The Path to Successful Employment for Arab Jobseekers

Background

There is a growing recognition across both the governmental and non-governmental spheres that the integration of Israel's Arab minority into the mainstream workplace will serve as a key lever for integration generally. For the past five years, initiatives such as Co-Impact (CI) have been leading the way – in this case, working to help leading Israeli companies change their organizational processes and cultures to be not just more accommodating, but welcoming, to minority candidates. The Applied Center for Psychology of Social Change has played an important role as lead consultant to CI on the socio-psychological aspects of this process, developing tools and interventions for improving procedures for recruiting, on-boarding, managing diverse teams, and promoting minority employees, as well as on key aspects of improving organizational culture within the companies. This process has been showing results.

However, there is now a large gap between the desire of organizations and companies to absorb Arab workers and the volume of referrals and resumes they receive. Having undergone significant (even radical) transformations in terms of their abilities to begin accommodating Arab employees, the companies that were selected for intensive, multi-year work by CI since the initiative began still have very few candidates to actually choose from. Past research into this phenomenon identified structural and skills-based factors, such as mobility/geography, limitation in language abilities, limited social capital, and lack of professional networks. Until now, the socio-psychological aspects have not been systematically researched or addressed in practice. This deficit provides an explanation to the serious shortage of Arab applicants for jobs, even where Israeli companies are more ready than ever to accommodate them and even when enrollment and graduation rates for Arab students in higher education are at an all-time high (*Times of Israel*, "Number of Arab students in Israeli universities grows 78% in 7 years," 25 January 2018).

"I am doing very well with the employers but with the candidates...It does not work. I need to find a new approach." Founder & Executive Director, Employment Assistance Organization

Why This Research Matters

As it stands, the willingness of businesses to accommodate Arab candidates exceeds the actual number of Arab applicants. Current research indicates that major barriers preventing highly-qualified Arab candidates from looking for relevant jobs outside the Arab sector result from the complex intergroup relations between Jews and Arabs in Israel. With funding from the Social Venture Fund for Jewish-Arab Equality and Shared Society and others, the Applied Center has completed an initial research, mapping, and diagnostic phase of a multi-year project, including the successful completion of a massive study of highly-qualified Arab Citizens of Israel from various backgrounds, sub-groups, and academic disciplines regarding their views, attitudes, and beliefs about being a minority job-seeker in Israel. Several key findings from this research are described here.

#1 65% of Arab candidates in the sample did not think they were expected to work in Jewish-majority companies. This perceived norm was found to be an important predictor of job seeking behavior in all sub-groups of the sample.

#2 More than 40% of Arab candidates surveyed were apprehensive about looking for work in Jewish-majority companies.

#3 For more than half of Arab candidates, their self-efficacy in job seeking was lower than their general self efficacy.

#4 Differential Solutions: Candidates from different professions need different interventions.

#5 It matters who delivers the message. Candidates indicated they would be most persuaded by messages from Arab managers.

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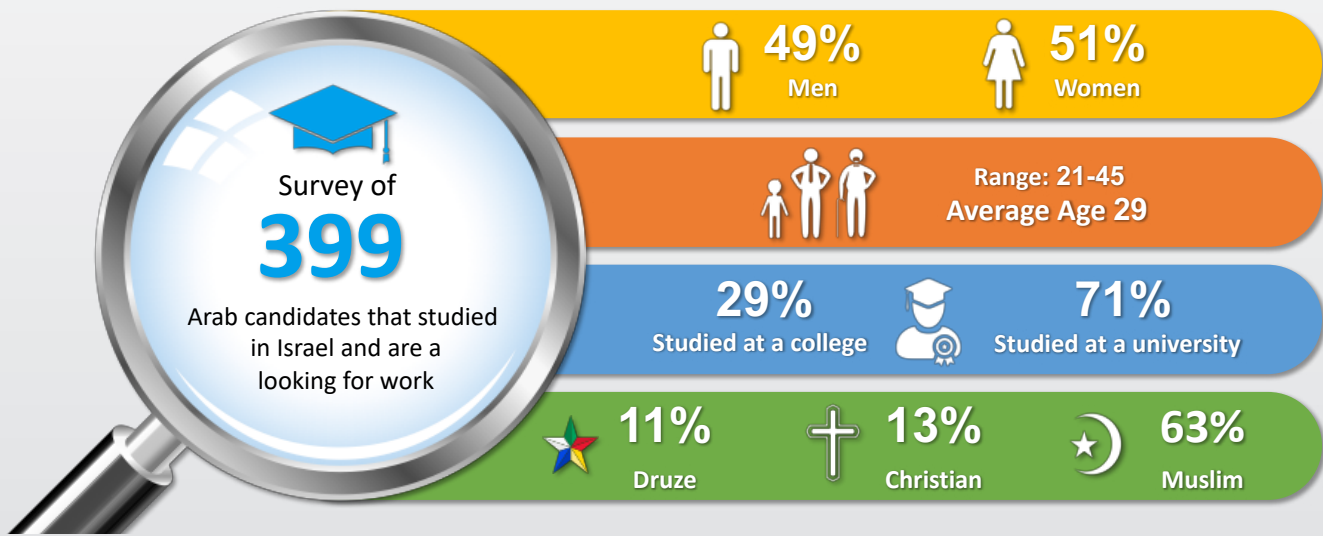for Jewish-Arab Equality and Shared Society

