

Foreword by Astronaut Frank De Winne
Head of European Astronaut Centre

DR. RASHID ALLEEM
Author of The SEWA Way

THE SEWA BRAND

**TURN | AND
AROUND REJUVENATION**

What people are saying about **SEWA Brand Turnaround & Rejuvenation**

“H.E. Dr. Rashid Alleem, is a charismatic leader, which as a leader he lives and speak in a transparent way from his heart, which motivate and attracts a lot of followers. Through his vision and new methodology he implemented, he achieved his vision in transforming SEWA to be an efficient organization, and a pioneering in providing happiness and customer satisfaction. The Book “SEWA Brand Turnaround and Rejuvenation” is a great documentation for the vision and implementation of HE Dr. Alleem’s methodology and life philosophy, which has been the root behind the transformation and excellence journey towards success, I highly recommend this book to be distributed to all UAE sectors to benefit from the knowledge model.”

—**Maged Farouck Hanna, PhD Candidate, PfMP, PMP, PMI-RMP, ILMAT, SSGB, UAE, Managing Director of High Steering Committee AACE International Conference.**

The SEWA Brand Turnaround and Rejuvenation’, tracks the company’s incredible journey to success. Offering key business insights and shedding light on strategies including SEWA’s ‘15 winning Principles’, it is an eye opening book that demonstrates the important role that inspiring thought leadership plays in turning around the fortunes of companies.

—**Salah Yamout, UAE, Director of Sales and Marketing at Arabian Automobiles Company.**

The SEWA Brand Turnaround and Rejuvenation is a testimony to his commitment to the development of the organization and the nation at large. He has very dramatically laid out the implementation of his learning over 15 years of his experience. The transformation brought about in SEWA operations, thinking styles and acceptance by the masses, of the technology advancements is commendable. It is evident that his contributions have ensured his workforce were given creative training models, mentoring programs and comprehensive tests to make them experts on their roles.

—**Taher Shams**, UAE, Managing Director, Zulekha Hospital.

The book is a must read for any business leader who seriously wants to have a successful turnaround and bring their brand back to life! Dr. Alleem brings new meaning and definition to Customer Centricity. He built a unique and revolutionary culture where the customer is at the centre while aligning the organization's objectives, targets, rewards and recognition with customer needs. By adopting this culture and mind-set at SEWA, the customer continuously receives a positive and seamless customer experience at every touch point.

—**Pierpaolo Mazza**, Middle East, Regional Director, Wartsila Corporation.

The book reveals the laser focus, the commitment, and determination with which Dr Alleem turns around and salvages SEWA despite highly adverse situations that were prevalent.

—**Manoj Lopez**, UAE, Associate General Manager, Radio Mango.

This new book from H.E. Dr Rashid Alleem describes in details the process he went through to turn around the SEWA organization which was in a very difficult situation. It provides clear examples, a methodology and practical ideas on how to concretely solve the biggest issues that an organization can be faced with. Enlightening!

—**Stephane le Gentil**, UAE, CEO, Wattaqa.

This is an inspirational read from which other companies and organizations can learn. H.E. Dr Rashid Alleem has successfully created a value based and highly effective work culture delivering results. Read this book and learn from one of the best!

Other bullet points

- No nonsense book full of practical advice and proven strategies.
- Passion, pride & perception
- A very conceptual and practical read

—**David Leich**, MESCAT, Middle East, South Central Asia & Turkey, Chief Technical Officer, Engie.

I would like to congratulate Dr. R. Alleem for his leadership. Under him SEWA underwent metamorphosis.

—**Vahe Atmadjan**, UAE, CEO, Bahra Electric International.

The transformation and vision that Dr. Rashid rooted in SEWA culture is absolutely impressive. I love SEWA customer service promise and the key strategic imperatives are spot on.

—**Jawdat Akid**, UAE, Senior Client Partner, Franklin Covey.

At a glance, the book contains all the essentials of a brand study; the extensive audit, introspection, sincerity, and transparency. It examines the SEWA brand on all tiers and, more importantly, the brand's central role in driving organizational success.

—**Tamim Daoud**, UAE, Internal Communications Assistant Manager, RAK bank.

Where in the world would you expect the Chairman of a parastatal authority to transform that business unit in mind, body and soul into a customer centric authority? And to share that vision with all? In detail. In every aspect. In every way. That is this book. Every employee knows exactly what is expected of him when he comes into work each day and

every customer know what to expect when he visits or calls an office. Now that is true leadership that delivers exceptional value!

—**Lamiaa Farrag**, UAE, Managing Director, Six Degrees DWC LLC, Dubai World Central.

Well written chapter from an inspired customer centric leader that transformed a less customer focused organization into a fully-fledged customer oriented one.

—**Imran Saeed**, UAE, Senior Executive Vice President, Siemens.

Dr. Rashid is a thought leader in organisational architecture. His work in transforming SEWA into a customer-centric organisation is remarkable and inspirational. This book is highly recommended for anyone who is keen to gain insights into transformational leadership in SEWA.

