



Tejari.com, “The Middle East Online Marketplace,” Under the Leadership of Sheika Lubna Al Qasimi

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Sheikha Lubna Al Qasimi is the chief executive officer of Tejari, a premier online business-to-business (B2B) environment, facilitating procurement in the Middle East. The case study describes a personal career that highlights the capacity of women in the Middle East to be recognized globally as entrepreneurs and leaders.

This case study places the business of Tejari.com in the context of its geographical location in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and reviews the status of technological capability in the region that supports Tejari.com in an online business-to-business (B2B) environment. The case study then considers the position of Sheikha Lubna Al Qasimi as the CEO and entrepreneurial leader of Tejari.com in the context of educational and career opportunities for women in the region.

The United Arab Emirates

The UAE is a federation of seven emirates or states in the Arabian Peninsula: Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah, Ajman, Umm Al-Quwain, Ras Al-Khaimah, and Fujairah. The national (Emirati) population is 2.4 million, approximately 25% of the total population that includes nonnationals (expatriates) (UAE Interact, 2004). The population has increased by 5% on average annually over the past 17 years, with an increase of 7.6% in 2003, the highest growth rate in the Arab world. Growth in the national population is attributed to the absence of birth control and government incentives to have more children. This growth rate is expected to slow due to education of the local populace and the elimination of government incentives. The expatriate population has grown due to the expanding UAE economy, although as Emiratisation (a policy of reducing reliability on foreign workers) is embedded, this growth rate will also slow down. The official language of the UAE is Arabic; for business purposes, English and other languages are spoken widely.

The Business – Tejari.com

Firstly, I will explain the rationale for the creation of the company leading into a description of its operation. Entrepreneurship is encouraged by the Dubai government through free zone areas set up for the incubation, nurturing, and growth of new businesses. The benefits to businesses located in the free zones are that ownership can be 100% foreign, and there is no tax. There are 3,000 companies in these free zones with an estimated turnover of US\$8 billion (Morison Menon Chartered Accountants, 2003). Incorporated into the Jebel Ali Free Zone is Dubai Internet City, created as a regional business hub for information technology companies (ICT). Besides Tejari.com's presence in Dubai Internet City, global companies such as Dell, Hewlett-Packard, IBM, Microsoft, and Oracle have also located their regional headquarters there, thus stimulating the Middle East's 1% spending on global technology and emerging global markets (Kelaita, 2001).

Within the UAE, there is 29.6% penetration of the Internet, compared to 8.2% usage for Middle Eastern countries as a region, 36.5% for Europe, and 68% for North America (Miniwatts International, 2005). There is one state controlled and censored Internet and telephony provider, Emirates Telecommunications Corporation (referred to locally as Etisalat). However, within Dubai Internet City, there is a privately provided Internet service, in recognition of the fact that "the Internet plays a strategic role in any company's ability to survive and compete" (Dubai Internet City, 2005, ¶ 15). Laws regarding electronic commerce and security were implemented in the UAE in 2000 to support technology projects such as Tejari.com and Dubai Internet City (Suhaili, 2002). The necessity of educating and employing a technologically competent national workforce is recognized in the Emirate: "the goal is to have 5 million knowledge workers by 2010," as stated by Sultan Bin Sulaiman (as cited in Smith, 2004, p. 2), Chairman of Tejari.com. Sheikha Lubna (Al Qasimi, 2001), when addressing college staff at a conference, echoed the aim for knowledge workers:

Technology skills are the tools that enable young Arab nationals to become productive members of the economy, creating new jobs and expanding industries that improve the national outlook as whole. A skilled national workforce in turn leads to less dependence on imported labour, and decreases unemployment by creating a sustainable pool of educated workers that can also develop new areas of expertise as the community's needs change. These skilled workers also empower the UAE to compete on a global level as trade opportunities expand. (¶ 17)

The Chairman of the Dubai Ports Authority, Sultan Bin Sulaiman, conceived the original concept for Tejari.com as a B2B marketplace for the companies in the free zone. This initial concept of having a B2B marketplace to supply the free zones was expanded upon following its presentation to the Dubai Crown Prince and UAE Minister of Defence (His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, referred to later in the case study as Sheikh Mohammed) who decided to open up the B2B marketplace beyond the boundaries of these free zones (Suhaili, 2002). The brand name for the company, Tejari, was decided upon because it derives from the Arabic word *tejarah* meaning trade, thus creating a regional identity through a name that could be pronounced globally. Tejari was located in Dubai Internet City, began trading on June 20, 2000 with 15 employees, having taken 60 days to implement from its original concept. The mission statement of Tejari (2005) reads as follows:

To maximize the business potential of our customers in the Middle East by providing them with innovative online B2B services, enabling them to extend their reach and enhance their competitive standing. (§ 2)

