conducive to the display of personal initiative (Frese et al, 1996). Collectivist values, on the other hand, place a greater emphasis on group harmony and conformity.

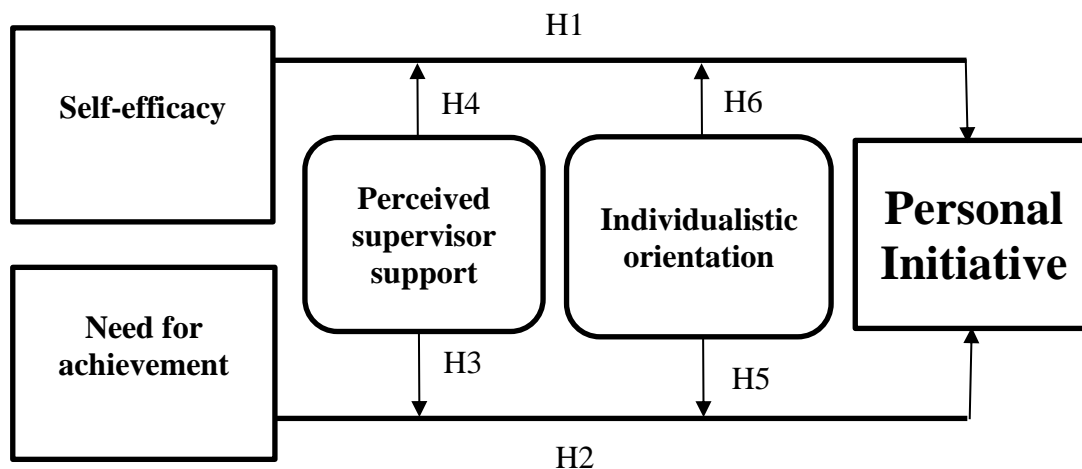
This is not to say that collectivism is necessarily incompatible with the notion of initiative and innovation. Collectivist cultural values may promote the development and display of ‘team’ initiative and collective ‘group’ innovation – but just not ‘personal’ initiative. The development and display of personal initiative are supported by reward systems directed towards personal gain (Eisenberger et al, 2002; Frese et al, 1996; Kottke & Sharafinski, 1988), which are associated with individualistic cultural values. Research suggests that individualism moderates other antecedents of personal initiative, such as need for achievement (Aycan, 2005; Daus, Dasborough, Jordan & Ashkanasy, 2012; Frese et al, 1996). Consequently, we hypothesised that the relationship between need for achievement and self-efficacy, and personal initiative is positively moderated by individualistic cultural values – and the reverse by collectivist cultural values.

Arab cultures have, at the aggregate level, generally been classified as being positioned somewhere around the middle of the continuum between individualism and collectivism (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005; Taylor & Wilson, 2012). Workers in the Arab world see their workplaces through different lenses. Many view their organisations as family units, in a way that is similar to how organisations are viewed in collectivist East Asia. Yet many others see their organisations as avenues through which survival and self-esteem can be attained, reflecting the way workers view their organisations in the individualistic Anglosphere (Abboushi, 1990; Weaver, Gillespie & Al-Jarbawi). In our study, we expected to see that the cultural values and perspective of an individual employee affects the way that need for achievement and self-efficacy translate to personal initiative at work. This expectation forms our last two hypotheses.

Hypothesis 5: The relationship between need for achievement and personal initiative is positively moderated by cultural orientation towards individualism

Hypothesis 6: The relationship between self-efficacy and personal initiative is positively moderated by cultural orientation towards individualism

Figure 1, below, presents our conceptual model.



**Figure 1:** Proposed model of Independent Variables (IV), Moderating Variables (MV); and Dependent Variable (DV)

### 3. Research Methodology and Samples

Data for this study were generated from a primary survey we conducted on employees of four large organisations in the state of Palestine in May of 2015. These organisations operate in the banking, energy, education and personnel services sector. The sampling process posed a considerable challenge in that there did not exist a list of registered organisations in the country on which random sampling could be based. Consequently, we had to adopt a convenience sampling strategy (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2002), relying on the first authors’ professional contacts. This meant reaching out to organisations in the first author’s and those of his contacts’ networks.

We requested managers in participating organisations to distribute invitations to participate in the study to their employees. To ensure individual participants’ confidentiality, however, they were unaware of which employees

ultimately partook in the study. Participants were given a two-week window after the invitations were sent out to complete the survey (i.e. between 05 May and 20 May 2015). While we collected some identifying information, this information is only available in an aggregated form in the results.