—**Toh Seong Wah**, Singapore, Chief Executive Officer, Energy Market Company Pte Ltd (EMC).

Dignity, transparency and equality are the three core values which are important to every human being, in private life and in a work place. It is an inspiration to see how creatively these values are put in practice in SEWA in the internal set-up for all the staff, and for each and every customer they serve. True example of a top modern organization taking us into the future.

—**Lena De Winne**, Europe, NGO Asgardia, CEO.

The book is fastidiously researched and profusely illustrated presentation of outstanding organizational turnaround mission driven by ‘finer thinking and superior action’. Dr Rashid Alleem’s in-depth elucidation of organizational turnaround situations and apt application of management philosophy in its true essence while echoing human capital’s significance for intended organizational standing makes the outcome of the book - business wisdom rich and an ‘absolute value’ for management thinkers and practitioners.

—**Dr. Vishwanath Kokkonda**, India, ITpreneur, Coach & Author.

“H.E. Dr. Rashid Alleem’s latest book, *The SEWA Brand Turnaround and Rejuvenation*,” takes you behind the scenes to discover SEWA’s pledge to enhancing its customer experience through an extensive cultural shift in ways of working. The book gives a personal and honest appraisal of the challenges and actions by SEWA’s leadership, providing a detailed analysis on crafting carefully planned customer experiences with the desire to enhance a service that your customers will want to use over time. This book is a true demonstration of H.E. Dr. Rashid Alleem’s vision and leadership in putting the customer back into the centre of your business and in building long lasting and rewarding relationships.”

—**Sunil Kaushal**, Africa and Middle East, Regional CEO,
Standard Chartered Bank.

This must-read book highlights the importance of being customer centric. These rich pages provides essential concepts of bridging customer focused best practices with the organization’s strategies and goals toward an organization success. This is the key to making things happen and getting results. The words not only engage and inspire leaders at a visionary level, but he also provides a host of pragmatic strategies that are easy to implement and applicable to organizations of all sizes and types.

—**Mohammed alotaibi**, Saudi Arabia, Electricity and
Cogeneration Regulatory Authority (ECRA).

The book clearly illustrates SEWA is modernized, forward-thinking, creative and agile SEWA is, as compared to other Utility authorities across MENA.

—**Mohamed Heiba**, UAE, Business Development Specialist SAP
Hybris.

“An amazing book with insightful, practical and relevant advice on how to leverage the lessons of failure and turn them into moments of learning and ultimate competitive advantage”

—**Dr. Mohammad Tariq**, UAE, Chairman of Pradigm Pioneers
group ventures.

H.E. Dr. Rashid Alleem did assess the current situation from helicopter view and later did a deep dive in the different area of customer satisfaction and intimacy. This did allow him to come to a solid conclusion as well a proven model which will allow him to approach the different challenges and improve SEWA performance.

—**Georges Semaan**, West Africa, ABB Automation.

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**TURN | AND
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THE SEWA BRAND - Turnaround and Rejuvenation



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Published by:



Herald

CochinHerald Media Network LLP
No:42, 2/F, DD Jacobs Mall, M.G Road,
Ernakulam, Kochi 682002, Kerala State, India.
Tel.: +91 484 4028200 Email.: mail@cochinherald.com

ISBN : 978-81-933468-2-2 (Paper Back)

ISBN : 978-81-933468-3-9 (e-Book)

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And audacious goals*

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SEWA Brand Turnaround & Rejuvenation
Sustainability the Fourth Wave of Economy

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FOREWORD

One may wonder why a European astronaut would offer an introduction to a book about the recent history and strategic vision of an Electricity and Water organization in another part of the world. The reason for this is twofold. First, no matter where in the world we live, what culture are we from, or which values we support, we are, first and foremost, humans, and we all have the same basic needs. This is why the commonly-described examples of care and hospitality generally comprise offering a stranger a glass of water and providing a roof over their head, as has been customary from ancient times until the present day. This old symbol aside, the other reason is that no matter the environment, the basic human needs remain the same—whether on Earth or in space. In space, we face the same challenges, such as a shortage of resources. In the same way as those who live in the most challenging climates on Earth, we need to be very careful and thoughtful about using the Earth's resources, particularly in terms of the long-term responsibility towards building a sustainable future.

While pondering this, it became clear that there is much in common between building sustainable life in human spaceflight and developing a blossoming, sustainable environment in the UAE. As stated above, the challenges we meet on Earth and in space appear to be similar in many ways, however, this is not exclusive to power and water.

Leadership by example has been my deep conviction since the days when I was a young pilot in the 80s. A career in the military, which included my participation in the Balkan crisis in the late 90s, in addition to two flights to space in 2002 and 2009, proved that the only way for a successful leader is to be ruthlessly truthful to oneself and courteously open with the other, doing as a leader what you want the teams to do, and having a fearless responsibility for the decisions taken.