Tejari offers a B2B online service for companies wishing to acquire commodities. Companies are preapproved by Tejari and registered, and their trading information is listed in the marketplace. All trading partners (as they are referred) can then search for supplies, request and receive quotations, and launch and bid for tenders. The service offered is based on the procurement cycle of purchasing functions and the duties and responsibilities associated with that process. To enable an efficient procurement cycle, business is conducted via online auctions that bring suppliers and buyers of products together. The auction scenario is a tool that meets a competitive need to transact business (i.e., to facilitate the buying and selling of supplies on a just-in-time basis) (Oakland, 1993). As speed is a factor in the efficiency of businesses today, supplies can also be purchased immediately through spot purchasing via online catalogues. The benefits offered through Tejari's service proposition include lowering of procurement costs, reduction in inventories, reduction in time to market, global trade, use of the World Wide Web, and availability at all times (24/7).

The Tejari organization is powered by Oracle, chosen for its capacity, reliability, up-to-date technology, and ability to grow (scalability) as Tejari requires. Since the original concept in 2000, the business expansion strategy has provided (a) Connect, to integrate the systems of clients; (b) My Tejari, a website area that can be personalized for the individual trader; and (c) Catalog, to manage the service and product catalogs of member companies through a data cleansing service. By the first quarter of 2003, company statistics showed the number of auctions had increased by 66% in one year, purchase orders had increased from 55 in 2002 to 4,017 in 2003, and Tejari community membership had increased from 482 to 1,528 (Al Qasimi, as cited in Cooper, 2003). In the third year of trading, Tejari had hosted 8,000 auctions, transacted more than \$500,000,000 worth of business, and the company was also in profit (Al Qasimi, personal communication, August 16, 2005).

The trading partners in the Tejari environment have conducted more than 35,000 online tenders valued at over \$1.8 billion. Currently registered are 3,587 trading partners operating in sectors such as automotives, healthcare, construction, information technology, food and beverage, and tourism. Trade sectors are growing in construction, for example, as there is a growth in real estate due to an increase in housing construction, the opening up of the market to nonnational purchase, and the housing needs of the growing national and expatriate population. It is the governmental sector that has continued to be the most active trader, benefiting from an opening up of the market due to internal market deregulation. For these state operations, deregulation has enabled competitive tendering and the streamlining of business transactions.

In line with its service orientation, customer relationship management is high on Tejari's goals. Through the bringing together of businesses to collaborate on product design, research, and development (R&D), Tejari will develop industry specific solutions to meet the needs of the trading community. In 2005, a consultancy department was integrated to advise companies on planning their chain of supply. Tejari clients are mainly based in the UAE, although increasing globalization in the region has led to enough trading activity from partners in Jordan and Kuwait to warrant individualized website environments for these countries. Stated by Al Qasimi in 2005 is a goal is to increase business globally, specifically an initiative is to seek business in Africa:

Tejari's revenue model and the growth of our trading community has enabled the marketplace to achieve a leadership position and brand maturity at an accelerated

pace. Our challenge now is to develop new services beyond serving as an online trading hub to drive even greater value in the supply chains of our members. (AMEInfo, ¶ 5)

The Early Career of a Business Leader - Sheikha Lubna Al Qasimi

His Highness Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan (as cited in Al Maktoum, 2001), founder of the UAE, said, “Nothing could delight me more than to see the woman taking up her distinctive position in society. . . . Nothing should hinder her progress. . . . Like men, women deserve the right to occupy high positions according to their capabilities and qualifications” (¶ 3).

Sheikha Lubna Al Qasimi is the niece of H. H. Dr. Sheikh Sultan bin Mohammed Al Qasimi (Ruler of Sharjah, UAE). In this case study, the British spelling of Sheikha has been used, although you also see the title as Shaikha elsewhere. Sheikha Lubna Al Qasimi is called Sheikha Lubna here because she is referred to as such by many in the region.

Sheikha Lubna, as a schoolgirl, had always been interested in science and math. Her ideas on careers at that young age were centered on medicine or architecture. Having studied English in the United Kingdom for 9 months and because of a brother living in California, she became aware of the importance of the growing field of technology. Obtaining a sponsorship from Hewlett Packard, Sheikha Lubna was admitted to California State University and, by way of the Dean’s list for her studies, became one of the first UAE women to gain a degree in technology (a bachelor’s degree in computer science in 1975). Sheikha Lubna considers that her undergraduate studies paved the way for her future business success as the “foundations were solid” (Al Qasimi, personal communication, August 16, 2005) (i.e., the curriculum included research, systems operations, engineering, and business). She was breaking new ground at the time as a female Emirati student and is proud to have served as a role model for younger women today who are growing up in the UAE. In illustration, Sheikha Lubna told the story of a 10-year-old Pakistani girl living in Dubai who recently passed the Microsoft Engineer exams; she is the youngest ever to do so. On hearing of the student’s success, she sent a congratulatory email to recognize the achievement and to offer encouragement for future endeavors. Sheikha Lubna has since earned an Executive MBA through the American University of Sharjah, a university on the American model in partnership with the American University in Washington, DC. On studying for her MBA, she was both proud that her academic knowledge of business was up to date and rather surprised to find she knew as much as she did. That said, it was a busy time of studying and working. For Sheikha Lubna, like most students, there were many nights she slept on the couch surrounded by her books.