Out of approximately 3,000 employees reached, we received a total of 215 responses but some of the responses were blank (indicating that the electronic surveys were opened but not filled), incomplete (e.g. only one or two questions were ticked), disengaged (the same answer ticked all the way through) or duplicates. In the end, we were able to collect completed responses from 144 individual participants. Their raw data are stored securely on our institution’s password-protected database and were analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics software version 22.

Table 1 below presents the demographic characteristics of our 144 respondents. It is interesting to note the large number of participants with management responsibilities (38%) and the fact that a considerable percentage have post-graduate education (35%). These statistics will be revisited in the findings.

<b>Age</b>	<b>18-29</b>	<b>30-39</b>	<b>40-49</b>	<b>50-60</b>	<b>60+</b>
	43	57	30	13	1
<b>Gender</b>	<b>F</b>			<b>M</b>	
	45			99	
<b>Years of experience</b>	<b>0-4</b>	<b>5-9</b>	<b>10-14</b>	<b>15+</b>	
	17	39	33	55	
<b>Years in current role</b>	<b>0-4</b>	<b>5-9</b>	<b>10-14</b>	<b>15+</b>	
	38	38	25	43	
<b>Supervision role. If yes:</b>	<b>Yes</b>			<b>No</b>	
	55			89	
• # of emp. Supervised	<b>0-4</b>	<b>5-9</b>	<b>10-14</b>	<b>15+</b>	
	33	12	5	5	
• Management level	<b>Line</b>		<b>Mid</b>	<b>Top*</b>	
	72		63	9	
<b>Employment tenure</b>	<b>Temporary</b>			<b>Continuing</b>	
	5			139	
<b>Educational level</b>	<b>Dip.</b>	<b>Undergrad</b>	<b>Postgrad</b>	<b>Other</b>	
	16	73	51	4	

\*Top-level managers report directly to their organisations’ governing board or owners.

**Table 1:** Respondent demographics

### 3.1 Survey Questionnaire

The survey questionnaire used pre-existing validated measures and scales, following existing literature on personal initiative (Earley, 1993; Frese et al, 1996; Frese et al, 1997; Lynn, 1969; Kottke & Sharafinski, 1988). However, it was necessary for us to convert our questions into Arabic for our participants. To mitigate the risk of mistranslation, we performed a back-translation from Arabic into English and confirmed the accuracy of the Arabic version of the text (Brislin, 2000).

Data reported by individual informants may be subject to a common method bias. Therefore, we performed Herman’s one-factor test, using exploratory factor analysis, on our final sample (Podsakoff and Organ, 1986; see Table 2 below). The exploratory factor analysis also ensures that the measures we use are valid given the study sample group.

Factor <sup>+</sup>	Measured variable	Factor Loading					Reliability
		1	2	3	4	5	
PI	1. I take initiative immediately even when others don't			.761			0.729
	2. I use opportunities quickly in order to attain my goals			.664			
	3. Usually I do more than I am asked to do			.789			
SE	4. If I want to achieve something, I can overcome setbacks without giving up my goal				.528		0.643
	5. When I want to reach a goal, I am usually able to succeed				.853		
	6. In case I would become unemployed, I am convinced that, because of my abilities, I will soon find a new job				.747		
Cultur_indiv	7. If a group is slowing me down, it is better to leave it and work alone		.761				0.778
	8. To be superior, a person must stand alone		.870				
	9. A person does better work working alone than in a group		.874				
	10. Only those who depend upon themselves get ahead in life		.583				
NFA	11. I get restless and annoyed when I feel I'm wasting time					.780	0.627
	12. I always work hard in order to be among the best in my own line					.599	
	13. I tend to plan ahead for my job or career					.735	
PSS	14. My supervisor appreciates extra effort from me	.909					0.955
	15. My supervisor strongly considers my goals and values	.904					
	16. Help is available from my supervisor when I have a problem	.844					
	17. If I did the best job possible, my supervisor would be sure to notice	.859					
	18. My supervisor cares about my general satisfaction at work	.890					
	19. My supervisor cares about my opinions	.831					
	20. My supervisor takes pride in my accomplishments	.888					
	21. My supervisor tries to make my job as interesting as possible	.859					

<sup>+</sup> In the tables, personal initiative is abbreviated 'PI', self-efficacy 'SE', individualistic cultural persuasion 'Cultur\_indiv', need for achievement 'NFA' and perceived supervisory support 'PSA'.

**Table 2:** Results of exploratory factor analysis and Cronbach's alpha reliability

Before running the principal component analysis, an examination of the data indicated that not every variable was perfectly normally distributed. However, these deviations were not considered problematic, given that factor analysis is a robust method (Allen & Bennett, 2012; Pallant, 2013; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). The result of our principal component analysis with Promax rotation and Kaiser normalisation suggest that common method variance is not of great concern, and therefore is unlikely to affect the results.