I recently visited SEWA for the first time, where I became familiar with the work of Dr. Rashid Alleem, who has been a prominent figure in the organization for the last three years. I have found myself in numerous situations where I have had to take over outfits that did not function to the best of their abilities and make them work. From my own experience, I know what a tough job this is and how many challenges stand in the way of those who need to rebuild processes and motivate people. I know this because I made it work; for this reason, I can appreciate the past three years of the successful development of SEWA under the leadership of Dr. Rashid Alleem.

The book you are now holding in your hands is the essence of the proof as to what a focused and dedicated leader can do. The valuable guidelines contained within these pages offer a validated model and a proven approach to setting up a modern and efficient organization, as well as an inspirational read for those who are curious about how today's actions alter the present history.

And all of this still boils down to the fact that we are humans doing things for other humans. In light of this, SEWA continues to serve its customers in the most friendly and respectful way possible. Since an astronaut's role is to explore outer space, further work is needed to unveil the novelties of the universe for our future generations. Furthermore, by working together continuously and joining hands around the world, we can ensure a safe and sustainable planet Earth for all.

I took many new and inspiring ideas following my visit to SEWA, where I met Dr. Rashid Alleem. Equipped with this new knowledge,

I am going to apply for the position of Head of the European Astronaut Center at my current workplace. I read Dr. Rashid Alleem's most recent publication on the plane on my way home, which provided more food for thought. It is my honor to share my inspired excitement here, on the front pages of this book, and congratulate you on holding it in your hands. I am sure it will provide you with practical wisdom and a modern attitude to business and humanity.

Astronaut Frank De Winne

Head of the European Astronaut Center

ISS Expedition 21 Commander

October 19, 2017

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INTRODUCTION

A Short History of a Big Topic

“Successful people are not people without problems; they are people who respond quickly and positively to their problems. In essence, their problems are not stumbling blocks, but stepping stones for personal growth and success. They keep challenging tomorrow.”

- Dr. Rashid Alleem

Another Leadership Book?

It is my hope that this book sets itself apart from the wealth of literature on leadership. The book you are holding tells a story of transformation, commitment, and determination. This book unfolds a story of revolutionary thought leadership and how, in the face of highly adverse situations, I salvaged the organization from a *near-catastrophic* end. Moreover, in these pages, I have focused on describing an authentic and effective leadership style that inspires, fosters transformation, and brings out the best in those around them.

SEWA Brand Turnaround and Rejuvenation offers an in-depth and behind-the-scenes look at a *dramatic* cultural and behavioral turnaround that I undertook. It chronicles my hard work and talent with a *laser* focus on a singular goal; to rejuvenate the SEWA brand and reinstate its honorary position in the country. The book also provides an excellent example of the managerial complexity and organizational dynamics that go into developing a global brand. SEWA (Sharjah Electricity & Water Authority) is an organization fully owned by the government of

Sharjah with a mission to provide reliable, efficient, and sustainable energy and clean drinking water for more than 1.5 million people living in Sharjah, the cultural capital of the UAE.

In 2014, the organization came close to *bankruptcy*, which severely dented its image. Sheikh Dr. Sultan Bin Mohammad Al Qassimi, a member of the Supreme Council of United Arab Emirates and the Ruler of Sharjah, was not pleased with the performance and decided to issue an executive order to restructure SEWA by replacing the leadership and the senior management team, in addition to dismissing the boards. In short, SEWA was on the fast track to oblivion.

The Turning Point

April 22, 2014, was a historical day in my life. It was 3 pm and I was in the middle of a late lunch with my beloved family when I received a call from the executive office of His Highness, stating that he had chosen me to chair SEWA since he wasn't pleased with the performance of the previous management, both financially and administratively.

He wanted me to report on the very next day—Wednesday morning—at 9 am to officially appoint me and give me some insight directions and instructions. What a surprise it was! I could not believe my own ears. I remained speechless for a moment, and could not finish the rest of my lunch. All I knew when I took the call from His Highness' office was that I was about to shoulder a weighty responsibility.

It was decided that I was to report to him directly without board members to ensure speedy, efficient, and fast decision-making to improve performance as soon as possible and rescue the authority from a near-death/near-collapse fate. In short, I had to reset the organization, which required legwork, long hours at the office, and lengthy conversations with all stakeholders, but mostly it required a simple love for His Highness and for my city.

The Big Bang

The news was a big bang—a transformational moment. I quickly understood that it was going to be the toughest assignment I had ever been asked to do; however, it was a stated fact that I had been given the responsibility by His Highness himself. There was no escape, and hence I took the plunge. It was inevitable that I would have to *struggle* against a myriad of obstacles and challenges in order to restore the image of the authority.

SEWA is considered a very sensitive organization by both the government and the public. It has been chaired by members of the royal family for the last 30 years. During the early 90s, the authority was chaired by His Highness' late son. Then, during the 2000s, the authority was led by His Highness the crown prince, and from early 2001 till the date of my appointment, which was made by His Highness, deputy to the ruler of Sharjah. The challenge that I am trying to bring home is that it was the first time a non-royal family was selected by our President His Highness to lead and transform this organization to become one of the most authentic organizations in the world. What a challenge!