Sheikha Lubna’s career trajectory started in 1981 when she became a programmer for a private company, Datamation, in the UAE. Datamation is a software company that is family owned by Indian expatriates, and she was distinguished by not only being the lone woman to work there, but she was also the only Arab. As a private company, the owners expected their employees to finish the job, so Sheikha Lubna worked outside the contractual hours of 8 a.m. - 6 p.m. to do so. Perhaps, it was her opinion of systems operations at the undergraduate level, as being “fun and neat” (Al Qasimi, personal communication, August 16, 2005) that sustained her through these hours. Her next career position was that of branch manager at the Dubai General Information Authority, before moving to become Senior Manager at the Dubai Ports Authority for 7 years. In the latter role, as manager of the Information Systems department, Sheikha Lubna

moved from the technical side into more of a business role, but her knowledge of technology kept her in good standing for comprehending the product needs of customers. In that role at the Dubai Ports Authority, Sheikha Lubna also headed up the Dubai e-government executive team project to initiate an electronic portal of information for the public sector. The spirit of this initiative went deeper than just producing a source of information, as it was founded in a mission to bring a “focus on customer service and satisfaction, to the government sector” (Al Qasimi, 2001, ¶ 7). In 2000, based on the leadership that she showed in the e-government project, Sheikh Mohammed appointed Sheikha Lubna as Chief Executive Officer for the implementation of Tejari.com. In summary, the important factors in Sheikha Lubna’s career progression and growth appear to relate to her education, preparedness to work outside the home, determination to succeed in business, and the involvement of a forward thinking and open minded mentor in Sheikh Mohamed.

Leadership by Women in the UAE

It is relevant to this case study to provide further context to the role of women in the UAE given the unusual status of Sheikha Lubna as a business leader in the country. The UAE Constitution states that

social justice should apply to all and that, before the law, women are equal to men. They enjoy the same legal status, claim to titles and access to education. They have the right to practice the profession of their choice. (Al Maktoum, 2001, ¶ 4)

According to the UNESCO Statistical Yearbook (1999; World Bank Group, 2005), the literacy rate among women in the UAE rose to 88.7% in 1995. By 1997, 72% of tertiary students were female. In the UAE, 6% of Internet users are women. Probably due to the exposure to technology whilst studying, the usage of computers in the UAE is higher for women in that country when compared with other countries in the region (Cisco Learning Institute, 2004). Females comprised about 19.4% of the total workforce in 1995 (World Bank Group), mainly in the areas of civil service, teaching, medicine, and in family businesses. A representative from the Civil Service Council stated: “Women are demonstrating great enthusiasm in taking up jobs to take advantage of their qualifications, social changes and the support and encouragement of His Highness the President and the UAE leadership” (Gulf News, 2002, ¶ 10).

In the health services, women account for 54.3% of the total number of employees; “one out of every three doctors, pharmacists, technicians and administrators is a woman, as is 81% of the nursing staff” (Arabnet, 2002, ¶ 3). UAE women employed in the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Health outnumber national male employees and account for 27% of the civil servants within the 24 government ministries (Gulf News, 2002). A reason to account for the high percentage of female employees in the public sector is that the federal government promises a job for every applicant with good benefits and flexible work schedules.

Many UAE national women, however, do not choose to take up employment after education, and legal and societal forces contribute to this scenario. Although law in the UAE states that there is equal pay for males and females, there have been claims that “at work women remain deprived of equal benefits such as housing and promotion” (World Bank Group, 2005, ¶ 12). A permit has to be issued by the husband before a wife can gain employment. According to the UAE constitution, women’s roles are positioned within the context of the family,

The family is the basis of society which shall be responsible for protecting childhood and motherhood. Laws shall be formulated in all fields to observe this protection and care in a

way which safeguards the dignity of women, preserves their identity and secures for them the conditions appropriate for a prosperous life and suitable work which is in accordance with their nature and capabilities as mothers and wives and as workers. (ArabNet, 2002, ¶ 3)

There may also be a personal preference to avoid the inconvenience of a career whilst running a household, plus the family may raise objections to a wife, sister, or daughter working. Sheikha Lubna, in an interview with Suhaili (2002), talked about the dichotomy of a culture that does not accept a dual role for women—that of employment and the running of a home. In the context of the need for the national workforce to expand to replace nonnationals, Sheikha Lubna called for males to recognize the possibility of this dual role and that men need to adapt:

Here the society starts criticizing by stereotyping, as long as she's doing well in her career that means that definitely she doesn't do well at home, this has to change. . . . A business with an equal balance between men and women and making half of the society's workforce active will solve a lot of problems like the high dependency on foreign labor. [We need to] acquire the support of men to understand that they have to also be accommodating inside the house. (Al Qasimi, as cited in Suhaili)

When questioned how she manages to balance her many roles, Sheikha Lubna's response was a self-deprecatory, "I don't know!" When talking with Suhaili (2002), Sheikha Lubna noted that she abhors talk of "sacrifice." She prefers to advise women that life is about making choices as regards looking after a home or working to have a career or blending both and that these choices are positive decisions women need to make for themselves. Having made the decision, then women need to balance their lives to spend time with family and friends, maintain their health, and follow their hobbies for a well-rounded life.

A career field where Sheikha Lubna (as cited in Suhaili, 2002) noted that women are already established and doing well in the UAE is in engineering: "Honestly I raise my hat to a lot of women in the society who are doing extremely well in the engineering field." In medicine, there are many women, but they do not get enough recognition: "We have very good doctors, surgeons, and medical professors that didn't get enough accreditation and support" (Lubna, as cited in Suhaili). There are also opportunities in nursing, a career where national women are not involved; the majority of nurses are expatriates. Emirati women probably do not choose a career in nursing because of the relatively low pay, long hours, and cultural barriers to working in a mixed gender area in a rather intimate setting. In information and communications technology, it is males from India and Pakistan who constitute the major part of the labor force in the UAE (Cisco Learning Institute, 2004; World Bank Group, 2005). In an interview with Sims (2000), Sheikha Lubna also saw electronic communication as an employment opportunity for females in her country: "UAE ladies who may not wish to work outside the home have the opportunity to create their own Internet-based business, or telecommute for an office job through e-mail" (¶ 9). As an example, she spoke of other Emirati women who are now CEOs of technology companies and named other women over the years who have held top jobs in Dubai (Sims). The women include Mona Al Marri (Dubai Press Club), Maroua Naim (Emirates Internet and Multimedia), and Anita Mehra (Department of Civil Aviation). Sheikha Lubna (as cited in Sims) commented that she is pleased to be amongst these women as "a member of a very prestigious club" (¶ 11). Other careers that Sheikha Lubna considers females need to reach for in Dubai are political positions (e.g., as ambassador or national council member). In her home Emirate of Sharjah, "there are about five women in the consultive council and two women in the directing general

level in government departments” (Al Qasimi, as cited in Suhaili), identifying that, within the UAE, women “already play a strong decision-making role today” (Al Qasimi, as cited in Sims).

Leadership Model

To connect this case study to leadership theories and models, I have provided readers with an assessment of how the leadership approach used by Sheikha Lubna compares with an existing model of leadership. For this, the GLOBE (Global Leadership and Organizational Behavior Effectiveness) research program was studied (House, Hanges, Javidan, Dorfman, & Gupta, 2004; House, Hanges, Ruiz-Quintanilla, et al., 2004; Javidan, Dorfman, Sully de Luque, & House, 2006). The GLOBE study, begun in 1991, develops a profile of leadership preferences through research undertaken in 62 cultures of 17,000 managers in 825 organizations from the industries of food processing, financial services, and telecommunications services (House, Hanges, Javidan, et al.). It has been claimed as “the most ambitious study of global leadership” (House et al., 2004, p. 723) and is concerned with the link between culture and leadership. Cultural dimensions of leadership have been developed and a “universal definition of organizational leadership: the ability of an individual to influence, motivate, and enable others to contribute toward the effectiveness and success of the organizations of which they are members” (House, Hanges, Ruiz-Quintanilla, et al., p. 13).

The GLOBE research program uses for its theoretical base an “integration of implicit leadership theory (Lord & Maher, 1991), value/belief theory of culture (Hofstede, 1980), implicit motivation theory (McClelland, 1985), and structural contingency theory of organizational form and effectiveness (Donaldson, 1993; Hickson, Hinings, McMillan, & Schwitter, 1974)” (House, Hanges, Ruiz-Quintanilla, et al., 2004, p. 15). The integrated theory

does not accommodate or account for cultural change. For example, exposure to international media, cross-border commerce, international political and economic competition, or other forms of cross-cultural interaction may introduce new competitive forces and new common experiences, which may result in changes in any of the culture or leadership variables described. (House, Hanges, Ruiz-Quintanilla, et al., p. 21)

As well, the GLOBE study considers a culturally endorsed leadership theory (CLT) as it identifies perceived leadership attributes that are contributors to or inhibitors of outstanding leadership (Javidan et al., 2006, House, Hanges, Ruiz-Quintanilla, et al. 2004).