Cronbach's alpha coefficients of three of the variables (i.e. personal initiative, individualism and perceived supervisor support) exceed the cut off of .70 recommended by Nunnally and Bernstein (1994) and Tabachnick and Fidell (2001). Two (i.e. self-efficacy and need for achievement) exceed a lesser threshold of .60, which is still considered reliable by Nunnally and Bernstein (1994), and Nunnally, Bernstein and Berge (1967). Accordingly, the reliability of each scale is satisfactory (also see George & Mallery, 2007; Kline, 2013).

## 4. Result and discussion

Table 3, below, reports the means, standard deviations and correlations of all variables. As the estimated correlation between variables was well below the recommended upper threshold of 0.7, discriminant validity was established for the study constructs (Pallant, 2013; Allen & Bennett, 2012). The correlation results indicate that our planned moderated hierarchal regression analysis can be performed to test our six research hypotheses.

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5
1. PI	1.914	0.606	1				
2. NFA	1.088	0.249	0.472515*	1			
3. SE	1.838	0.523	0.342934*	0.240569*	1		
4. PSS	3.061	1.392	0.088042	0.037823	0.030649	1	
5. Culture_indiv	3.132	0.868	-0.01538	-0.03478	0.042418	-0.14465	1

\*p<0.001, \*\*p<0.05

**Table 3:** Mean, standard deviation and correlations (n=144)

We performed hypothesis testing on our data through a moderated multiple regression analysis (Baron & Kenny, 1986), in that separate independent variables were constructed for our predictors (i.e. NFA, SE), moderators (PSS, Culture\_indiv), and the two-way interaction terms (NFA\*PSS, SE\* PSS, NFA\*Culture\_indiv, and SE\*Culture\_indiv). The interaction effects must be significant for them to suggest a moderation effect (Baron & Kenny, 1986).

Before conducting the regression analysis, the predictors and moderators were mean-centred. This was done in order to avoid issues associated with multicollinearity. Our results are shown in Table 4 below.

Variable	Dependent variable: PI				
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Constant	1.91*	1.914*	1.914*	1.916	1.919
NFA	0.472*	0.413*	0.411*	0.416*	0.422*
SE		0.243**	0.242**	0.215**	0.217**
PSS			0.064	0.045	0.045
Culture_indiv			-0.003	0.017	0.016
NFA*PSS				0.061	0.046
SE*PSS				-0.127	-0.153***
NFA*Culture_indiv					-0.033
SE*Culture_indiv					-0.118
F	40.60*	27.16*	13.67*	9.72*	7.69*
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.217	0.268	0.262	0.268	0.273
Change in Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>		0.051	-0.006	0.006	0.005

\*p<0.001, \*\*p<0.05, \*\*\*p<0.1

**Table 4:** Results of moderated multi regression models

Model 1 shows the main effect of just one of our predictors (i.e. NFA), which explains approximately 22% of the variance



in the dependent variable ( $F= 40.60, p< 0.001$ ). We introduced the second predictor (i.e. SE) in Model 2, the results of which show that: by controlling for the main effect of NFA, SE has a significant and positive effect on PI, explaining an additional 5.1% of the variance in PI ( $F= 27.16, p< 0.05$ ). In the next stage of our analysis, we entered our two moderators into the model, namely PSS and Culture\_indiv. The results indicate that when controlling for the effects of both independent variables (NFA and SE), these moderators have no significant effect on PI; no additional variance is explained by adding these two variables (change in adjusted  $R^2 = - 0.6\%$ ).

In Models 4 and 5, we added the two-way interaction terms to the regression. In Model 4, NFA\*PSS, and SE\*PSS are entered. We find that neither NFA\*PSS nor SE\*PSS has a significant effect on PI (change in adjusted  $R^2 = 0.6\%$ ). In Model 5, we added the two-way interaction terms of NFA\*Culture\_indiv and SE\*Culture\_indiv. The results also show that both interaction terms have no significant effect on PI, and no significant additional variance is explained by adding these two terms to the model (change in adjusted  $R^2 = 0.5\%$ ). We summarise the results of our hypothesis testing below:

#### **4.1 Hypothesis 1: There is a positive relationship between self-efficacy and personal initiative**

Model 5 in Table 4 shows a significant and positive relationship between NFA and our dependent variable (i.e. PI) ( $\beta= .217, t= 2.87, p<.05$ ). Hence, our empirical results support the first hypothesis.