Challenges for The SEWA Brand

Besides the fact that the brand was *murdered* through mismanagement, the following section details the top 9 challenges I had to face at the outset:

- \$4 billion debt.
- Creditors wanted payment for goods and services delivered long ago.
- An over-staffed and under-skilled workforce (about 5500 employees).
- Run over projects.
- Very low staff morale.

- Frustrated customers.
- Aging power plants, machines, and substations (phase-out was needed).
- Very high interest rates for the existing bank loans (as high as 9%).
- Good employees wanted to retain their jobs and benefits.

These challenges can be at odds with one another and hamper the brand turnaround effort.

What to Do

At first, it seemed like a nightmare that was much too big to handle! I zeroed down on two things that would enable me to transform the organization, first, to bring the authority up to His Highness' expectations, and second, to please the society by striking the right balance between the commercial and the social obligations of the organization. This is achieved through a set of strategic thinking skills designed to help us achieve that goal in the most efficient way possible.

Based on my previous business turnarounds and experience with other organizations, I thought the most important step to start with is the need to have a set of core values and guiding principles to help us navigate through the turbulent times. Second, having a success module in place to build and sustain a business is essential. However, this caused me to say to myself, *Will that be easy? Does it mean I have to work eight days a week?*

The Turnaround Specialist

I had a gut feeling that the process of turning around a troubled entity like SEWA was going to be complex. My past experience had taught me that managing a turnaround requires crystal-clear thinking, prompt action, and a fool-proof plan. So, here I was, the Turnaround Specialist,

spotting problems with a fresh eye and creating new solutions. To sum things up, I took the decision-making reins and operated in the eye of the storm to guide SEWA through troubled waters, and hopefully to a safer harbor!

It's time for Leadership

I said to myself, *Oh my God, what type of turnaround leadership do I need to practice now? Is it situational or transformational?* The answer wasn't easy, as managing turnaround requires clear thinking, quick action, and a strong plan. After having some *quiet* time with myself, I decided to opt for transformational change, which meant I had to start from scratch, provide remedies for all the loopholes or rather glitches in the existing processes, and above all, enable speed and efficiency in designing and executing the change.

I assumed the big question to be: "How, when, where, and who to start with?" At that time, I thought to myself, *There's no time to be wasted—this is not an easy mission. The process might be easy to write and understand, yet challenging to implement. A transformational leadership style is needed right now.*

Though I had no time at hand, deep down I knew that I could not build a successful transformation in *hurry and worry*. The best transformations/turnarounds are slow-cooked, *not* micro-waved. The key to success is the *quality* of the time to invest and the ability to create a *buy-in* team through practicing the transformational leadership.

Transformational leader in a Transactional world

However, the only thing that bothered me was that I had to be a transformational leader in a transactional world. Hence, apart from focusing on numbers, total quality metrics, and KPIs, I also had to focus on the brand. Steering an organization through times of change can be dangerous and risky, and can lead to negative consequences.

A voice then came from within:

Brand turnaround requires a complete psychological shift across the entire organization. It is relatively easy for a new organization to start with a clean sheet of paper in creating a culture. But for an organization like SEWA that has been around for over 40 years, the shift involves quite a bit shedding and rewiring.

I remembered the hypothesis: many organizations get into trouble not because of a *failed* strategy but because of a *frozen* culture. If there is a grain of truth in it, then *how* do we change a cultural lever of growth? To protect the organization, I knew I had to *first* implement a set of sound, core values, and *second*, to create a list of guiding principles that act as a roadmap.

You are a BOT Leader

While ‘warming up’ for SEWA’s turnaround, I happened to attend a previously scheduled meeting on January 15, 2017, with Her Excellency Sheikha Lubna Bint Khalid Al Qassimi, Minister of State of Tolerance for UAE. We discussed a couple of things, ranging from sustainability to humanitarian efforts in the field of tolerance.

I didn’t know I would be surprised to discover that we had many things in common, and she ended up giving both of us the title of a BOT leader. I got puzzled and asked her what the term meant. “Build Operate Transform leader,” she replied.

“In my case, I have been asked to transform four ministries, and in your case, you have transformed four government departments. In fact, you have gone an extra mile, with SEWA being the fifth one. Both of us have been asked to either to shape up, transform, or turnaround low performing organizations and move on to new assignments.” She further added, “Rashid, you play the role of the savior wherever you go. God bless you.”

During the meeting with her, she highlighted the achievements I had made, especially in the Hamriyah free zone, which used to be one of the best performing organizations I have ever led. I took over Hamriyah Free Zone back in March 2000, and I distinctly remember the early days when we had only 76 SMEs companies, which mainly came from the UAE. By the time I was handpicked by His Highness to chair SEWA on April 22, 2014, over a period of almost 14 years, the Hamriyah Free Zone became a multi-billion dollar conglomeration of almost 6000 companies comprising over 65,000 people with 159 different nationalities and an FDI of over \$20 Billion.