The findings of the study will provide a wide variety of information about 61 cultures, representing all major regions of the world, that can help managers and leaders in their adjustment, strategy and policy formulation, human resource management practices, and organizational practices. (House, Hanges, Ruiz-Quintanilla, et al., 2004, p. 65)

I have therefore drawn from this research, as it includes a cultural cluster of the Middle East, to consider whether Sheikha Lubna’s leadership profile is comparable to that considered valid in Arab cultures and will consider the implications of this finding in her leadership approach.

Business Leadership

When Tejari was launched in 2000, it was rather a peculiar time to launch a dot com company. By 2001, many “dot coms were under the hammer” (Shields, 2001, ¶ 8). Sheikha Lubna considered that the dot coms were businesses about technology, “but we weren’t.” In

explanation, she described the role of technology in the Middle East's business environment as "that of an enabler, or a means by which businesses can become more efficient, more customer-focused and supplier-friendly, and ultimately, more profitable" (Al Qasimi, 2001, ¶ 3). In Sheikha Lubna's opinion, Tejari remained successful because its business focus remained firmly on the core product, the value of procurement, and did not seek to grow rapidly as many of the dot coms did, to their cost. Instead, the company sought a more progressive plan based on developing and keeping customers through a relationship of good business practice over the long term. She referred to Tejari's business strategy at this time as "organic world wide" growth, whereby they did not concentrate on the mechanics of business (or, in this case, the technology) but on the needs of the clients.

For public and private businesses to thrive in today's increasingly competitive climate, Sheikha Lubna's personal mantra is that the "customer is king" (Al Qasimi, 2001, ¶ 7). Her gratification comes from "making the client happier" (Al Qasimi, personal communication, August 16, 2005), and the practice of Tejari is to encourage clients to speak their needs. Tejari.com is a business that was founded on research into the way the local market traded, "done here with our own thinking and own culture" (Al Qasimi, as cited in Suhaili, 2002). Listening to the customer underpins Sheikha Lubna's business decision making, through the knowledge that better results are gained through this practice. To Sheikha Lubna, that is a "unique service proposition" (Al Qasimi, personal communication, August 16, 2005) and a core reason for regional success. A challenge for Tejari.com at the outset was to educate users that e-security was efficient and secure; the business was aided through the introduction of laws protecting e-commerce and the transaction of B2B finance from bank-to-bank to avoid potential security problems of credit cards abuse. In addition, seminars, workshops, and conferences were held locally to educate business users in regard to the security of online transactions. A Tejari trading member, Al Sawalhi (as cited in AMEInfo, 2003), head of contracts at the Department of Health and Medical Services, Dubai, offered credible testimony for such service orientation: Tejari is not just a technology platform, it is also a professional consultancy that can advise customers on all of their purchasing processes. We've found Tejari to be a business necessity based on the benefits we've received as a member of the marketplace.

Over the years of trading, Tejari has received numerous business awards including the following:

1. Gulf Marketing Review: Gulf Brand of the Decade Award 2003 (E-Commerce & IT Category).
2. UAE Super Brands Council – Super Brand of 2003.
3. World Summit for Information Society, Geneva. Best E-Content Provider in E-business (2003). (¶ 9)

As CEO, Sheikha Lubna ascribed the receipt of awards to the way Tejari disseminated its business quickly to traders and the subsequent trust that customers have in using the business tool. As each client builds their own trading environment (profile) and gains a history of trading, they can focus on the benefits the procurement tool offers them. Customers gain observably improved results when they analyze their procurement costs and quickly identify effectiveness in their value chain. On the award of UAE Super Brand of 2003, Al Qasimi (personal communication, August 16, 2005) noted that Tejari was "the fastest to get [the award], usually it takes 7 years." Sultan bin Sulaiman (as cited in Tejari.com), Executive Chairman, commenting on the same award, considered that Tejari had a wider reach and the best brand recognition of any B2B online enterprise in the region. Sheikha Lubna considered that a company should capitalize on receiving awards (Al Qasimi, personal communication, August 16, 2005). The

award for Best E-Content Provider in E-business (2003) was not only a motivator for Tejari employees but was a recognition of the capable information and communication technology work taking place in the country and the region; as such, the award was a “big deal for people in the Middle East” (Al Qasimi, personal communication, August 16, 2005).

Sheikha Lubna described Tejari as 80% service oriented as opposed to being 100% product (technology) driven (Al Qasimi, personal communication, August 16, 2005). In her previous roles as a programmer and systems engineer, Sheikha Lubna recognized that businesses involved with technology tended to be

very self-centered and not close to the end users. . . . In technology companies, the CEOs can be so technology orientated that they never talked about clients. They forget that users use products and that users are number one. (Al Qasimi, personal communication, August 16, 2005)

The technology in Tejari is used to build databases based on services that offer a “best fit for the clients” (Al Qasimi, personal communication, August 16, 2005). To enable clients to adapt to new ways of working, she described how the process begins with introducing change to some users who can act as champions of change for other traders as they buy into the model. As the business scales up and out, any changes in the platform have to be managed so they are transparent to the end users; “how we deliver is key” (Al Qasimi, personal communication, August 16, 2005). For change management to be successful, patience is required as adaptation time will vary according to the perceived needs of individual clients. Sheikha Lubna (as cited in George, 2004) identified her role in change management as a trinity of contribution that is shaped by technology, “I think I am a change agent for life. I am a facilitator, a messenger and a bridge. And in that bridge, I have played it in technology. . . . Technology is a catalyst for change” (¶ 27).