#### **4.2 Hypothesis 2: There is a positive relationship between need for achievement and personal initiative**

Our model also shows a significant and positive relationship between SE and our dependent variable ( $\beta= .422, t= 5.41, p< .001$ ). Hence, our empirical results support the second hypothesis.

#### **4.3 Hypothesis 3: The relationship between need for achievement and personal initiative is positively moderated by perceived supervisor support**

#### **Hypothesis 4: The relationship between self-efficacy and personal initiative is positively moderated by perceived supervisor support**

Model 5, however, does not show a significant and positive relationship between the interaction term NFA\*PSS and our dependent variable ( $\beta= .046, t= .56, p>.05$ ). Neither does it show a significant and positive relationship between the interaction term SE\*PSS and our dependent variable ( $\beta= -.153, t= -1.96, p=.051$ ). In fact, our results appear to suggest that there is a negative and marginally significant relationship between SE\*PSS and PI, indicating that perceived supervisor support may even negatively moderate the relationship between self-efficacy and the display of personal initiative at work. Our empirical results fail to support the third and fourth hypotheses.

#### **4.4 Hypothesis 5: The relationship between need for achievement and personal initiative is positively moderated by cultural orientation towards individualism**

#### **Hypothesis 6: The relationship between self-efficacy and personal initiative is positively moderated by cultural orientation towards individualism**

Furthermore, the model does not show a significant and positive relationship between our dependent variable and the interaction terms NFA\*Culture\_indiv ( $\beta= -.033, t= -.42, p>.05$ ) and SE\*Culture\_indiv ( $\beta= -.118, t= -1.59, p>.05$ ) respectively. Consequently, our empirical results fail to support the fifth and sixth hypotheses.

In summary, our analysis suggests that contemporary understanding of the relationship between need for achievement and self-efficacy, and personal initiative holds true in the context of the Palestinian workplaces that we sampled. This indicates that management approaches that rely on these relationships are likely to translate well into comparable organisations across the region. For instance, implementing initiatives that improve self-efficacy (e.g. positive reinforcement) to increase personal initiative is likely to have a desired effect. But perceived supervisor support and cultural orientation towards individualism do not have the effect that we expected on the personal initiatives of our Palestinian participants. We discuss these findings under the next heading.

## 5. Discussion

An explanation for the discrepancy between our actual and expected findings vis-à-vis the effects of individual cultural orientation and perceived supervisor support on personal initiative revolves around the characteristics of our survey participants. A careful perusal of Table 1 on respondent demographics reveals that our respondents cannot be regarded as representatives of the general adult working population. For instance, 86% of our survey participants have graduated from university, 40% of whom have postgraduate qualifications. In contrast, only around 12-13% of Palestinian adults have completed university studies at all (UNDP, 2015; PCBS, 2017). Moreover, 62% of our survey participants have management / supervisory responsibilities, indicating their level of seniority in their organisations.

These observations suggest that, unlike the overwhelming majority of the workforce, our survey participants consist of only its professional and managerial fractions, which are engaged in the formal sector. Consequently, our findings cannot be generalised across the entire labour market covering the area. But this is not to say that our findings are not valuable. NGOs and large foreign and local firms frequently rely on local professional and managerial workforce – and they almost exclusively source their labour supply from the formal labour market on the ground (Budhwar and Mellahi 2007, Mellahi, Demirbag & Riddle 2011). Our findings will prove valuable to these organisations. Furthermore, the relevance of our study will increase as authorities - like the Palestinian government - engage in nation-building efforts.

### 5.1 Cultural Orientation towards Individualism

The effects of individualist cultural orientation on the relationship between personal initiative and its antecedents are less significant in our study than what we expected. This is because individuals with higher levels of education and intellectual competence, like our survey participants, tend to be less attached to elements of their cultural identities. Consequently, their cultural values are less likely to contribute to their behaviours at work than those of other workers.

For instance, a survey participant may respond negatively to the following questionnaire statements: “to be superior, a person must stand alone” and “only those who depend upon themselves get ahead in life” due to their traditional upbringing. But this may not actually manifest in the form of something concrete in the workplace. Facets of an individuals’ cultural values and traditional upbringing, like religion, tend to diminish in their importance to an individual’s behaviour the more educated and intellectually competent that individual is (Eurobarometer, 2005; Gallup, 2015; Zuckerman, Silberman & Hall, 2013; Sacredote & Glaeser, 2001). Furthermore, they are more able to separate personal values and professional behaviours. This may explain why our participants’ cultural orientations do not have such a strong impact on the interactions between their personal initiative, self-efficacy and need for achievement.