Let me take you back to the meeting. The meeting was so inspiring and came at just the right time, during a period when I was feeling puzzled about what to do with my brand turnaround project. Her Excellency's words of wisdom and encouragement gave me a sense of direction and a positive and peaceful mind to move on. Marching to a better tomorrow full of confidence.

A couple of days later, another positive message made my day. This one was really special because it came all the way from Germany. Ms. Rosa, a great friend, sent me a message to say she had spent over 12 hours reading my last book, *The SEWA Way*, and had taken notes from it. She couldn't put the book down because it was really engaging. What's more, she promised to use some of the quotes in her presentations later.

Leading the Way with Courage and Humility

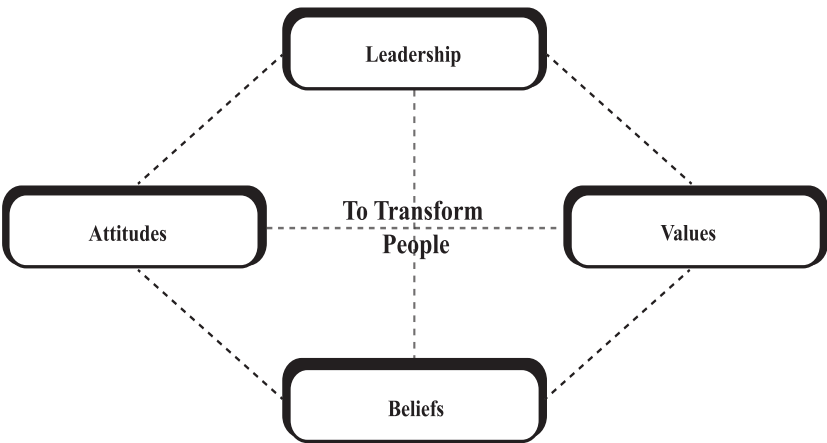
Taking a stand, for anything, requires courage. Courageous leadership is knowing what is right and then acting on it. There are two things that, when blended together, could make the brand turnaround easier. First, the *reorganization* of people's beliefs and values. Second, *reengineering* the whole internal process and adapting the best practices from the world leaders in the utility business.

Reorganization

Strong interpersonal dynamics continue to be a key success factor in true visionary leadership. Great visionary thinking utilizes a symbiotic

relationship between the leader and the follower, fostering collaboration, innovation, and camaraderie.

For me, it was all about focusing on the three main attributes: *Values*, *Beliefs*, and *Attitude*. These elements can motivate people to transform and unlock their potential, and achieve their dreams, including those who may appear to be very different from what they can be. To cut a long story short, SEWA needed a *healthy* shake-up. With a little internal reorganization in their values, beliefs, and attitudes, people can be truly transformed. This is because I believe that people do not resist change, but rather that they resist being changed. As they say, if we rearrange molecules of carbon, we get diamond, and by reorganizing core values, beliefs, and attitudes you can create a diamond team. The image below summarizes my thoughts.



Attributes to Create a Diamond Team

According to Kotter International, more than 70% of major transformation efforts fail because organizations do not take a consistent, holistic approach to changing themselves, and nor do they engage their workforces towards it.

Over the past 15 years, working with the government, semi-government, and private organizations, I had developed strong viewpoints, principles, concepts, techniques, and processes for nurturing, managing, and building brands for enduring profitable growth.

Reengineering

Reengineering concerns the fundamental rethinking and radical redesign of business processes to achieve dramatic improvements in critical, contemporary, and modern measures of performance, such as cost, quality, services, and speed.

Like any typical business process reengineering, I started with a blank sheet of paper and revisited existing processes, albeit with the aim to deliver more value to the customer. In so doing, I placed an increased emphasis on customer needs, because growing customer dissatisfaction is comparable to weeds in a garden, choking life and reducing the fruit harvest. In addition, I reduced organizational layers and eliminated unproductive activities throughout.

Assembling a High-Performance Team

A leader is often pushed ever closer to the forefront of the day-to-day operations. If you want action, request a decision or make one. In a stable situation, there is time to develop talent. However, at a troubled firm, you must exploit the talents of those who can perform and recruit the talent that is lacking. This requires building a permanent management team that can bring a company back to health, which can subsequently add value to the company. At this stage, I knew that transformational leadership alone would *not* serve the purpose, and that, even after years of blood, sweat, and tears, I wouldn't get anywhere. Therefore, I would need a high performing team that was highly focused and have the following essential elements ingrained in them:

- Redesign the vision and flesh out the strategy in a coherent and cohesive whole.
- A shared sense of purpose. Direction plus energy.
- Clear realistic objectives. Everyone knows what the team's objectives are and what their part in the plan is.
- Slim down the meeting culture and beef up strategic dialogue.
- Best use of resources. All resources belong to the team and are put to work according to priority.
- Create an atmosphere of openness. People can speak openly, without fear of being considered critical.
- Handle failure well by picking itself up quickly. Also learns the hard lessons and press forward.
- Ride out the storms. The true evaluation of teamwork is in the difficult, demanding situation of change.