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Methodology

Face-to-face surveys were conducted with 399 Arab university students or graduates who were asked nearly 200 questions about their views and attitudes toward the job market in Jewish-majority companies, perceived barriers toward entering the job market, and their knowledge of, and willingness to use, various employment assistance and job-referral agencies. The respondents came from a cross-section of academic disciplines and employment fields and were at various junctures of their job-seeking journeys. In addition to the quantitative component, the study also included a qualitative component. The researcher who led the study conducted personal interviews and held a focus group with Arab university students to explore what it meant for them to be part of Israel's Arab minority as students, after graduation, and when looking for work. The interviews were transcribed and key findings were extracted from the transcripts.

Survey of **399** Arab candidates that studied in Israel and are a looking for work

- **49%** Men
- **51%** Women
- Range: 21-45 Average Age 29
- **29%** Studied at a college
- **71%** Studied at a university
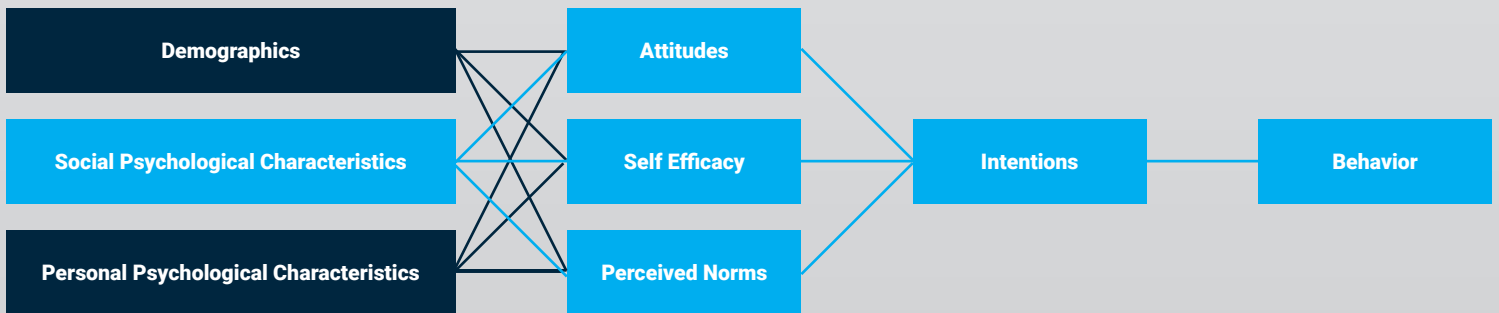- **11%** Druze
- **13%** Christian
- **63%** Muslim

Findings

The research phase culminated in the creation of a cutting-edge model based on the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1985), which has been validated and applied in over 1200 peer-reviewed publications. Our model shows that the factors driving applicant behavior are based on inter-group attitudes, norms, and self-efficacy and takes into account how these are rooted in social-psychological factors based on the applicants' social identities as members of a minority group. These social-psychological factors drive attitudes, norms, and efficacy, above and beyond personal and demographic characteristics. The key is to change these, and thus change behavior.

What Predicts Arab Candidates' Intentions to Look for Work at a Jewish-Majority Company?

