

Samia case study

Samia lives with her parents and is not married. She speaks English and Arabic fluently and also speaks a little French, which she has a diploma in, and a little Iranian and German. Samia was born in Iraq and is now aged 33. She studied in Iraq and has lived in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) for five years. She speaks English, Arabic, and a little bit of French (for which she has a diploma as she studied it for four years in a college). However, she considers she has forgotten most of her French, although she does also speak a little German and Iranian.

Currently

Samia is currently Marketing and Business Development manager with 'ABC' a British company operating in a specialized area of the construction industry in the UAE, and has been there for around a year and a half. She handles all the marketing requirements of the company and deals with all government sectors. "this brochure is one of my, you know, my achievements in the company. I designed this one; I was responsible for it...I did it in two languages". She got the job through one of her best friends, who knows the managing director and this friend introduced her to him by chance. She reports directly to the managing director of ABC, who gives her a lot of flexibility in her work "I have the flexibility to move and he is always satisfied about my choices and my decisions. He usually agrees about that, you know". The company has done a lot of projects in Liverpool in the UK. On joining the company, Samia handled all the marketing by herself; she did not know anything about the company, but "I handled everything by myself and I achieved very good...you know, just I deal with myself, so I had flexibility." She does have colleagues who help her when she needs it, but in the main she does the whole job by herself. The company employs around 150 people in its offices but employs as many as 1,000 laborers on projects. This is the first time Samia has worked with British people and she is very happy in the job. "I deal with many different nationalities in my life, but I never deal with British so I'm very happy with them..."

A typical day

Samia describes her days as; "yesterday I was in Abu Dhabi. I did meeting with 'Z Co.'. This is an oil company belonging to Abu Dhabi government. Now, we are going to register our company with 'Z Co.' in order to get opportunity to be active with the 'Z Co.' ". ABC has already registered with 'X Co.' because it is focusing on the oil and gas sector, especially in Abu Dhabi, because there are a lot of opportunities there. "they need our activity, you know, as a scaffolding. So, you know, because it's high tank and everything so they need scaffolding". ABC is using a very sophisticated technique of scaffolding material, which is called 'M***'; it is a German system, and ABC is the only company in the Middle East that is using this system. "this system is very high in safety and, you know, it minimizes the cost of the projects when we use this system; the side which we are dealing with minimizes the cost of the labor and reduces the time of finishing the project...because it's very, you know, a very developed system". The meeting lasted for an hour and a half plus a total of four hours travelling. She feels that she achieved well yesterday because she got information of how to register her company with 'Z Co.' in order to get job inside 'Z Co.' "so it was a very useful journey; it was very useful meeting yesterday, because without the visit yesterday I wouldn't know how to get the job there. So yesterday I got very good information from them. They showed me how to register on the website in order to be a registered company there." Samia usually represents her company everywhere, especially in the seminars in Dubai Chambers of Commerce and all seminars to which she is invited to I represent her company, by herself. "but yesterday my colleague was with me; he's the sales manager, you know, he's concerned in oil and gas. He has very good experience in gas, so he was with me. We met one of the directors of 'Z Co.' ". To arrange such meetings, Samia often just uses cold calling; she says about this meeting "I just contacted

Samia case study

them and I introduced myself to them and I fixed an appointment”. However, she also uses relationships that she has built up “because you know I worked in government for four years and I have very good relationship with many people in different sectors”

Family

Her father has company here. She has a sister. She considers her parents to be the source of her knowledge and that she is still learning from them. “for any Arabic woman when she has the support from her family I think she can succeed easily and usually my family used to support me in all my journey from the beginning”. Samia believes that on her leadership journey, “from beginning until today, they [her parents] used to support me and they used to motivate me. I'm very glad because my parents are happy about what I've achieved in life; and what I'm still achieving. Because when you get the support from inside your home, that will be the main thing which gives you the motivation to reach what we want to reach”.

Samia considers her parents are “my ideal of life.. my source of knowledge ... and I still am learning from them”. She still lives with her parents as she is not married. Samia does not think there would be too many “obstacles for any Arabic woman when she has the support from her family”. Her family has supported her from the beginning, “they used to motivate me....I'm very glad because you know my parents are happy about what I've achieved in life and what I'm still achieving”

Education

Samia studied in Iraq in the college of arts; department of English. She studied English Literature then shifted to Ireland, and studied business management in Trinity College in Dublin. She has an undergraduate degree Her Sister lived in Ireland.