Leadership Team

In early 2015, the high-performance team was renamed to the leadership team owing to the competencies, qualities, and skills of the leaders in the team would help me in my SEWA turnaround strategies. When SEWA was still deeply mired in its financial crisis, I chanced upon *4 Es of Leadership* introduced by Jack Welch, the former CEO of GE. In his days at GE, leaders were expected to demonstrate **E**nergy (individuals who love to go, go, go), **E**nergize (individuals who spark others to perform), **E**dge (strong competitors who make 'life and death' decisions), and **E**xecution (a consistent performer who delivers results). The *4 Es* caught my attention, because each resonated with my course of action and that he emphasized that leaders should *walk the talk* by demonstrating the 4 Es in their work life.

The 7 Es

The philosophy stated above is great and surely reaps enormous benefits if applied tactfully. However, I wanted my future leaders to not only walk the talk but also *talk the talk*. Hence, to meet my objective, I added an extra 3 ‘Es’ to his philosophy: **E**ffectiveness (doing right things, a performer who overcomes the odds and sees the stars), **E**fficiency (doing things right to achieve the desired results with limited resources), and lastly, **E**xcellence, (doing right things right). You will find the spirit of these 7 Es running along the vein of this book.

The Hard Start

I have been always quoted as saying, “The journey of a thousand miles must begin with one ‘hard’ step, a ‘road’ map, and a ‘big’ smile.” My character reflects a “hands-on, serious, and driven to excellence” approach, which, in the minds of many SEWA employees and former employees, translates into “micro-managing, bottlenecking and dictatorial.” I was in their bad books! Nevermind, I do believe Friedrich Nietzsche when he said, “What does not destroy me makes me stronger.” Due to my character, I faced immense external and internal opposition. Leaders usually face similar situations during their brand turnaround. One particular situation that I can relate to is the story of Angela Ahrendts, former CEO of Burberry (2006-2014). As mentioned in Forbes, when Angela took the helm as CEO of Burberry in 2006, she knew that the organization had lost focus, however, her position was criticized and her abilities to understand a British brand were doubted since she was an American from the Midwest. Despite such criticism, nothing deterred her. She had a clear vision, and she determinably aligned her company around the vision. Further, she engaged the organization in helping to accomplish it. Indeed, at Burberry, Angela not only oversaw a tripling of revenues to \$3 billion and a stock return of 300%, but she also successfully revitalized a 150-year-old brand that had lost its way.

I could completely relate to her. My case was quite similar; I was the only non-royal family descendant hailing from a different backdrop altogether, and I was chosen by His Highness, Dr. Sheikh Sultan, the ruler of Sharjah, to run a government organization on royal order. However, I didn't veer from my course; instead, I established a clear and true vision and aligned the leadership team and the organization around it. I rolled up my sleeves, took a deep breath, and said to myself, *I will either find a way, or make one. Let's go for it.* I stood by my vision and was ready to do whatever it takes to deliver on the vision.

The Vision Gamut

Vision is one of the most overused, misunderstood, and abused words in the business world. Vision statements, mission statements, strategic plans, roadmaps, and blueprints litter today's offices. If you want to silence a room of executives, try this small trick. Ask them: "Do you actually refer to your vision in detail as you set goals with individual employees and develop operational metrics for departments?" Without fail, the response is always a sudden, stunned hush accompanied by the sound of knees knocking.

Do I sound like a vision slayer, who is out there to put an end to all the vision statements in the world? Well, that's not true. Let me take you through to my personal philosophy of defining a vision, which I always like to call a "true vision."

My True Vision

Almost all business leaders have a vision to lead their unit towards success, but very few have what I call a true vision. But how do we define it? *A true vision* is when your heart carries your values, beliefs, timeless principles, and fundamentals, which work alongside your mind, where business objectives, performance, and challenges are carried. In this case, your mind acts like a *manager* in a system, while your heart acts as a *leader*. Thus, true leadership is a robust and dynamic process; a

dance between two poles, each taking the lead, each following the other, but it is the heart that molds, interprets, communicates, and portrays the vision. Got it?

I want my readers to live the turnaround journey with me. Hence, I have inter-woven my experiences and lessons learned, both hard and soft, into a story-telling narrative. In reading this book, I want you to feel the *ecstasy* and *pain* of this sojourn/adventure.

No doubt, when it comes to shaping the future of your team or organization, you would rather avoid the wrenching pain of a turnaround and instead leave your own trauma-free trail. My pro-tip for you is to identify the signposts and guide your efforts, not direct them. If you are in the middle of your business's brand turnaround, this book could, and what I believe will be, the turning point of your business life.

Like every SEWA enthusiast, you must unhitch your imagination, experience the game, and figure out what works best for you and your organization. The book reflects both the intuitive and counter-intuitive aspects of transformational leadership, which may be fairly easy to comprehend but far more difficult to master. In the end, it's up to each of us how we rewire the organization.

