

SUCCESSFUL COACHING IN THE ARAB WORLD

TALES FROM THE FIELD

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What are the essential success factors and difficulties of coaching in the Arab world? This is a challenging and important question. Unfortunately, concepts or models that help us to understand the specificities of this region and the consequences for coaching are still lacking. Commercial concerns and a lack of research in the field make it difficult to find a reasonable answer. The danger for clients is that, given the lack of standards and the newness of coaching to the Arab world, they may be vulnerable to fads and sales pitches without a clear sense of how to evaluate coaches and the coach's ability to meet their needs. My aim now is to provide an initial framework to coaching in that region. In addition, I also hope to stimulate further research and dialogue on this critically important topic. The features I describe here are based on my own experience and the collective judgement of executive coaches, executives, educators and consumers of executive coaching services whom I interviewed. All quotations, unless otherwise credited, are from interviews with coaching colleagues whose names are given at the end of this article.

From the early 1990s the coaching field grew apace in the West as a result of difficulties associated with increased downsizing, mergers, acquisitions and outplacement. The management leader's role expanded to deal with increasing levels of uncertainty and pressures to perform in a progressively more corporate world. Globalisation, increased competition and the impact of the financial crisis are creating a highly stressful environment for managers and leaders. For the first time, the Arab world and the wealthy countries of the Middle East in particular are experiencing similar pressure. The need for performance maximisation and a strong competitive environment has also contributed to the upsurge in coaching in the last two years.

COACHING IN THE ARAB WORLD? – A LESSON IN DIVERSITY

Each region and each culture has its own way of doing business. To be a successful coach in the Arab world, you need to know and understand its culture.

The first mistake anyone can make is to see the Arab world as a homogeneous entity. To start with a major misconception, there is no such thing as a typical Arab coachee, client or leader. You may meet leaders from Morocco, Egypt, Lebanon or the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Morocco is not Egypt, Egypt is not Lebanon and Lebanon is not the UAE. The geographic, political, cultural, economic and social diversity of North African and Middle Eastern countries is huge. We are talking here of some 22 countries with around 300 million people – from Francophone North Africa to the Anglophone Middle East.



The following quantitative data give a flavour of the diversity (a good source of data is <http://www.arabstats.org>)

1. GDP per capita in Qatar is 70 times higher than that in Yemen.
2. Infant mortality rate (per 1000 live births) goes from 133 in Somalia down to 20 in Tunisia and down to 8 in the UAE.
3. Internet penetration (users as % of population) goes from 0.13 % in Iraq up to 15% in Morocco and up to 35% in the UAE.
4. The year that women received the right to vote ranges from 1946 (Djibouti) to 2005 (Kuwait).

Arabs do, however, share some collective experience: their Islamic collective / authoritarian heritage, the Arabic ethos and language and a history of oppression by the western occupier (Dwairy, 2006). Family is a central value and people's lives are conducted according to family or tribal norms, values, will and goals. Using through the lens of this collective heritage I will highlight some features that differentiate coaching in the Arab world from coaching in the West.

LAYERS OF CULTURE INSTEAD OF THE TRADITIONAL 'HOW TO' APPROACH

Traditional cross-cultural coaching focuses mainly on the differences between languages or ethnic groups. The traditional guidance on how to hand over a business card or how to greet a counterpart is far too simplistic to fulfil the challenges facing leaders in today's international environment.

As global coaches we have to consider both the individual and the organisational context. My client, an Arab engineer in a family-owned business in Cairo, had similar challenges to an Austrian engineer in a family-owned business in Vienna. Far more so, for instance, than he had with an Arab marketing executive in a corporation in Cairo.

To take another example, an executive from Syria was struggling with his counterpart in France. What seemed initially to be a cross-cultural miscommunication was revealed after some analysis as a typical head office versus regional office culture challenge. Tenure, social class, educational background, family background and management level are other cultural differentiators that have a big influence in a given context or situation.

The diversity of the Arab world on the one hand and the influence of other cultures on the other impose limitations on any form of generalisation about coaching in the Arab world. There is an inherent cost to generalisation: you can always find features that do not fit individuals and groups or a trait that also fits another nation or cultural group.