Career

After studying in Ireland Samia returned to the UAE, where initially she managed her father's company; a very big company for import and export, home appliances and you know in general trade. She then worked in government for four and a half years. First, she was in sales and marketing for a government organization. “when I joined the government I was appointed as a marketing representative for 3 months. Then after three months I was promoted to key account officer and after 6 months, because I achieved well, I was promoted to marketing manager” After this, Samia moved to another government organization, where she was responsible for the data center “we were connected to ministry of interior and ministry of Foreign affairs, you know. It was very big organization at that time”. She then resigned from this job because she returned to Ireland for a short period and then returned to the UAE, when she joined her current employer.

Philosophy/views

Samia thinks a benefit of marketing is that it can increase one's relationships in society: “you know when you work in marketing you face many different kinds of people in different sectors”.

Samia case study

On the topic of the role of Arab women, Samia has this to say: “when you talk about Arabic women, the notion of Arab women conjures up an image for many people, you know, Arab women cloaked in long, covering garments; restricted in freedom and movements”. Samia is not in agreement with this image pointing out that when she attended the meeting in Abu Dhabi described above, she travelled with her male colleague in the same car, going on to say “last week I was in Qatar, with my managing director, you know, I stayed there for 3 hours, sorry three days; and last month I have been in Iraq, in the north of Iraqi in Arbil. Before, I have been in Jordan. So I used to travel outside, you know, if my job or my work required that. It’s no issue for me.” She believes that the achievements of Arab women around the world now lead us to rethink this image: “the achievements and what we achieved in society let us to rethink about this image, because now we have to think about what the women have; what this achievement means. And we have to increase the power; we have to increase the confidence; we have to change the image of Arab women. That’s the important thing that I want to, need to add it to my speech”. Samia says she is speaking in general here, not particularly an image outside the country or outside the Middle East, and does not mean that is important for all Arab women to go out to work “I mean about the expertise women, you know the woman who has experience, who has talent; because for any country if they want to improve themselves; they want to develop themselves, they have to focus on potential work force and not only male half; because we[women] are the second half of the society... you know we have to increase the talent for both genders in order to improve our countries”.

From Samira’s point of view, a successful life and leadership is not just a matter of study or academic qualifications or even job or title: “it means for me ... it’s a culture; it’s a community, you know, it’s a talent; it’s skills, and the key for the successful life is to learn and to study about these skills; how to be a leader in society and in order to change behavior, you know, to be an effective leader in your global environment”. She believes that you cannot study in order to be a manager or study in order to be a leader “you have to...it’s a way of thinking; it’s a mindset. That’s what I want to say”

Samia thinks that leadership needs a lot of effort and in order to succeed, and that there can be many challenges to on the journey to leadership “you have to succeed many obstacles in order to reach to the leadership...so as an unusual life you have to pass these obstacles you know”. As an example of this, “when I travel outside as an Arabic woman and alone and I’m not married, you know, as a single person, maybe others think, you know, ‘why she travel alone; why she is alone now? It’s not possible...’; but this is one [example] of the obstacles I have to pass in order to achieve; in order to reach where I want to reach; I have to deal with every obstacle in professional way, wisely, in order, you know, to reach my target in life”. Here she refers to ‘others’ as the community in general; society in general. Related to this is Samia’s view on women’s dress for business “I used to wear the scarf everywhere I travel, you know, even when I was in Dublin; everywhere in the world I used to travel, I would wear a scarf but with a long shirt and with trousers. But no, I don’t wear my Abaya” – “sometimes when I have meetings with European people, sometimes I don’t wear an Abaya, in order not let the others think that I’m a restricted person, you know. [I’m] flexible, I don’t have any issue in dressing”

Samia considers Sheikha Mozah [Qatar] and Sheikha Fatima here and Sheikha Maitha bin Mohammad as “our leaders they are the women in Arabic world who achieved very well and we wish to follow their path; in their success”.