Demographics — Social Psychological Characteristics — Personal Psychological Characteristics → Attitudes — Self Efficacy — Perceived Norms → Intentions → Behavior

Specifically, the research revealed that: 1) Most college-educated members of Israel's Arab minority perceive that norms, the accepted standards of behavior for a given group, are against looking for work in Jewish-majority companies. In other words, they perceive that their family and friends do not expect them to work in Jewish companies and that most other Arab candidates are not looking for work in Jewish companies; 2) Most have low self-efficacy (the belief in one's ability to succeed in specific situations) in the context of looking for work in a Jewish-majority company, and most feel low self-efficacy in this context in general; 3) Many are apprehensive about looking for work in a Jewish-majority company and think such a process would be useless and frustrating.

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## Research-Based Interventions

In addition, by examining the social psychological factors that predicted norms, self-efficacy, and attitudes, the research indicated what interventions might be most effective at increasing job-seeking behavior among Arab candidates. First, the research suggested that perceived norms could be changed, especially via messages from the right people (see more below, regarding the importance of who delivers the messages). Next, the research indicated that reducing the effect of negative perceived stereotypes (i.e. the perception that Jews see Arabs as incompetent) would most increase feelings of self-efficacy. Lastly, attitudes could be most improved via a malleability intervention, which highlights the potential for change in groups.

Another important insight from the research is that the various interventions listed above are not equally important for all sub-groups of Arab candidates (e.g. candidates from different academic fields or professional backgrounds). For example, a malleability intervention to change attitudes would be effective for graduates in the field of law and accounting, but not in the exact sciences. On the other hand, an intervention to reduce the effect of perceived stereotypes would be most effective in the exact sciences. Thus, designing an effective intervention plan requires a tailor-made approach based on the specific candidates it aims to reach. Finally, the research shed light on who might be more or less effective as potential "messengers" or agents of these interventions to change attitudes and perceptions regarding working in a Jewish-majority company. Overall, the survey revealed that Arabs in the business sector were perceived to be by far the most persuasive messengers, followed by Jews in the business sector, nonprofits, and then by leaders in society.