In the company’s recruitment policy, the philosophy of listening to the customers is reinforced. Employees need to be “open, courageous and to be able to speak well with clients. It is not about functional knowledge” (Al Qasimi, personal communication, August 16, 2005). Although Sheikha Lubna has the functional knowledge through her technical acumen, she considered that to improve employee performance technical ego needs to be constrained. There are many other areas, besides technical competence, that are important to the business and for which an employee may need development to be able to perform effectively. Sheikha Lubna herself models listening to customers as she pays a great deal of attention to feedback in the annual customer survey. If employees are concerned about the possibility of negative feedback in surveys, she tells them that such honesty from clients “will protect employees in the long run as it mitigates risk” (Al Qasimi, personal communication, August 16, 2005). Risk taking is important as it gives “the opportunity to innovate, to try new ideas, and to learn from mistakes” (Al Qasimi, 2001, ¶ 13). Risk taking is a reoccurring theme in Sheikha Lubna’s business belief; courage is required of employees who are expected to take calculated risks. She quoted her mentor, Sheikh Mohammed, on this subject: “One of the most important aspects of success in business and in life generally. It was again His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid al Maktoum who said that not taking risks is, in itself, one of the greatest risks” (personal communication, August 16, 2005).

Tejari (2005) now employs 52 people, but there are at least 120 working with the company as, to reduce the challenge and overhead of recruitment, other human resources have been outsourced to other UAE companies. Tejari is a performance-based company, following the trend of leaders in the field (e.g., Microsoft, where 60% of earnings are based on performance).

Employees are made aware of the expected level of performance as defined in written policies, a “clear set of deliverables . . . a clear document from day one” and employees with “stamina will stay” (Al Qasimi, personal communication, August 16, 2005). When she was at the Dubai Ports Authority, Sheikha Lubna managed 100 employees, describing her management style as aiming to “understand their need [by] working closely with them” (Al Qasimi, personal communication, August 16, 2005). At Tejari, this style is continued: “We have operations meetings each week to work closely together” (Al Qasimi, personal communication, August 16, 2005). When delivery of business is successful, personal thank-you emails are written to individuals. The work hours in Tejari are long, 8 AM until late in the evening, But, there are occasions where the work is moved out of the physical building to have “kick off meetings in Hatta” (Al Qasimi, personal communication, August 16, 2005). Hatta is a small town, 1 hour from Dubai, with a hotel that businesses use for retreats/away days due to its quiet, calm, stress-free environment. Here, the team leaders present their accomplishments; then, after lunch, everybody moves outside to get together for physical activities.

In the GLOBE project (House, Hanges, Javidan, et al., 2004), a dimension used to consider leadership is that of team orientation, which had the lowest score in the Middle East cluster. Active teamwork is a key skill that Sheikha Lubna fosters in her leadership endeavors, saying that such a skill “cannot be developed in front of a PC or through the Internet, but is nonetheless vital to the long-term growth of the UAE’s economy value. . . . The contributions of others, and to appreciate a diversity of ideas and business viewpoints” (Al Qasimi, 2001, ¶ 11).

As she believes, nobody works in isolation but as part of a group striving toward a common goal. As the group gains, there is a personal gain, and the individuals do well. The culture of the workplace that Sheikha Lubna fosters is that of the family: “My success is the success of the team. . . . The team is like a family” (Al Qasimi, personal communication, August 16, 2005). The physical manifestation of this metaphor of family is the lunch room where employers lunch together in an informal setting as in a family kitchen. Metaphors are powerful devices that we use in everyday language to express ideas, relaying information about phenomena in a vivid manner (Onsman, Tannen, as cited in Kemp, 2002). It is not surprising that Sheikha Lubna uses the metaphor of the family positively as her immediate family has always been very supportive, encouraging her to follow her interests and continue her education (Sims, 2000). Sheikha Lubna’s allusion to the family fits with the findings from the GLOBE research on the Middle East cluster:

The importance of kinship as the family is the most significant unit of Egyptian society. . . . To Egyptians, the team leader is more than just an executive; he is a paternal figure who will be rather autocratic but benign. He cares about them and their families. (Javidan et al., 2006, p. 80)