But, as they say, there's no one-size-fits-all remedy to overhaul an organization. SEWA was different, particularly owing to its various organizational and cultural roadblocks. So, the question kept ringing in my head. How?

Let's address the SEWA Turnaround Process. The lessons I have learned could fill a library. It is my sincere hope that these lessons will take their rightful place on a global level.

Welcome onboard!

Rashid Alleem
January, 2017
Sharjah, UAE.

The Story behind the Story

My Journey to this Book

As previously mentioned, SEWA was teetering on the brink of bankruptcy when H.H Sheikh Sultan Bin Mohammed Al Qassimi, ruler of Sharjah, asked me to take the helm as the chairman of SEWA. Going back to that day, I view it as a kind of restoration for SEWA. I was given the daunting task of rescuing the organization from a near-death/near-collapse fate. My mission was to bring SEWA back in business in the fastest possible way. Surprisingly, it was not the first time that life has thrown me into similar situations.

Here's what the great American scholar and friend, Dr. Bilal Abdul-Alim wrote about me in his recent book, *From The USA to The UAE*, "In my view, whenever His Highness wants to improve a department, he sends Dr. Alleem there for a period of time to take care of the business."

Thank you, Your Highness, for choosing me to bring about the transformation at SEWA. Indeed, your trust in me made this challenge a bit easy. I won't disappoint you. Promise!

Let's Begin at the Beginning

To begin with the turnaround, and to revive a dying brand, I began to draft a Turnaround Strategy. After doing a SWOT profiling of the current scenario, I formulated an impressive strategy and called it the "SEWA Brand Turnaround & Rejuvenation Strategy." I was sure that, apart from stabilizing the crisis, the plan would also induce efficiency and accountability within my organization.

On the face of it, the title of the book may compel you to consider it as if it were any other book of this dubious, often complicated era; that is, in its debunking of the magic mantra of marketing and branding. Gladly, the book is far from it! As you dig in, you will find the book indulges in the marketing and branding. The framework for SEWA's brand turnaround effort expanded from its initial marketing focus into a company-wide reorganization that involved several change management stages. The chief object behind every chapter is to offer help and suggestions to my readers, and to save them some of the midnight groping, which I did.

Stages of the Turnaround Process

I knew I didn't have enough time to do the turnaround, but it was a royal order from our State President, whom I love and respect most. I started the process with three stages, before reducing it to two. Additional stages came later, and hence it became a five-stage journey. Then, we jumped to eleven stages until I settled on the best fit—9 stages.

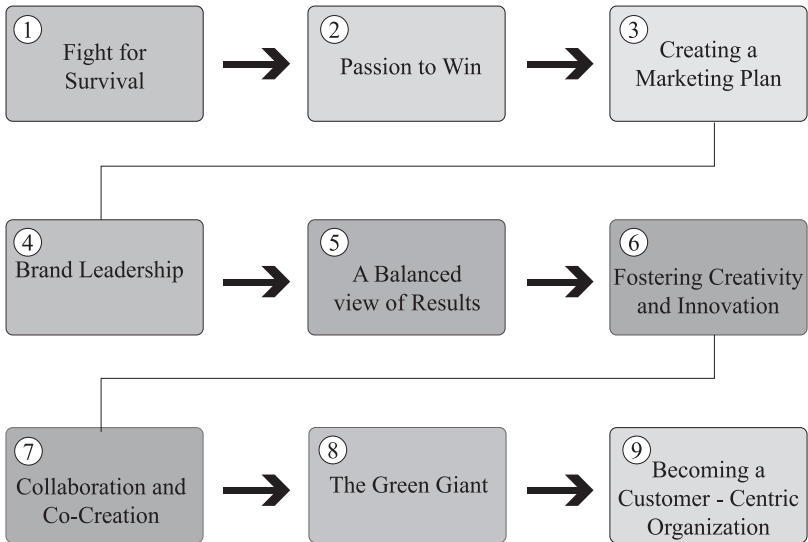
Each stage below represents a change program which we undertook to create and manage global brand coherence. Let's get introduced to the nine stages that brought about the brand turnaround of the organization.

1. Fight for Survival
2. Passion to Win
3. Creating a Marketing Plan
4. Brand Leadership
5. A Balanced View of Results
6. Fostering Creativity and Innovation
7. Collaboration and Co-Creation

8. The Green Giant

9. Becoming a Customer-Centric Organization

The following diagram summarizes the nine stages:



The SEWA Brand Turnaround & Rejuvenation Strategy

The next section acts as an “action plan” for your easy navigation through this book.

Have a smooth sail!

About this Book

From the author's perspective, what is most gripping is the spirit of organizational overhaul. What does it take? Where does it lead to? Why take the plunge? This book is not a scientific or academic tome, but rather you will discover a framework—a tried and tested one that helped my organization to cover the journey from rock bottom to the summit. There are thought experiments in which the reader can participate, and doing so will enhance the experience.

