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D. D. Warrick

University
of Colorado,
Colorado Springs,
USA



Jens Mueller

Waikato
Management
School,
Hamilton,
New Zealand

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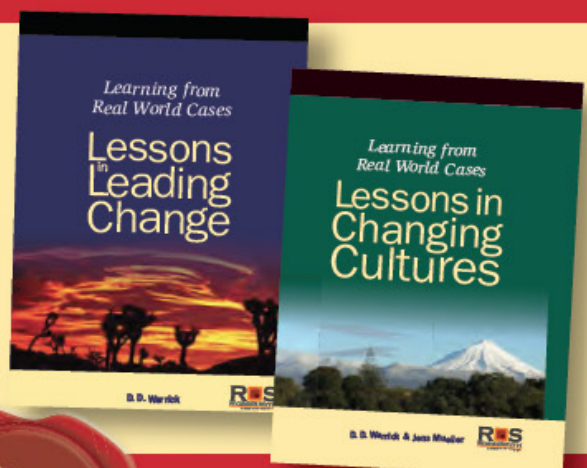
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Award Winning Leadership: A Case Study Of Saudi Chamber Of Commerce - Eastern Province

Vijayalaxmi Moovala

Major Focus Of The Case

This case study focuses on the leadership style of the Secretary General of Saudi Chamber of Commerce: Eastern Province, Adnan Abdullah Al Nueim, who brought about significant changes in the Chamber, and transformed the bureaucratic, traditional work environment into a customer friendly, proactive, and service oriented one. Under the dynamic leadership of Adnan, the Chamber received awards for the best work environment (2008 & 2009) in Saudi Arabia among all non-profit organizations. It also won the award for best customer care (2008) in the government sector. Adnan, himself was given the award of Corporate Management CEO of the Year (2009) in the semi- government sector of the Middle East. The case highlights the strategic management and human resources mechanisms of the Chamber. A profile of the leader, style, qualities, values and, people orientation is outlined. The factors that contributed to the Chamber winning the prestigious awards in the Middle East region form a part of the case.

Saudi Chamber of Commerce: Eastern Province

The Saudi Chamber of Commerce¹: Eastern Province, a semi-government service organization in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, was established in 1952. The Chamber's vision was to lead the development of Eastern Province², the largest province in Saudi Arabia, through effective mobilization of resources and diversification of economy. Under the dynamic leadership of the Secretary General, Adnan Abdullah Al Nueim, the Chamber which had an employee strength of 215 including 11 women [in July 2010], was poised to scale great heights in the professional corporate world through its leadership effectiveness and management practices.

Best CEO of the Year

Adnan, a 38-year old, dynamic, and well-educated Saudi national, joined the Chamber in 2003 in a supervisory position, and within a short span of four years was promoted to the position of a Secretary General. He was adjudged as the “**Corporate Management CEO of the Year**” – 2009³, by the *Middle East Excellence Awards Institute* which was the platform to recognize achievements of professionals and organizations from the region. This award honored the distinct achievements of Adnan, who as a leader brought about significant changes in the Chamber, by establishing strategic direction and building professional management teams. The tipping point in favor of Adnan was the successful implementation of an executive/management

1 www.chamber.org.sa

2 Eastern Province covers more than 36% of Saudi Arabia's total area. Its coastline, over the centuries, has served as a vital link in East-West trade.

3 <http://www.meawards.com/criteria.asp?awardid=574>

development program, which resulted in a noticeable improvement in attracting and retaining executive talent, and enhancing employee productivity/ performance at the Chamber. In addition, the coaching/ mentoring processes, employee incentive programs, and a fair performance management system that were implemented in the Chamber played a role in Adnan getting the award.

Strategic leadership and core values

On assuming the leadership position in 2007, Adnan set about with the most important task of formulating the vision, mission and core values of the Chamber. The strategic focus of the Chamber was on five key areas:

1. Membership [subscription]
2. Products/ services provision
3. Business development and investment
4. Internal business environment
5. Financial resources

Objectives were determined in the five strategic areas and quarterly reviews were conducted. In these reviews: (i) the content and context of the achievement of objectives were analyzed, (ii) accountability of assistant secretary generals/ managers was highlighted, and (iii) future action plans were agreed upon. Adnan fostered a positive, flexible and progressive work environment in the Chamber. He created a team culture and highlighted the slogan: **Working Together for a Better Future**. The core values espoused by the Chamber were:

- Trust and Integrity
- Customer Service
- Commitment
- Professional Excellence
- Accepting Responsibility
- Group Work
- Gratitude & Appreciation

Employees of the Chamber believed that core values depict the behavior of the organization and hence, should be implemented and exhibited.