Samia case study

Samia has further views on overcoming obstacles, and things that she has found have helped her on her leadership journey: "I think the touch with experienced people or people who have talents or who have knowledge; when you are close with these kind of people, for sure you will get, even if small part, from their experience. This is a very good reason to learn from them; to achieve for yourself. And that's what happened often here in UAE, through the seminars; through the meetings which the UAE government used to do. For example, Dubai Chamber of Commerce used to [hold] four or five seminars in a year, which give you chance to introduce yourself to others and to meet experienced people so that's very good and very good way".

Samia defines leadership as a set of skills. "as I mentioned earlier, it's a set of skills; it's a talent. And in order to be a leader, an effective leader in your global environment, you have to learn these skills. From my point of view, it's mindset, it's very easy, it's skills. I mean the way of looking at other things; the way of thinking, this is the skills". She believes that if you want to be a leader, you have to open your mind for the means of how to be a leader, not just to be in a position that you are a leader or a manager. "... and you don't have any skills of how to manage your position. First of all you have to have the set in order to manage your place or you can't increase your position very easily".

On the subject of dealing with change issues: "I did big change in my work sector because before, when I work with the first government organization in marketing and promotion, I worked with, you know, I deal with all government sector, sometimes in the private sectors; most of them with the government. Now when I joined ABC, I worked in construction. And it's very huge change because I never had any experience about the construction, and especially scaffolding because I think when we talk about scaffolding, immediately it comes to your mind men. Right?" – "you cannot think the woman can be involved in scaffolding. So when I joined the place, it was big change for me; I had to learn so about the field itself, so I studied and I did research about the construction mainly, and scaffolding especially, and I achieved well for that and [am] successful in my position now". The reason for this change given by Samia is that at that time of change she needed to travel and needed a four to five month vacation. So as this was at the start of the financial crisis and salaries had started to reduce, she decided to resign. On her return she changed to the private sector "because I want to change something in my life; because I think it's nice when you know about everything in world; the variety is very important. You know, it's nice to be expertise in as much as you could of the fields in life"

Samia considers that in ABC the managing director has power in the company, but at the same time he is a very flexible person "he gave to every person the power to deal with issues; with things related to work. So he divide the power. You know everyone has his personality; has his character. So, *Alhamdulillah*, I have enough power in my place and my work". She does not think that there are any areas where leadership is lacking in the company "when the management level be flexible and professional I think you can achieve the leadership easily". Samia is very ambitious and gives an example of that ambition: "when I was child, I was very ambitious and till today I still have the same. When I was in the secondary school, I wished to be a doctor but unfortunately my degree was not enough to reach the medicine college. So I got engineering college that time; I just went to the college two weeks then I didn't like it. I changed to college of arts because I think if I go with this field [engineering] I'll not achieve anything for myself" – "I preferred to study English because it's the main language in the world. So I want to reach to different places; when you have the language you can reach any place very easy. I have

Samia case study

strong character as well. I started my journey of life when I came here[and] I managed my dad's company and that was at very early age; I was 22 years old and he gave me all the responsibility and I managed all the responsibility in the company. I'm not very experienced person at that time; just I finished my graduation, my dad give me the power that time in order to manage everything. So when I managed that, I wished to enlarge my experience my knowledge so I joined the government sector. I think I'm very ambitious because when I am in a place I don't limit my ambition. I want to reach up, you know, and when I you know when I go up I want to be more". So Samia is an ambitious woman and though she is satisfied with her life up to now, she still feels that she can achieve more "I thank my god for that you know because he gave me more than I deserve in life. But I want to achieve more, you know, because my parents did too much with me, so I want to refund something for them" Finally, Samia believes that Arab women have very good experience and lots of Arab women have talents and skills to contribute to society, but more can be done. "we can't reduce the gap which male did in the business and many country which depend on woman, they achieved well in business and in the financial sector ...because we have to improve the woman; we have to develop their experience; we have to give them too much confidence to improve themselves well in the society".

Work

When she first came to Dubai, Samia managed her Father's company. Then she worked in the government at the Emirates Post (Empost) for four and half years in marketing and sales. She next worked for the Emirates Identity card authority where she was responsible for the data center. At that time, the authority was connected to the Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs "it was very big organization at that time". She then resigned because she went to Ireland for study.