Having said that, I still find enough common themes and patterns to justify a conceptualisation in which coaching can successfully be adapted to current Arab business culture.

FAMILY COMES FIRST

For a long time Arabs lived in nomadic tribal systems that enabled them to survive in tough natural conditions and to cope with often unfriendly if not hostile interests of groups competing for the limited availability of vital resources. To maintain this system, a strict patriarchal hierarchical authority was needed to protect the collective interests. Individual ideas or decisions always took low priority compared with tribal norms. Many Arab states can still be compared with a confederation of tribes; today it is still possible to find many states that are ruled by large families or tribes or groups from a certain region. Individuality is discouraged and its development should not threaten the authority of the leader. However, collectivism is not just the result of the ancient tribal history. It is also a result of the failure of states to take responsibility for their citizens' survival. In most western countries, there are unemployment, health care and many other social and welfare packages. In most Arab countries working couples rely on their family or clan for these services. 'My mother or my mother-in-law often come and take care of the children while we are working,' 'My parents gave us a parcel of land to build our house and helped my husband find a job' are typical comments you hear across the region. Men and older members of the family are supposed to take care of the well-being of all other family members. This implies again a strong hierarchical structure within these clans.

Why use the word 'clan' instead of family? In western countries family often means couples with children. In Arab countries family includes many generations, including what might be considered distant cousins in the West. A family holiday has different meanings: you can end up in a big house with over 20 people around. This results in a high degree of closeness. 'Everybody knows and supports everybody.' It also results in strong interdependence between individual decisions and the well-being of the collective. A Jordanian woman entrepreneur shared the following: 'I married an American. But I wanted my family to agree. It took me many years, but I would never have married him without my parents' consent. I know that our marriage would not have been a happy one since I would always be missing their blessing.'

Again we should not forget that there is a high diversity within the Arab world. Countries like Tunisia or Lebanon are less authoritarian and less collective than

Saudi Arabia or Libya. You will find single working mothers or young couples who want or have to take care of their own lives with no family support. Levels of urbanisation, educational background and high income are variables that increase the level of individualism in the Arab world.

Implications for coaching

- Coaches who work with clients with an Arab or any other collective cultural background should pay special attention to understanding the status of that client in the family or clan. An analysis of the context, relationships, dependencies and social class background is critical. The relationship of your client with his or her family or group may seem to you submissive and 'unhealthy'. You may want to push your client to stand up more for him- or herself and seek independence. This approach is likely to result in greater conflict and open wounds. A better strategy is to find out about the client's level of collectivism and develop coping strategies that will work within that context.
- The authoritarian culture implies a strong hierarchical leadership style. Murad, head of HR from Kuwait: 'You don't find leadership here, it's all about management, controlling and using your own power to get things done. Concepts like empowerment are new here ... Furthermore, directors would refuse to take part in a programme that includes soft skills like communication or conflict. They think if they are directors then they know it all and are afraid their authority may suffer if they went on such a course or took coaching.' An executive from Syria stated: 'I cannot say no to my chairman. I expect my employees to deliver what I ask them to do. Why would they need personal development? They just need to do what I ask them to do!' Coaches using assessment tools like 360-degree questionnaires need to know that responses are influenced by this attitude. We did use a 360-degree feedback tool in a Saudi corporation; the results were not 100% accurate since all employees rated their bosses as good or very good in each item. Even if confidentiality was promised and guaranteed by a third party institute, people felt reluctant to give their honest opinion because they were afraid that it might somehow become public knowledge.
- Arab leaders expect a coach to give them advice, which is why they look for seniority and business experience. They may be frustrated by a purely non-directive approach in coaching. They have questions and problems and want you to give them the

answers. A common transference reaction in a coaching context happens when a client unconsciously expects you to play the role of the patriarch or parent who has all the answers.

- A slow but steady transition is, however, taking place in the Arab business world. Many young executives have a different approach to leadership and are themselves frustrated about not being heard by the most senior leaders. As a coach you can help them turn that frustration to more productive use.