Some senior management do not want to share success with others which Sheikha Lubna said is a high risk because she considered that if an individual is treated as a member of a family, then they will appreciate that the employer cares about their immediate family (Al Qasimi, personal communication, August 16, 2005). In illustration, she mentioned an employee whose mother was in an intensive care unit in India, but the employee was reticent about taking any time off to visit her. Sheikha Lubna responded to him by saying that the “team is in place and we can work with you at a distance” (Al Qasimi, personal communication, August 16, 2005). It is also noted that the relationship between the leader and employees is emotional and personal in the Middle East (Javidan et al., 2006), attuned with Sheikha Lubna’s sentiment that she would never forgive herself if her Indian employee did not return home at this important time (Al

Qasimi, personal communication, August 16, 2005). A similar experience is described in the GLOBE project; an Egyptian project manager explained how he helped one of his employees who had experienced some personal difficulties (Javidan et al.). The conclusion here is that “as with other Middle-East countries, although it is important for the individual to be successful, it is the family or group success that is more dominant” (Javidan et al., p. 82).

In Javidan et al. (2006), the findings from GLOBE were used to construct a case of a leader in charge of teams in Brazil, France, Egypt, and China. Specifically, the article considers the art or science of global leadership and the difficulties of being effective when dealing with people from different cultures. It is a strong point in the paper that “people in different countries do in fact have different criteria for assessing their leaders” (Javidan et al., p. 68). The case, whilst hypothetical, suits our purpose as Sheikha Lubna is and has been in charge of teams constituted from many nationalities. People who work with Sheikha Lubna are from 12 different countries; she referred to Tejari as a “mini-United Nations” (Al Qasimi, 2001, ¶ 12) and appreciates the strength such diversity brings to a working environment. She sees technology as a way of bringing the world together:

The Internet and the ease of global travel, as well as the more than 100 different nationalities living in the UAE, prove to us every day that we do not live and work in isolation, but as part of a global community. (Al Qasimi, 2001, ¶ 12).

Employees are from different religions; the official religion of the UAE is Islam, and other faiths are tolerated. Her attitude to that phenomenon is to “celebrate culture . . . Christmas, Eid [Arabic word meaning any Muslim festival], Indian festivals. . . . [We need to be] very sensitive about this as we are all equal” (Al Qasimi, personal communication, August 16, 2005). Sheikha Lubna’s views on cultural implications are based on the encounters she has had with diversity and the understanding she has gained from such exposure: “I learnt through my career to interact with multinationals and, therefore, a diversity of cultures with diverse politics” (Al Qasimi, as cited in Suhaili, 2002).

It is particularly relevant to consider Sheikha Lubna in her position as a high profile female leader in an Arab culture, given that Arab countries are considered to be very male dominated. Gender inequality was a finding in the Middle East cluster during the GLOBE research, Egypt being the Arab country of research for the Middle East cluster as it is the largest Arab country. In the GLOBE research, gender equality is considered as “Gender Egalitarianism or the degree to which a culture minimises gender inequality” (Javidan et al., 2006, p. 70).

Sheikha Lubna has faced challenges to her role from outside the region; she believes there are many deep felt assumptions held about Muslim women. She (like many others of her religion) wears an abaya (a black garment that covers hair and body) in public. Although her face is not veiled, her hair is covered. She considers there is a stigma ascribed to this mode of dress by non-Muslims. The stigma plays out as though dressing in such a manner “blocks energy to the brain” through a strongly held belief that because some Muslim women “choose to be this way” that they have “no brain” (Al Qasimi, personal communication, August 16, 2005).

Especially after the September 11 events, the projection of the Arab and Muslim society is projected in a very negative way. One of the effective ways we can change this image in the west is by putting women in high positions, because usually in the western culture they judge the quality of any society by looking at how developed the women are. (Al Qasimi, as cited in Suhaili, 2002).

Sheikha Lubna has felt extra pressure on herself as a woman in a senior position dealing with the egos of male colleagues. Gender conflict is universal, but is even more apparent in a

society such as this where “women in employment” is a relatively new concept. On hurdles that she has encountered, Sheikha Lubna stated that her “experience with Dubai Ports Authority was of a male environment. I think I frightened them in many ways as they didn’t know how to handle me” (Al Qasimi, personal communication, August 16, 2005).

She deals patiently with colleagues and employees who do not trust women managers and lets her actions stand as evidence of her expertise. “You have to deliver before you demand their acceptance. . . . You have to have the patience. . . . You have to have the discipline” (Al Qasimi, as cited in George, 2004, ¶ 14). Sheikha Lubna put her accomplishments down to having “learnt from failures rather than success, [and having] patience and perseverance” (Al Qasimi, personal communication, August 16, 2005). When failure occurred, she learned from it by speaking with counterparts and deciding where to go from there. She knows that many managers cannot work like that as a “lot of people have egos” (Al Qasimi, personal communication, August 16, 2005); however, it worked for her in resolving many of the problems, and the tactic brought her closer to people as they then sought to support her. Sheikha Lubna recognized an accepting gender environment at Tejari where “male colleagues are more interested in my ideas and strategic vision for Tejari than bothering about my gender or nationality” (Sims, 2000, ¶ 15). Trust from national male management has helped; “such people appreciate and value an intellectual, experienced person, with the right educational background, right experience and encourage them to take high positions” (Al Qasimi, as cited in Suhaili, 2002). Admiration in the region towards successful women managers is noted in this story:

I was once having lunch in a restaurant and then two Saudi businessmen came to me and told me “we just wanted to say hi and tell you how proud we are of you and your work as an Arab.” (Al Qasimi, as cited in Suhaili).