Management Philosophy

A personal interview conducted [by the author] with Adnan provided valuable insights into his leadership thoughts and philosophy. His vision was for the Chamber to be ranked among the top five in the world. Adnan's passion for institutional building was evidenced through the shared vision, shared values, shared decision-making, and human capital development at the Chamber.

Adnan's motto:

'Leaders should have the vision and create the right culture.'

The coaching process initiated in the Chamber was a reflection of this philosophy. On one end of this spectrum, was the encouragement given to employees to be ambitious, positive-minded, and enhance their professionalism. On the other end, was the responsibility assigned to managers to develop their successors and empower their subordinates. Adnan encouraged employees to have the drive, initiative, ambition, and demonstrate competencies to compete in the global/ complex environment. He acknowledged and welcomed anyone who aspired and aimed to occupy his position, which indicated a mature, positive, and confident leadership style.

Adnan followed the maxim:
'A good leader develops other leaders and not followers'

An interesting dual approach leadership model practiced by Adnan was that the organization must provide opportunities and create the right environment, to enhance employees' professionalism and objective achievement. The successful formula that was being implemented in the Chamber was:

Figure 1:



Adnan emphasized that his role:

*'.....is to transfer the vision and guide employees. Employees are highly capable key players in organizational objective achievement. The effective way to gain support for corporate strategy is through employees' involvement and participation. I cannot do anything alone; I am here to support the staff. My time in the Chamber is for employees and subscribers. I can always check emails and catch up with other work after office ours.'*⁴

Employee Participation In Decision Making

Adnan had established a strategic committee of thirteen members, including the five assistant secretary generals as permanent members. To ensure employees' participation in strategic decision making/ management, three members of the committee were selected from the non-managerial employees. To encourage women participation in management, one lady employee was selected as a member of the strategic committee. The role of this committee was to formulate and monitor the implementation of the Chamber's strategic framework.

Adnan conducted weekly meetings with the five *assistant secretary generals*. He also conducted joint monthly meetings with *assistant secretary generals* and *department heads*. The minutes of both these meetings, and the monthly activity reports submitted by all departments were posted on the Chamber's intranet which could be accessed by all employees. This was a good management practice endorsing the leadership commitment towards shared vision and values, where the top management believed that employees, irrespective of their hierarchical level, were entitled to know the strategic decision making, and happenings at top management meetings.

This was keeping in line with the management dictum:
'Strategy must descend from the boardroom to the shop floor/customer counters.'

⁴ Excerpt from an interview [conducted by the author] with Adnan on 18th July 2010 at the Chamber in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Transparency And Open Communication

The Chamber conducted 'employee opinion' surveys annually. A specially instituted committee monitored the surveys, analyzed the findings and prepared the results/ feedback report. The feedback report included a summary sheet in which the suggestions/ complaints/ comments of employees, **even those related to Adnan**, were copied verbatim. The feedback report was circulated to all employees in the Chamber, thereby demonstrating a transparent and open communication style [the original feedback sheets submitted by employees were handed over to the Chairman of the Board]. Adnan addressed issues/ concerns raised in the survey by writing a comment/ solution, and sending it to every employee.

Adnan responded to emails sent to him directly by employees, by personally looking into the issue and/ or assigning the responsibility to the concerned person. Adnan sent short messages of appreciation and personal thanks to employees on their mobiles about their achievements. These messages were forwarded to all other employees, as well. Any good work done by employees was acknowledged by Adnan through appreciation letters and personal emails. Trends such as these endeared Adnan to his employees who contributed to his nomination for the **best corporate management CEO award - 2009**.

Human Capital Development

A noteworthy human capital development initiative undertaken by Adnan was the establishment of a *career development section* in August 2009. The main function of this section which reported directly to him, was to focus on and review key human resources mechanisms; particularly job descriptions, job placement, career and succession planning in the Chamber. A strong believer in 'continuing learning' as a tool for professional success, Adnan encouraged lifelong learning through the *continuing learning program*. This program aimed at raising the level of education and skills of employees. Financial support and moral encouragement were provided to employees interested in developing themselves and furthering their career prospects.