### 5.2 Perceived Supervisor Support

The effects of perceived supervisor support and the relationship between personal initiative and its antecedents in our study are surprising. Our findings fail to support the notion that perceived supervisor engagement is a positive moderator between personal initiative and need for achievement. This is perhaps because, for senior and highly skilled professionals, the guidance of top-level managers is not as crucial to translating personal motivation into tangible initiative as it is for, say, an entry-level staff whose day-to-day activities are closely monitored by their supervisors.

Unexpectedly, our analysis also shows a marginally significant ( $0.1 > p > 0.05$ ) but negative relationship between the interaction terms SE\*PSS and PI, indicating that perceived supervisor support may even negatively moderate the relationship between self-efficacy and the display of personal initiative at work. This is surprising given our framing of supervisor support as a resource. But this is not always how supervisor engagement is perceived by staff, especially highly skilled professionals. Personal initiative, after all, “implies a certain rebellious element toward the supervisor” (Fay & Fresse, 2001, p.98). Consequently, we conclude that, for highly skilled professionals, supervisor involvement has the potential to be perceived (and felt) as much as a nuisance as it is a resource that supports the display of personal initiative (also see Austin & Larkey, 1992; Chambers, 2004; Wright, 1999). This provides a plausible explanation for our negative and marginally significant finding concerning this variable.

### 5.3 Self-efficacy and Need for Achievement

Given the limitations of this research, we are ultimately unable to claim that our current understanding regarding the impacts of self-efficacy and need for achievement on personal initiative is broadly transferrable to Palestinian (and indeed, Middle Eastern) workplaces. But we can make this claim in the narrower context of the highly educated, Palestinian and Middle Eastern professional workforce. While most workers in the region still operate in the informal

sector, increases in government investment nation-building in the aftermath of years of violent conflicts are likely to contribute towards an increase in the percentage of formal sector workers relative to their informal sector counterparts.

As this happens, ideas and management approaches from the developed world - including those that rely on positive correlations between self-efficacy and need for achievement, and personal initiative - will become more relevant and gain greater traction. This is consistent with the convergence hypothesis we outlined earlier in the literature review section of this paper.

## 5. Conclusion

The aim of this study is to better understand the applicability of contemporary HRM practices, which are based on our knowledge about the relationship between personal initiative and its key antecedents in the context of a developing Middle Eastern country that has just emerged from a destabilising conflict. Specifically, we sought to understand whether or not the relationships between self-efficacy, need for achievement and perceived supervisor support, and personal initiative - among Middle Eastern professionals - reflect those of their Western counterparts who live in a remarkably different environment. We were also curious about the roles of cultural orientation towards individualism on these relationships.

We collected survey data from employees of large organisations operating in Palestinian territories, and then performed correlation and regression analyses to examine relationships between the said variables. Our findings support the conclusions of contemporary research about the positive effects of self-efficacy and need for achievement on personal initiative (Hong et al, 2016; Speier & Frese, 1997; Lisbona et al, 2018, Frese et al, 1996; Frese et al, 1997).

But our expectations regarding the link between perceived supervisor support, the cultural value of individualism and personal initiative are not supported by our findings. The reason appears to be that our initial assumptions are based on studies done on the general workforce (Frese et al, 1996; Frese et al, 1997), whereas our survey participants occupy the top echelons of their society in terms of educational attainment and socio-economic status. We suspect that cultural values tend to have less of an impact on well-educated, senior professionals, who are also less dependent on the attention and support of their supervisors. This is because education and income are found to be negatively related to key aspects of cultural identity like religious belief (Sacredote & Glaeser, 2001), and the scope of highly skilled professionals' work benefit from independence more so than close supervision. In fact, too much supervisor involvement may even distract their ability to turn self-efficacy into tangible demonstrations of personal initiative (as highlighted by Austin & Larkey, 1992; Chambers, 2004; Wright, 1999).

Our findings suggest that organisations that operate in a similar environment as our study participants should be cautious about attributing the effects of cultural values on qualities like personal initiative in their professional workforce. Moreover, they should consider how the impacts of supervisory engagement may vary between employees at different levels of seniority and educational attainments. The good news is that initiatives aimed at improving self-efficacy and motivation among staff, for the purpose of developing personal initiative (the value of which is increasing in a changing commercial landscape), are likely to achieve the desired outcome among workers across the board irrespective of workplace context. Consequently, we suggest that maximising self-efficacy and motivation (a.k.a. need for achievement) – say, by way of positive reinforcement or offering attractive incentives to perform – are effective ways to improve personal initiative.

We believe that future research in the broader context of the Middle East and North Africa, encompassing multiple national jurisdictions, would prove worthwhile – as would an investigation into employees in small firms as well as the informal economy.

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