After that she joined the scaffolding company, AMS and she has been with them for 18 months as Marketing and business development manager. She got the job through one of her best friends, "he knows the Managing Director and he introduced me to him you know by chance". It is a fairly large company with in the office around 150 employees plus there are many laborers. For example, for a recent project they employed around 1000 laborers.

She feels fortunate to have got the job and is very happy. Samia reports to the managing director and he gives her a lot of flexibility and is always satisfied about her choices and decisions. It is a British company and she handles "all the marketing requirements of the company..I deal with all government sector ". She used to be responsible for "all the marketing materials for my company" and created a brochure in two languages. When she first joined the office "I handled all the marketing job you know by myself".

She has dealt with many different nationalities in her life but she had never dealt with the British before and is very happy with them. She had also dealt with Americans before and also had a very nice experience with them. She thinks that for those living in the Middle East, that the European are very similar to each other as they think similarly about the main things. She finds "all the Europeans easy to deal with as they are flexible". She states that "they are easier than us as sometimes we have restricted ways of thinking.

Yesterday she was in Abu Dhabi with a colleague, the Sales Manager, where she met with the Director of an oil company of the government for 90 minutes. Although the driving time adds to this greatly, at

Samia case study

least yesterday she had company as they shared a car for the drive. She had set up the appointment after contacting them to introduce herself, sometimes she has to cold call and other times she has contacts for a company. Based on her work with the government, she has “very good relationship with many many people in different sectors”. She recognizes that “when you work in marketing you face many many different kinds of people in different sectors”.

Her company will be registered so as to be able to trade with them. She considers that she “achieved well yesterday, because I got information of how to register our company with Ziat Co. in order to get job inside Ziat co. so it was very useful journey and it was very useful meeting yesterday”. She says that without the visit yesterday she would not have known how to get the job there but yesterday they showed her how to register on the Ziat Co. website in order to be a registered company there.

They are focusing on the oil and gas sector, “especially in Abu Dhabi because many many opportunities there.” “our company is using a very sophisticated technique of this scaffolding material which is called modex..its a German system based in Berlin... we are the only company in all the Middle East who are using this system”. It is a scaffolding system with very high safety that minimizes the cost of the projects. Samia used to represent the company everywhere especially in the Seminars at Dubai Chamber of Commerce. Last week she travelled to Qatar for a meeting with her Managing Director where they stayed for three days. Last month she travelled to the north of Iraqi and before that she was in Jordan.

On women in leadership

the notion of Arab women conjures up an image for many many people of the Arab women cloaked in long covering garments, restricted in freedom and movements. However, the achievements of Arab women around the world now lead us to rethink about this image right...because the achievements and what we achieved in the society led us to rethink about this image because now we have to think about what the women has, what this achievement means and we have to increase the power. We have to increase the confidence and we have to change the image of Arab women. That's the important thing that I want to add.

She adds that she is not talking for all Arab women as “It's not important for all Arab women to go to work”. She is talking of women who have expertise and experience and want to develop themselves. She considers that business needs to focus “on the potential work force and not only the male half because we are the second half of the society. We have to increase the talent for both in order to improve our countries”.

For Samia, the successful life and leadership “is not just about study or academic qualifications..it's more than that. .it's more than a job and more than a title.... It's a culture, it's a community, its a talent, it's skills..and the key for the successful life is to learn and to study about this skills” She believes that you cannot “study in order to be a leader as its a mind set”.

She believes that Arab women have “very good experience and lots of Arab women they have the talents and skills”. She considers they can't reduce the gap [reference to the economic crisis] which males did in business. Many countries “depend on woman who have achieved well in business and in the financial sector”. She considers that “we have to improve the woman to develop their experience to give them much confidence to improve themselves well in the society”

Samia case study

She thinks that leadership needs a lot of effort in order to succeed. There are many obstacles in order to reach leadership. For example, when she travels outside as an Arabic woman and is alone [she is unmarried], others in the society think and question as to why she is travelling alone. "But I have to pass in order to achieve where I want to reach...I have to deal with every obstacle in a professional way wisely in order you to reach my target in life". She used to wear the scarf everywhere when travelling but now "sometimes I don't wear my Abaya outside", but of course she would wear the scarf. Sometimes when she has a meeting with Europeans she would not wear the abaya in order "not let the others think that I'm a restricted person". She states that "I don't have any issue you know in dressing". Like Sheikha Mousa [Qatar] and Sheikha Fatima here and Sheikha Matha bin Mohammad Rashid are "considered our leaders". They are the women in the Arab world who "have achieved very well and we wish to follow their path in their success".