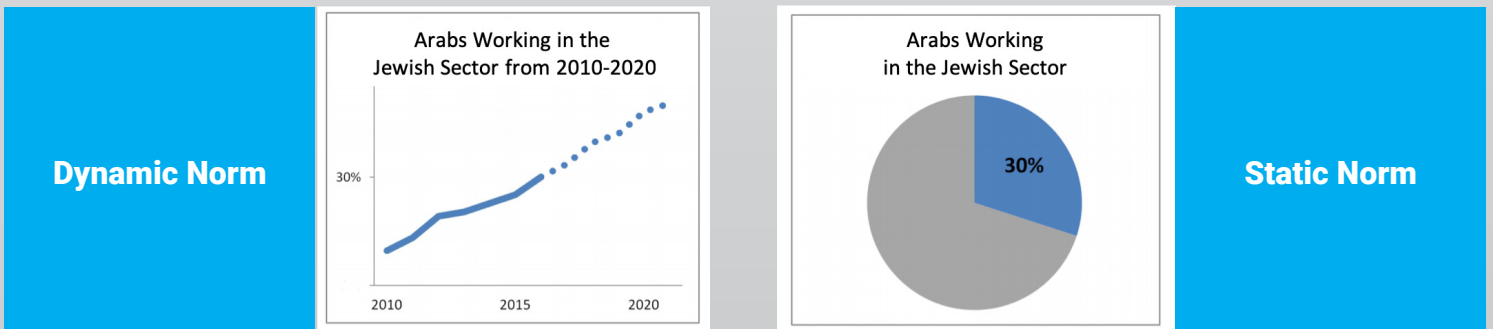### Who is the Most Effective Messenger?
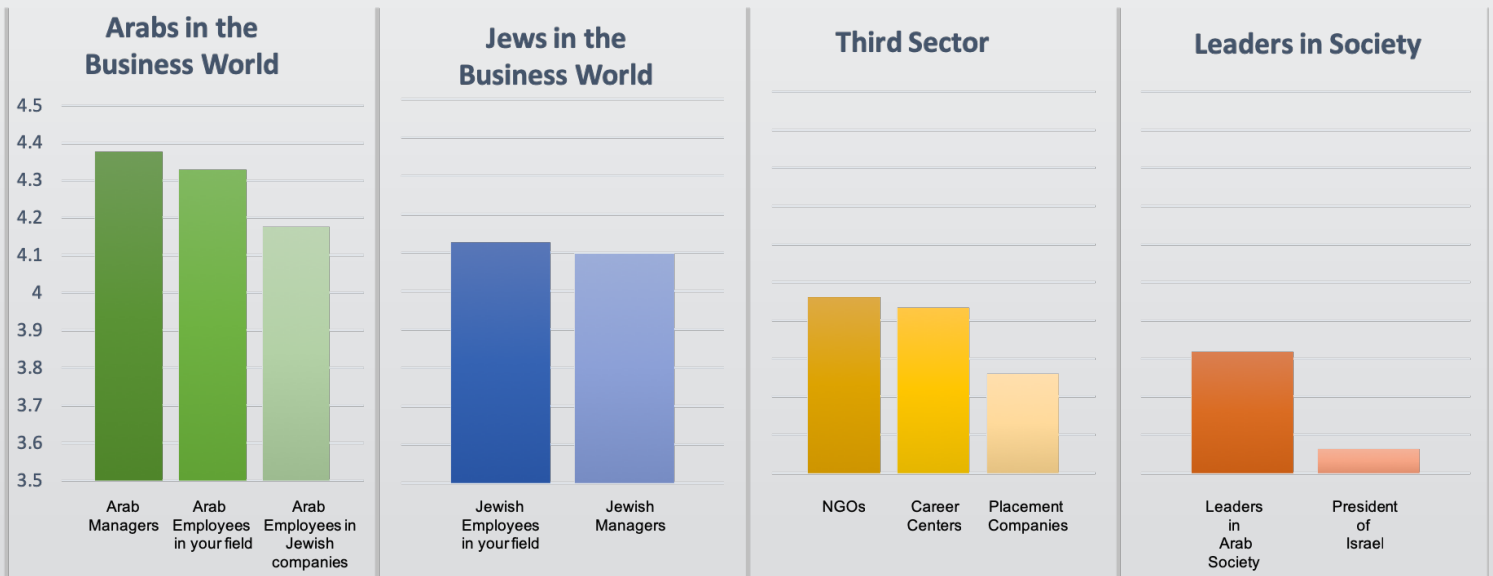
Current On-Field Implementation

To address these socio-psychological barriers, we are developing practical knowledge and tools from the field of social psychology to serve CI, job referral organizations, and career centers at universities to help them more effectively refer and prepare applicants for the growing number of positions emerging outside of the Arab sector. In the second phase of the project, the Applied Center has begun working with CI and with Itworks to help them maximize their impact by developing specific tools and interventions based on the model described above. One simple example of the type of intervention that can lead to a dramatic shift in perceived norms is presenting dynamic instead of static information: Organizations and initiatives were advised to report a trend showing an increasing number of Arabs who are working in Jewish-majority companies, rather than a static figure.

Dynamic Norm

Arabs Working in the Jewish Sector from 2010-2020

Static Norm

Arabs Working in the Jewish Sector

30%

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Looking Ahead

No other initiative is tackling what it means to apply for, interview with, and actually join an "in-group" company as a member of an "out-group." This seems to be the missing piece of ongoing efforts to better equip Arab candidates for employment by providing technical training, language courses, and teaching basic soft skills. After conducting a focus group at the Technion and analyzing the data, it was clear that a socio-psychological intervention designed to overcome the barriers described above can and should be made before Arab candidates enter the job market. Therefore, in the next year, we plan to pilot our model also in a career center in one of Israel's leading universities. These pilots will form the experimental foundation for wider, ongoing work to maximize the impact of the various initiatives, programs, and mechanisms advancing the employment of Arab jobseekers in Israel.

"The focus has so far been on the employers: understanding them and convincing them of the business case for diversity and inclusion on the assumption that the candidates are waiting in line. And that's one big missed opportunity. All they [businesses] knew about the candidates so far was based on assumptions and guesses. And that is the significant contribution of this work - to understand the candidate. It was necessary to do this work long ago, to understand the other side, the side of the candidates. "

Fadi Elobra, Co-Founder& Co-CEO, TALENTEAM

A workshop to share knowledge and key research findings with the field was held on February 19, 2019, with forty participants from over a dozen organizations and initiatives.

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