VALUES OF ISLAM

Arabic culture is deeply influenced by its Islamic heritage. The Qur'an and the Sunnah, (practice based on the sayings and deeds of the prophet Mohammed) are strong basic references for everyday life. There are, however, different schools and different levels of religious adherence within the Arab world. Some radical fundamentalists reject the West and its values in the name of Islam. Others justify democracy, women's rights and freedom with references to the Qur'an and the Sunnah. Most Muslims are very moderate and live according to a liberal version of Islam. However, many things have happened in recent years that have made it easy for mistrust and fear to spread in both the Arab and western world. The western media's concentration on terrorist attacks, the Taliban, and so on, have also contributed to giving western society the wrong impression about Islam as a whole. I meet many executives and coaches in the West who genuinely believe Islam is a violent religion and see Arabs as a threat.

Implications for coaching

- It is helpful as a coach working with Muslim clients to have a basic knowledge of Islam and its history. These would be the Five Pillars (faith, fasting, praying, financial aid for the poor and pilgrimage), the main sects and basic rules. For instance, I once had a young female client from a traditional Arab family who wanted to start her own business and had no role models around her. Her family wanted her to become a teacher or to work for the government. Together we studied the example of Khadija, the wife of the prophet Mohammed, who was herself a very successful entrepreneurial woman with her own trading business. This helped my client find her own way and convince her family.
- Religion is rarely a main topic of discussion in the business environment. As a non-Muslim it would be wise to refrain from lecturing Muslims about the true Islam. I once recommended an executive coach from the UK to an Omani friend and we all met for the first time at Frankfurt airport, during Ramadan. After discovering that we did not eat or drink from sunrise to sundown, my coaching colleague began arguing that this was totally unhealthy, citing studies that have shown that not drinking enough water harms the body. I was highly embarrassed and tried to change the subject as quickly as possible. Unsurprisingly, my Omani friend did not take my colleague on as a coach but more sadly, my coaching colleague could never understand why we were 'so sensitive'.

LOVE-HATE RELATIONSHIP

The relationship of Arab countries and society with the West is ambiguous. It has even been called a love-hate relationship.

Why hate?

Historically, countries in the West were colonial powers that oppressed national movements for independence. During the colonial period they supported passivity

and inferiority among Arab people. But some of the hatred is more legendary, dating back to the Crusades and the period when the Arabs had to leave Andalusia due to the Reconquista. Some of the reasons for today's antagonism and hate towards the West, frequently cited in the Arab world, include:

- The West's unconditional support for Israel, its occupation policy and the war in Iraq.
- Western countries and policies are hypocritical. On the one hand western politics declare freedom and democracy as fundamental values, while on the other they support autocratic regimes outside their countries and have used their secret services to destroy democratic forces that were not following their interests.
- The West and their allies have abused many innocent people who lost their dignity or life in the name of democracy, human rights and the fight against terrorism.
- Trade policies, imposed duties and monetary fund policies have increased poverty in many Arab countries. Agricultural and other subsidised western products have massively gained market shares and destroyed local employment and industry.

It is important to note that the perceived imperialism of the West is not limited to Arabs. I have often found this same antagonism in India, sub-Saharan Africa or South America.

Why love?

Arabs are fascinated by western technology and progress. Researchers and scholars cite western studies. Being educated in the West gives young people a competitive advantage – doctors and pharmacists advertise that they have studied in Paris or Boston as a guarantee of quality. Furthermore, Arabs who have visited or lived in western countries appreciate the freedom and advantages of democracy.

Sometimes this fascination is so acute that it becomes an inferiority complex: everything from Europe or the US is better than local products or services. This has given coaches and leadership trainers from the UK and the rest of Europe a huge competitive advantage. They are often hired on the basis of their nationality, without any quality check, which has led to many charlatans misusing the situation and damaging the coaching and training scene in numerous Arab countries.