It was found in GLOBE that in the Middle-East, employees want “their leaders to be unique, superior, status and class-conscious, individualistic, and better than the others in their group” (Javidan et al., 2006, p. 80). Perhaps, Sheikha Lubna has met with these expectations of leadership through her expertise and actions, thus overcoming some gender inequality in the region.

On her achievement with Tejari.com, Sheikha Lubna reflected that it was a reward to be appointed to set up a company and know that her business acumen was being recognized as opposed to only being regarded previously as “a techie” (Al Qasimi, personal communication, August 16, 2005). Although the appointment gained a great deal of media coverage at the time, Sheikha Lubna considers that the attention was not about her personally but was an opportunity to “demonstrate that a woman could succeed at a senior level in a high risk business” (Al Qasimi, personal communication, August 16, 2005). As Sheikh Mohammed had the foresight to appoint a woman to such a position, she reflected that at the end of the day, it was a matter of personal integrity to succeed. To illustrate the success of women in UAE business, Sheikha Lubna quoted Sheikh Mohammed as saying to male colleagues that he might “replace some of you with them!” (Al Qasimi, personal communication, August 16, 2005).

In 2000, Sheikha Lubna was asked by Sims (2004, ¶ 18) in an interview, “Where do you see yourself career wise in the next 5 years?” Her response then is consistent with what she has had to say now looking back over those 5 years,

I think running Tejari will present me with enough challenges and triumphs to keep me interested for at least the next five years. I’m equally dedicated to my personal mandate of sharing my experiences with other UAE women. The next five-year period is a long

road with so many things left to do. It takes courage to believe in your life's conviction - check back with me in 2005 and we'll see where I am. (§ 18)

Life is changing for Sheikha Lubna Al Qasimi. Having been appointed a board member, she has handed over the reins of CEO and managing director of Tejari to another. This is working within a plan that she had set to make herself dispensable within 4 years. In 2004, Sheikha Lubna was appointed as the Minister of Economy and Planning and became the first woman in the UAE to assume a cabinet position (George, 2004). "There are other women ministers in Gulf countries, in Bahrain, Oman and Qatar, but Sheikha Lubna's role is the most senior to date" (Wheeler, 2004, § 3). Sheikha Lubna is admired in the community as a "preeminent UAE woman and role model . . . a recognized expert in the field of information technology . . . who does not just talk about e-business and e-commerce she has actually put it into practice" (Boardman, 2001).

Many personal honors have been bestowed upon Sheikha Lubna Al Qasimi during her career: Distinguished Government Employee Award (1999), Dubai Quality Group: For Support to Leadership, Quality, and Change (2000), ITP: The Best Personal Achievement Award (2000), Datamatix: IT Woman of the Year (2001), Commonwealth of Kentucky: Honorary Title of Kentucky Colonel (2003), and Entrepreneurship Award for Contribution to e-Business in the Middle East - House of Lords, UK (2004). Her role as a prominent member of the UAE Council of Ministers continues. Currently, she lectures at Zayed University, a University for national women, and enjoys the role of teaching as it allows her to share knowledge with others. She also shares her knowledge through interviews and international business/government forums such as the second Microsoft Government Leaders Forum Arabia held April 2005. Sheikha Lubna was a conference speaker on the subject of the Arab world in 2020 (at The Arab Strategy Forum held December 2004) and a keynote speaker at global events (e.g., through presenting on "Emergent Models of Global Leadership" at the International Leadership Conference held November 2005). She has also used online technology to share her knowledge through a webcast entitled "Global Conversations with Business Leaders" at the WF360 Arab-Western Businesswomen's Summit, 2004. In the future, Sheikha Lubna anticipates possibly studying at Massachusetts Institute of Technology, a leader in science and technology education, for a doctorate degree in business or technology.

Sheikha Lubna Al Qasimi is an individual who has broken barriers both as a female leader in a geographical area not renowned for its gender equality and as a female business leader in the field of technology where women are under represented. As such, she represents a positive role model.

Arab women are half our community. Sometimes better than men. Perhaps in the past we lagged behind, but today she is growing to better heights in our society and is able to achieve goals within our communities. She will only grow. (His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, November 11, 2001)

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