The main challenge that the Chamber faced was with unplanned and unexpected requests/ demands from subscribers. These challenges were overcome through out-of-the-box thinking and empowerment. An 'Excellence and Innovation' program was formulated which was aimed at encouraging employees to be innovative and creative. As a result of this, a healthy competition and open environment existed in the Chamber where employees were empowered to think independently, and those who contributed to this program were also rewarded. The value addition process in the Chamber was mutual; in which the Chamber added value to the employees by enhancing their professionalism and the employees in turn, added value to the Chamber, through their work efficacy and excellent customer care.

**In the Chamber, employee development costs were viewed
as human capital investment.**

Customer Care Orientation And Excellence

In a major revamp, the Chamber was rebranded, publicized, and projected as a unique, high quality, user friendly, service provider. Adnan was instrumental in the Chamber reaching high standards of customer service through a two pronged approach. On one hand, it focused on customer care and service dimensions which involved offering high-quality customized programs, and services addressing specific issues and individual needs through various outlets.

On the other hand, the Chamber focused on the vital link in the customer service chain, the service personnel/ providers. Employees of the Chamber were well-trained to serve customers and

work with partners. The customers of the Chamber traditionally called members were renamed as *subscribers*, which contributed to a major positive change in the mindset among employees about customer care. Subscribers were treated according to their specific needs and, their complaints were viewed as feedback.

The testimony of the customer care orientation exhibited by the Chamber was the customer care award received by it. The Chamber received the “**Best Government Customer Care Award**”⁵ for 2008 in the Middle East, for its exemplary performance in serving the public. This award was given by *The Middle East Excellence Awards Institute* on the consideration of not only the customer care services, but also the over-all influence of customer care of the Chamber in the nominated government organization.

Best Work Environment

The leadership style and management practices that prevailed in the Chamber contributed to it being adjudged [among all non-profit organizations] as the ‘**Best Saudi company to work for**’⁶, for two consecutive years, i.e. 2008 & 2009. The award was given by *TeamOne Consulting and the Saudi Research and Publishing Group*, which conducted a survey related to management/leadership style, key human resources mechanisms, and the level of employee satisfaction with the Chamber.

The Chamber focused on good human resources practices to create the best work environment. It instituted ‘employee of the month’ awards for rewarding employees with outstanding performance, and the ‘perfect manager’ award to develop managerial competence and ensure that managers followed the best practices in terms of goal achievement and people management.

Award Winning Characteristics

A learned and enlightened leader, Adnan wrote a weekly column in the economic section of the local daily newspaper *ALYAUM* [Today]⁷ about business related topics. A visionary and a strategist with a focused approach and goal orientation, Adnan exhibited maturity, intellectual development and understanding of people management. He had an open door policy and believed in working in close proximity with every employee. He established personal rapport with employees and learnt from their expertise. Adnan was a role model and led by example. Some personal characteristics that came across strongly were his generosity, warmth, tolerance, and patience. He was unpretentious, had a pleasant disposition, and was accessible to employees.

Adnan had the judicious blend of objective achievement and people orientation.’

Embodiment Of Core Values

Adnan through his leadership had created an organizational culture conducive to employees’ exhibiting professional behavior and living by the core values. The trust of employees in the leadership and integrity of Adnan was reflected in the award received by him as the *corporate management CEO of the year-2009*. Winning the *best customer care award - 2008*, indicated that the leaders and employees of the Chamber, walked the talk, by providing excellent **customer service**. **Commitment, responsibility, group work and professional excellence** prevalent in the Chamber contributed to it being the best Saudi company to work for. **Gratitude** and **appreciation** that the Chamber showed towards its internal customers, in the form of a healthy work-life balance and professional environment, helped in the provision of excellent customer service to its external customers. Succession planning, coaching, and other progressive measures highlighted in

⁵ <http://www.meawards.com/criteria.asp?awardid=464>

⁶ http://www.bestsaudiocompany.com/en/home_en.aspx

⁷ A daily newspaper published in Arabic from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

this case, were an indication of professional excellence and people orientation that the top management of the Chamber valued.

Discussion

1. Describe the characteristics of Adnan's leadership style that created such a successful organization.
2. As a leader what are specifics that Adnan did to build an award winning organization.
3. Discuss what you like and then anything you would change about the vision, mission, and core values Adnan established.
4. Discuss your understanding of Adnan's dual approach leadership model.
5. Assess Adnan's people orientation with special reference to employees' participation in management and his open and transparent communication style.
6. What would be the major lessons you would want to learn from Adnan's approach to leadership and to building a highly successful organization?