Implications for coaching

- As a western coach you may start with the bonus of people's fascination with you. You are considered a professional simply because you are from the US or Europe. You can also increase your bonus by showing honest respect and appreciation towards the Arab tradition, culture and history.
- The collectivist culture of the Arab world also works to your advantage. Since everybody knows everybody else, taking a local coach is perceived as risky. Employing a foreigner is a better guarantee of confidentiality. Talking about fear, shame or 'non-Arab' or 'non-Islamic' desires may be easier with an outsider than with a judgemental insider.
- On the other side, as a western coach you may be seen as a representative of imperialism. Feelings like anger and inferiority can be expected to be transferred to a western coach. It is important to help the client differentiate what feedback is directed to you as a coach and what comes to you as a representative of the US or Europe.
- Many people in the West, including coaches, have prejudices against Arabs and Muslims. They judge the behaviour of clients by western values and norms. Even I, with my Arab background – having been educated in the West and having worked there for a long time – struggle with my own stereotypical thinking. This is part of our human nature, and where education and self-awareness come in. An invaluable axiom to help all of us functioning in a global society was spoken by St Augustine in the fourth century: 'Seek not to understand that you may believe, but believe that you may understand.'

WE ARE ALL FIRST GENERATION

The diversity within Arab society is enhanced by a great number of migrant workers – from 1% in the Maghreb to 18% in Saudi Arabia and as much as 80% in Dubai. Working as a coach you will have not only Arab clients but also managers and leaders from more than 100 different cultures. 'If I learned something here [Dubai], it was a lot about people and a great level of listening – diversity in the UK meant working with a second-generation person from India born and bred in London. Here it's a different game; everybody is "first generation", with some western education, perhaps, but deeply embedded in their culture and values.' Most leaders and coaches I talked to from Dubai stressed the aspect of listening. 'I did not learn a lot

about IT or new things in my field that I did not know before but I did learn a lot about people management and diversity'; 'I worked in the last five years with people from 120 cultures – I definitely learned to listen.' Coaches need strong listening skills everywhere in the world. However, working in a less diverse environment, one tends to see repeating patterns. As a coach we also tend to hold some assumptions that are accurate in a homogeneous environment most of the time can be easily tested with the client and his or her feedback.

Implications for coaching

- In such a diverse and especially fast-moving world as the UAE, people need to shift their own mindset and habits. 'This morning I had a coaching session with a multimillionaire Saudi and then with a Ugandan lady working for the UN. This afternoon I am meeting an Indian executive. This makes my work fun and enriching on the one side, challenging on the other. You cannot make assumptions – most of the time they are wrong.'
- As a coach working in a cross-cultural context you should read about the region and culture you are working in. It is not about putting people in boxes but about an increased awareness of cultural features. For example, you need to know that demonstrations of emotions are a normal part of doing business: that way you will not assume wrongly that the Arab managers you were dealing with were upset during negotiations.

YOUNG EXECUTIVES NEED A MENTOR

Many C-level executives (CEO, CIO, COO, etc.) in the Arab world are quite young. Most of the time they are either second or third generation members working in family-owned businesses or members of the ruling clan. These men and women are mostly educated in the West, although recently more and more in Asia, and their ages vary from the early 20s up to 35. Some of them have had the opportunity to work overseas to gain work experience and learn best practices.

Most of these young executives, however, lack the professional and leadership experience for these senior roles. They need mentoring and support to be able to face the challenges of a C-level position.

Furthermore, they have never been employees or middle managers themselves. In the words of an expatriate middle manager from Abu Dhabi, 'They did not have to climb the ladder or work their way up, so they do not know how it feels to be a sandwich manager or a simple employee highly dependent on information from above. They sometimes demotivate people by not giving information and keeping everything confidential. It is not because they are mean, it's mainly their missing leadership experience.'

Implications for coaching

Young executives need mentoring as much as they need coaching. They also expect their coach to give them advice and ideas on how to solve their problems. They expect their coaches to help solve day-to-day issues like:

- I have a board meeting tomorrow and have three items. How can I prepare for the discussion?
- I am meeting 'the patriarch'.
- I don't get on with my chairman.
- I struggle with the leadership team.

This does not mean that coaches need to take a directive approach. Rather, it means that as a coach it is very helpful to use your own business experience and offer ideas. As one executive coach from Dubai puts it, 'I have a strong business background, also being a high level executive before becoming a coach; I do see that my clients appreciate that. I mean it's always their choice if they want to use the ideas I give them.'

