

EMBRACING DIVERSITY THROUGH LEADERSHIP AT VODAFONE QATAR



Vodafone is the world's leading mobile telecommunications company. Founded in the UK in 1984, it now has a significant presence in Europe, the Middle East, Africa, Asia Pacific and the United States, with nearly 323 million customers. Qatar is one of six countries in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). Website: www.vodafone.com

When Euro-American companies expand into emerging markets, the typical model they use is to send in experienced expatriates to get the business up and running. Vodafone was no exception when it opened its Qatar operating company in 2009. Since then, however, Vodafone's approach has been far from conventional.

"We began by bringing in Western expatriates on assignment, but our intention was always to recruit Qataris and other nationals who live locally," said Rachel Laws, Head of Culture and Leadership at Vodafone Qatar. "This is important for us because we want to reflect the demographics of our customers, ensure the long-term stability of the company and contribute to Qatar's National Vision 2030, which is the country's strategy for human, social, economic and environmental development."

Vodafone's employees represent a cosmopolitan mix of cultures. Among 300 staff members, there are 40 nationalities.

"In our operating companies in other countries, such as Australia or Italy, the majority of employees are nationals," said Laws. "It's a very different situation in the emerging markets. Here, our employees have different needs, different personal values and different expectations about leadership and performance. We wanted to highlight the implications of this, and we also wanted to encourage our employees to understand, respect and work with these differences."

Vodafone Qatar asked Kenexa, an IBM Company, to create a development intervention that would focus on diversity, inclusion and leadership in the context of cultural difference. Designed and delivered by Kenexa, the program provides behavioral guidelines and

practical examples to help the leaders embrace diversity, improve working relationships, create a more conducive work environment and enable higher levels of performance.

"Kenexa is a global specialist in employee-related issues, and has extensive experience in emerging markets and leadership," commented Laws. "The company designed two programs for us that will help make our working relationships more effective and help us achieve higher levels of performance. It's been fantastic to work with the professionals at Kenexa, and we really value their insight, their approach and their professionalism."

COMPLEMENTARY INTERVENTIONS

Kenexa developed a one-day program for Vodafone Qatar's 65 leaders called *Leading and Succeeding in Emerging Markets*. A separate workshop was developed for non-leaders, predominantly the employees in Vodafone Qatar's support functions.

Leading and Succeeding in Emerging Markets highlights the different values and backgrounds of Westerners compared to employees from emerging markets. It explains the implications of these differences and shows how leaders can achieve greater impact and manage their teams more effectively. The program has already been delivered for Vodafone Qatar's executive team. Kenexa will run it four more times, with about 15 leaders attending each session.

Grahame Maher, Chief Executive Officer of Vodafone Qatar said, "This is an incredibly useful and enlightening program. It's about embracing and celebrating differences, and it gives behavioral and practical examples of how expats and local nationals can build bridges and work together more effectively. It's an expertly-facilitated

program that not only gives our leaders the tools to lead in an emerging market environment, but also reinforces the importance of diversity and inclusion in our business.”

Kenexa also is running a complementary workshop on what it means to work in a multinational company. The workshop is for non-leaders, including local Qataris and other nationals who have limited corporate experience.

The workshop for support function staff gives individual employees, who have limited corporate experience, a greater understanding of what it means to work in a multinational company. It highlights issues around performance and examines work expectations, operational realities and what it takes for individuals to succeed.

“We’ll roll out this workshop to a further 80 employees, including Qataris and other GCC nationals,” said Laws. “As part of our commitment to developing the capability of Qatar, we also plan to open up both programs to Qataris who do not work for Vodafone, but who would get real value out of attending one of the sessions.”

WORKPLACE AND CUSTOMER BENEFITS

Jan Mottram, HR Director at Vodafone Qatar, says the programs have a commercial benefit beyond improving leadership skills and fostering harmonious working relationships through better understanding.

“We’ll always be pushing for higher performance and the programs will contribute to that,” she said. “But we’re also a center for talent, and the learning and impact from these sessions will be a factor in helping us to create an attractive environment where people will want to come and work.”

She adds that another important benefit relates to the demographics of customers. “We have a diverse customer base, and in order to provide the best possible service, we have to understand the cultural differences of the people we serve,” she said. “The best way to do this is by having a diverse workforce. The Kenexa programs reinforce the link between employee diversity and customer diversity, and they highlight the value diversity and inclusion bring to our business.”

OPERATIONAL EXCELLENCE

Vodafone’s regional head of talent for the Asia Pacific and Middle East regions plans to attend *Leading and Succeeding in Emerging Markets* with a view to assessing its suitability for Vodafone operating companies in other emerging markets.

In Qatar, Vodafone is striving to become the country’s most admired company. Its stated purpose is to “make a world of difference” to all people in Qatar.

“We’re evolving from a start-up to a stage of operational excellence,” said Laws. “The Kenexa programs are playing a part in helping us manage this transition by changing people’s perspectives. They support our corporate values of trust, vitality and worldliness. By minimizing misunderstandings and cultural conflict, we believe they will help us to be even more successful in our marketplace.”

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