Key Leadership Lessons

1. The style in which you lead is just as important as the things you do as a leader.
2. Top leadership direction that includes and encourages employees' participation in the strategic framework of the organization, leads to success. Organizations need to translate strategic plans and decisions into understandable terms and disseminate them to all employees in the organization. The practices in the *Saudi Chamber of Commerce: Eastern Province* of employee participation in decision making and open communication were noteworthy, and indicated top management commitment towards employees' involvement in strategic decision-making and implementation.
3. Implementation of the strategic framework and goal achievement are possible through employees' contribution and individual achievements. An effective leadership strikes the right balance between task achievement and people orientation. Adnan's leadership style exhibited a judicious blend of task orientation and people management, making him an effective leader.
4. Customer care and excellent service is very important for any organization's success. The right formula is to focus on internal customers [employees], who will provide the best service to external customers, who in turn will contribute to the profit margin. Leadership of the Chamber ensured that employees were developed, appreciated and taken care of. This helped in the provision of excellent customer service that the Chamber was recognized for.
5. Human capital development mechanisms pave the way for the survival and growth of organizations. Employees are the best assets of any organization. Implementing career development and succession plans provide the right impetus for the continuity of expertise and effective leadership in organizations. Adnan focused on management development programs and succession planning that ensured the availability of leadership and expertise in the Chamber. This endorsed his effectiveness as a leader, whose focus was on identifying and developing potential leaders.

BIOGRAPHY

Dr. Vijayalaxmi Moovala holds a Master's degree in Business Administration and a Doctorate in Business Management from India. She has a certificate in psychometric (occupational) testing: SHL [UK] and is a certified Master trainer of Neuro-Linguistic Psychology [USA]. Dr. Vijaya has over 20 years of experience in management training and consulting. She started her career as a Management Consultant and University faculty member teaching M.B.A. students. Her expertise is in the areas of *human capital development, applied managerial psychology, strategic and general management*. She has extensive experience in facilitating management training and development programs for supervisors and managers of different organizations in India, Kingdom of Bahrain and other Gulf countries. Dr. Vijaya has provided leadership and guidance to several human capital development projects. She is research oriented and has published several management articles in renowned journals. She believes in self-development and lifelong learning.

Dr. Vijayalaxmi Moovala

Program Manager

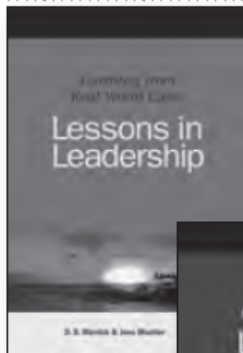
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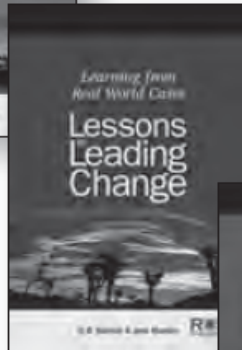
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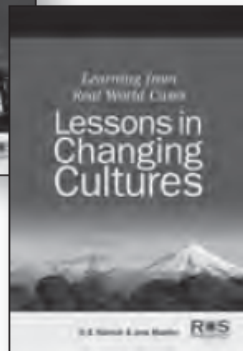
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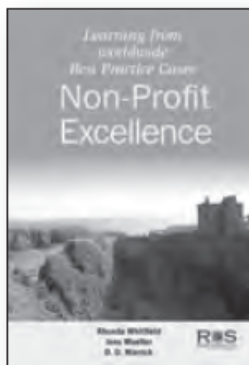
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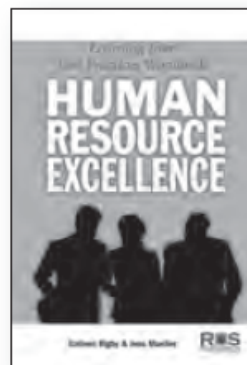
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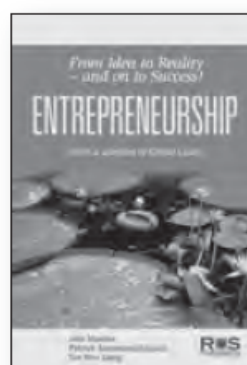
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