- Because local people have not climbed the ladder, they inevitably lack the emotional experience of being a middle manager or general employee. L., a C-level executive from Algeria, shared his experience: 'I started my career in Germany. I had a good degree from a well-known university but, as is usual in Germany, I had to start at the bottom. One day our department head invited us all to an important meeting. We did not know what was coming up. I entered the room and 280 people were already there. The department head talked about a strategic reorganisation and showed us the new structure on PowerPoint slides. I saw my team and my topic moving from a

central position reporting directly to our head to a marginal position three levels below. I still remember the anger and frustration I felt. Today as an executive I always take this experience into consideration when I am planning reorganisation or any major change. I know how it feels. Most of my colleagues or friends in similar positions never had to go through this; they immediately started at the top. They just don't know how it feels and this ends up in miscommunication and demotivation.' As a coach you can help by increasing your clients' awareness of change management, emotional implications of change and employee motivation. Another goal is to increase their self-awareness and clarity about their roles as change agents. Together, you can also examine real cases from their experience and build hypotheses and plan interventions accordingly. This implies that the executive coach needs to be knowledgeable in communication, change management and organisational development.

THE UNKNOWN EGO

A fellow coach told me an extraordinary story about how he dealt with the ego issue during a very successful leadership seminar in Bahrain. The participants opened up, talked about their fear of hierarchy, and told stories about themselves and the history of their company. They even spoke openly when their senior managers joined the workshop and gave some candid feedback. At the end of the seminar they were asked to write a personal development plan. At this point there was a complete reversal. Most were reluctant to do it and those who did found it very difficult. Three veiled women came up to my colleague and said that they could not do it alone but maybe the three of them together could do it with him. It was very strange for the coach to sit down with all three women and talk with one while the other two listened and offered help by saying, 'Yes, she is a little like that,' or, 'No, she is not ...'. In effect, they were helping her to discover something called her ego.

There are very few cultural points of reference for reflection on self. 'Who am I?' or 'Who are you?' are difficult questions and not often understood. In western society self-help books are bestsellers. Reflecting the 'I – who am I, etc.' is a common practice within certain circles, in art and in literature.

Arabs who have little contact with the West are very far from posing this type of question. And if asked, they will always answer, 'It's not for me, I am doing this for others.' The expectation is that individuals will be or play certain roles, like a good son or daughter, a good father and mother. Men should be strong, take care of the family, be a good Muslim, etc. These 'super' images stand in the way in a collective society. You have to fulfil all these roles before you can indulge yourself in thinking who you are.

Also, answering these questions does not always lead to higher satisfaction. It may lead to a discovery of needs that can never be fulfilled because even wanting to do so would mean the client confronting the family or clan. At the end, the coachee may be even less happy and stable. Taking your own life in your hands and living it your way is a very western approach to happiness. In most Arab societies, if you are not with people and actively involved in some way, you are deprived of life. An old Arab saying reflects this: 'Paradise without people should not be entered because it is Hell.'

However, if you drive or walk through Arab cities, you will see many pictures of rulers or leaders, which enhances the impression of a cult of personality. Indeed, many of them seem to have big egos. This paradox may be explained by the fact that there is one taboo on the ego. God and the rulers have a monopoly on egos, and if you display yours, you are entering the political arena with all its associated risks.

Implications for coaching

- Talking about weaknesses or 'being personal' has too many negative connotations. That is why, as a coach, you should force yourself to check the viability of your concepts. For bilingual coaches, try to avoid using English with your clients and instead use local and formal Arabic because it is a great help. Failing to find words or expressions for an English word may be a sign of a cultural barrier, rather than just a linguistic one.
- Use hierarchy in a positive way. If you coach the CEO, the assumption is that coaching may work with others too.

- Use the collective culture in a functional way: talk to your clients about their peers in other organisations or tell stories of others doing something like 'coaching' and it will gain social acceptance.
- Be patient if coachees do not answer your questions. It may not be resistance but a new world they are discovering. They also need time to let you in on the most intimate thing they have – their ego.