I think being in touch with experienced people or those who have talents or who have knowledge. You get even if only a small part from their experience. I prefer to be close to the well experienced people to learn from them to achieve for yourself. That's what happens often here in the UAE through seminars and meetings which the UAE government arranged. For example, the Dubai chamber of commerce seminar they used to do four five seminars in a year which gave you a chance to introduce yourself to others and to meet experienced people. You get to increase your talent and your experience by listening to others.

"I define leadership as a set of skills as I mentioned earlier". It's a talent and in order to be an effective leader in your global environment you have to learn this skill. It's a mindset. For skills I mean the way of looking at things, it is a way of thinking. This is the skill it is mental skill. If you want to be a leader you have to open your mind for the means on how to be a leader. "Its not just to be in a position that you're a leader or you're a manager if you don't have any skills of how to manage your position" First of all you have to have the mindset in order to manage your place.

I made a big change in my work sector because before, when I worked with * in marketing and promotion, I dealt with the government sector and only sometimes in the private sector. But when I joined AMS I worked in construction. And that "was a huge change because I never had any experience" with construction and "especially scaffolding because I think when we talk about scaffolding, immediately it comes to your mind men..right?" You don't think a woman can be involved in scaffolding so when I joined the place it was a "big change for me". I have to learned so much about the field itself as I studied and did research about the construction industry mainly and scaffolding especially. I achieved well for doing that and am successful in my position now.

I made the change because the the financial crisis had started and the salary started to reduce and so I decided to resign. At the time even my "CEO he refused my resignation because he said we want you to stay with us. He was very nice person". However, I wanted to travel so I had to resign as I needed a long vacation of four - five months. "I changed to the private sector because I wanted to change something in my life because I think it's nice when you know about everything" it's important to have the variety in my life, its nice to have expertise in as much as you can in different fields of life.

Our managing director he has power but at the same time he is a very flexible person. He gives to every person the power to deal with issues related to work. So he divides the power according to personality. So "Al hamdulillah I have enough power in my place and in my work". When you have management that is flexible and professional I think you can achieve leadership easily.

Samia case study

I'm very ambitious. When I was a child I was very ambitious and am still like that. When I was in the secondary school I wanted to be a doctor, but unfortunately my degree was not enough to reach the medicine college. So I got into engineering college but I just went to the college for two weeks and then I didn't like it. I changed to the College of Arts because I think if I stayed with engineering I'll not achieve anything for myself. I preferred to study English because you know it's the main language in the world and I want to reach to different places because when you have the language you can reach any place very easily. So I studied English, then I started to improve myself step by step because "Al hamdulillah" I have knowledge, I got it from my family, from inside my home. I have a strong character as well.

I started my journey of life when I came here as I managed my Dad's company and that was at a very early age as I was 22 years old. He gave me all the responsibility and I managed all the responsibility in the company. It was a very big company for import and export, home appliances and general trade. So it was big and dealt with a large amount of money and I was responsible for it. But I was not a very experienced person at that time as had only just graduated. So my Dad give me the power at that time in order to manage everything.

So when I managed it I also wished to enlarge my experience, my knowledge so that is when I joined the government sector to learn more. When I joined the government I was appointed as Marketing Representative for three months and then I was promoted to a Key Account Officer. Then after six months because I achieved so well I was promoted to Marketing Manager. I think I'm very ambitious because when I am in a place I don't limit my ambition as I want to reach the upper level and when I go up I want to be higher.

I have ambition to achieve in life. I'm very satisfied about what I have. "I thank my God for that you know because he gave me more than I deserve in life". But I want to achieve more because my parents did so much for me so I want to refund something back to them.