ARAB WOMEN ARE AMBITIOUS

Arab girls usually have a stricter education than boys. They are not as free to go out and enjoy themselves at discos, parties, restaurants, etc. This has an interesting implication. Most girls from an early age tend to compensate by concentrating harder on school achievements. Throughout most Arab countries, girls have better grades. At universities you will sometimes find more than 50% female students, even in engineering or physics. When I studied mechanical engineering in Germany, there was less than 1% female students; at the same time in Tunisia 35% of mechanical engineering students were women. If you look at the percentage of female university professors, you will find a significantly higher number than you will find in any western country.

This pattern is repeated in the work environment. An Egyptian expatriate in Dubai commented: 'Local women are more ambitious. You will find this phenomenon in most of the Arab states. Because they have less freedom they tend to put their energy into study and work as compensation. The outcome of this is that they are really good.'

This pattern of excellence applies to women with access to education, but one should not forget that 65 million adult Arabs are illiterate and two-thirds of them are women. More than 10 million Arab children between the ages of six and 15 are still not enrolled in any schooling, and on current trends this number will increase by 40% over the next decade (Robert Stevens, 12 September 2002. UN report on Middle East catalogues widening inequality).

Retrieved from <http://www.wsws.org/articles/2002/sep2002/mid-s12.shtml>).

Many Arab leaders throughout history have supported women's emancipation and offered education for all social classes and both genders. Among others, former Tunisian President Habib Bourguiba initiated strong reforms in 1957 after independence, while the current ruler of Dubai, His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, supports women's rights and encourages them to take on leadership. However, there is still a long way to go before women have an equal influence in the corporate sector in the Arab world and elsewhere. Women occupy only 2% of senior management positions in business worldwide (WOMANKIND Worldwide. Why do we focus on women – the proof. Retrieved from <http://womankind.org.uk/statistics9086.html?theme=text&themePersist=true>)

Implications for coaching

- Some implications are practical. It may be more appropriate to meet female clients in a conference room. It is fine to ask them what they would prefer, meeting outside their work environment to gain some distance or in their offices or an official meeting room. It can happen, but only rarely, that a woman leader prefers a female coach.
- As a coach you can help your female clients to change their perceptions. Sometimes female local leaders think they need to hold themselves back or have difficulties making themselves heard. Encouraging them to stand back and observe their own behaviour and decide if it is appropriate for the given situation or whether they need to show teeth, can be very helpful. G., an executive coach in the UAE, recounts: 'I did coach many Arab women, and they really learned how to be more assertive with their male colleagues. It is impressive how quickly they adapt to that.'
- Even if you meet very modern and independent women leaders in the Arab world, be prepared for their values to still be very strongly focused on family. Having a career is fine, but to decide not to marry or to decide against having children is extremely rare.

AT THE OUTBREAK OF THE CRISIS

For the first time in their young history the rich Arab countries are experiencing an economic recession and a need for downsizing. Oil wealth and tremendous economic growth were normal in recent years. Most leaders did not have to worry about managing during turbulent times and most organisations do not have the collective experience of surviving a crisis. Organisations, like human beings, learn

most from challenges and setbacks. A common cynical comment heard about Arab business in the past was 'They are doing good business in spite of themselves.'

Now the impact of the global crisis is significant and competition has been growing. Local leaders were not ready for the shift. 'They did not respond with certainty and clear direction. They have sent a chaotic response that engendered more chaos,' says a consultant from the UAE. 'We sometimes lack the ability to step up and lead. Unlike other countries that suffered much, we have been spoiled in the past. Also we are a young state. What is 36 years compared to hundreds of years elsewhere?' comments an executive from Bahrain. Many of the states did not have the time to learn the lessons.

Implications for coaching

- As a coach you can help the leaders find ways of learning how to cope with crisis. I connected one of my clients with another executive from Europe whose organisation has been undergoing a huge transformation. Sharing knowledge among peers is a powerful technique. Afterwards we reflected on his learning and how he could implement it in the current situation of his organisation.
- Using a group coaching setting can be helpful too. You can take the leadership team and work with them, with subject matter experts if necessary, to understand and analyse the current reality and develop a common vision and plan for the future.

MEDIATION AND DIPLOMACY NEEDED

Negative feedback and conflicts threaten harmony and lead to loss of face. Many Arab leaders are afraid that they might become less respectable if they talked openly about weaknesses or mistakes. 'Farid is more afraid of losing face than losing money. Things will go better if you can explain to him where he was wrong without making him lose face,' Farid's colleague commented to his peers during an international leadership programme.

As I pointed out earlier, authoritarian hierarchies rather than egalitarianism characterise leadership style in the Arab world. Younger leaders are not allowed to make mistakes, so they cannot learn from their failures.

Implications for coaching

- It is not easy to offer feedback as a coach, especially about developmental areas. Arab clients listen to you but often fail to take it in. Traditional leaders do not actively seek feedback. 'They expect people to do just what they tell them to do, so why would they need feedback?' comments R., an HR manager in Jordan. However, the more trust you build in the relationship, the more likely it is that they will open up.
- You need time to build trust. Arab clients do not open up quickly. Western clients tend to think that if they have paid good money they deserve to get the most they can for it and put topics on the table rather quickly. This is why it is important to spend time in the region and to build relationships. Once you have been successful in building trust you have a great opportunity to help your clients achieve their goals.
- Conflicts in Arab culture are usually solved in an indirect way. Sitting in a conference room, confronting each other and clarifying issues is perceived as an affront. The role of a third person or a mediator has traditionally been important in solving conflicts. A third party will talk to each of the partners in a conflict and then bring them together and mediate. You may be asked by your client to play this role. It is wise in these situations to work with your client to identify a neutral mediator.
- Arab leaders will sometimes send a third person to give employees negative feedback since it is very hard for them to say it face to face. As a coach one can discuss the implications of such a strategy on employee motivation and work on finding alternatives.
- Many managers also struggle with teamwork. You may find many dysfunctional teams; again, conflicts might have developed over time and remain unresolved. 'As a coach you can work on these items (conflicts and teamwork) with your clients and you'll be surprised how quickly they adapt to a more functional way of dealing with conflicts.'

VISION TO TRANSFORM THE ARAB WORLD

Previously in the Arab world, the pace of growth and change has been very high. It is not unusual to find leaders being appointed to a third big job in 18 months with no

real background of any of them, however flexible and quick to learn they might be. Laws did not always follow and engendered inequality in the working population.

The ruler of Dubai, speaks about major challenges facing the Arab world: 'With an already high unemployment rate of 15%, the Middle East must create 80 million new jobs in the next five years just to keep apace of our demographics. Unemployment is a problem afflicting all 22 member states of the Arab League, but it is most conspicuously a youth issue. Fifty per cent of the jobless are under the age of 25, roughly double the world average. Women have an especially difficult time finding jobs ... Far too frequently in our region, good governance strategies take a back seat to military spending. Such recklessness has cost Arabs decades in lost development. The total expenditure on conflicts in the Middle East in the last six decades has exceeded \$3 trillion. In fact, the Middle East is the world's most militarised region. And how much do we spend on education? The per capita expenditure of our region's 22 nations has shrunk in the last 15 years to 10% from 20% of what the world's 30 wealthiest countries spend.'(Mohammed Bin Rashid Al Maktoum, June 3, 2009. Education vs. Extremism.

Retrieved from: <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB124398534971279197.html>)

There is strong will and many initiatives to create job opportunities in the Arab world in general and a vision of becoming more and more independent from oil and gas specifically within the GCC countries. Much needs to be done and economic leaders among others can play a significant role.

Implications for coaching

- The crisis in the Arab world, and elsewhere in the developing world, is often a crisis in leadership and management. As a coach in this environment, you can contribute to developing better leaders.
- Because coaching has been the product of western culture, coaches who work in the Arab world need to adapt their mindset and techniques. To work with Arab leaders as a coach, you need to immerse yourself in this part of the world. Some coaches have been attracted by the money they can earn in this region; they think they fly in, give some sessions and fly out with big bucks. This will not work in a culture where relationship building over time is the key to success.

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