- The importance of a surviving strategy; the key factors that affect an organization's ability to succeed; SEWA's core values and 15 winning principles—The SEWA Way (Chapter 1).
- Why infusing passion at all levels of the organization—from senior executives to entry-level staff is crucial; the strategic bent of SEWA 2020 vision & beyond (Chapter 2).
- How a marketing plan helps you achieve the brand turnaround and how to develop an effective marketing plan that ensures your M&B strategies and activities are aligned throughout the organization (Chapter 3).
- Introduction to SEWA's 8 Ps of Branding Cycle. Exploring the benefits of Brand Management and its efficacy (Chapter 4).
- Benefits of a Balanced Score Card; the ways in which this tool addresses the needs of twenty-first-century organizations; how to develop performance measurement criteria; questions for selecting the right evaluation methods and tools (Chapter 5).

- An overview of agile innovation; the crucial role of agile methodologies; how such a system keeps everything running smoothly and lets you respond quickly to change (Chapter 6).
- The art of collaboration & co-creation; in-depth knowledge of SEWA Co-creation principles; the best co-creation case-studies of global brands (Chapter 7).
- SEWA's green strategy; SEWA's pro-environmentally responsible practices; SEWA's journey to becoming a reliable, efficient, and sustainable utility owned by the Sharjah Government (Chapter 8).
- Secrets to skillfully managing and executing customer experience strategies; creating a highly differentiated customer experience; winning customer loyalty (Chapter 9).





Fight for Survival

Stabilize the Situation

In April 2014, I was hand-picked by His Highness, the ruler of Sharjah, as the chairman of SEWA. Was my appointment to chair SEWA a blessing in disguise? You will find that out in the rest of the book.

The current reality was that SEWA was in a wreck and it needed a fresh pair of eyes. I embarked on a restructuring journey and reasoned out that rescuing the situation was the toughest step. Where to begin? How to begin? I found the answer at a business lunch.

At a business lunch, I chanced upon a vibrant, young, and successful businessman, whom I had known for quite some time. He came forward to shake hands and congratulate me on my recent career transition. During our conversation, he mentioned that, according to a study conducted by the Association of Insolvency and Restructuring Advisors, only “9% of failures” are due to influences beyond management’s control and to sheer bad luck. The remaining “91% of failures” are related to influences that management could control. “To be precise,” he continued to say, “52% are rooted in internally generated problems that management didn’t control.” That was my *Eureka* moment! The guy gave me a useful piece of information; yet, my own thoughts were in a whirl, too confused by emotions to think clearly.

After a couple of days, I began with a clear and a peaceful mind. All I needed was hard-nosed, hard-headed, feet-on-the-ground pragmatism to quickly assess the opportunities and pin down the shortcomings to develop innovative and unique strategies.

First, to stabilize the situation, I conducted a fact-finding session on what had happened, where things went out of control, and why the leadership lost focus. Secondly, I prepared a plan to fix the existing problems. Once the plan was in place, I implemented the planned courses of action by funding the process and building a team to carry it out. Finally, I monitored the progress and made changes wherever necessary. Sounds like a cake-walk, doesn't it? Read on to find out how I turned the table.

Fact-finding

I started “one-step-at-a-time” and wanted to just “take-things-as-they-come.” Along with specific skills and an understanding of SEWA's troubled situation, I, being the Turnaround Specialist, was expected to offer a new perspective from which to independently evaluate the company's circumstances. I reminded myself, *Rashid, not all companies are salvageable*. I decided to do some groundwork; I drafted a process that would focus on *several* issues by asking myself questions such as:

- Can it be saved? Why?
- Are reasons valid?
- Is SEWA business viable?
- What is the main purpose of the business?
- Are there sufficient cash resources to fuel recovery?
- Which existing managers are capable of leading parts of the company?

A few days after answering the above questions, I decided that the fact-finding session needed to be done as quickly as possible so that a realistic assessment of the current state of SEWA could be prepared. Such a fast response owed to the fact that a Turnaround Specialist's first priority should be to manage cash flow—to stop the hemorrhage. Following this, it is essential to find where the real problems—not the symptoms—are located. Next, a business plan outlining and suggesting possible courses of action—or cures—should be prepared. Following the diagnostic stage, the transition can begin towards turnaround. Once a course of action is chosen, implementation and monitoring can then occur. Being the specialist, I should remain involved, at least until the business is stabilized, preferably until the transformation is complete.

LEGO: Brick by Brick

A story that continues to inspire and guide me is that of the LEGO brick. In narrating this short biography, I am certain there's immense wisdom in it for corporates around the world.

In 2003, the LEGO Group announced the biggest loss in its history, leaving the company on the brink of bankruptcy. However, LEGO bounced back, and it is now one of the world's best-loved toys, not to mention the world's most profitable and fastest-growing toy company. What rescued the company from a near-death/near-collapse fate? A disciplined approach to harnessing creativity. Undoubtedly, the history of the LEGO Group is one of the most remarkable business transformations in recent memory.

LEGO failed to keep pace with the revolutionary changes in kids' lives and began sliding into irrelevance. The group's fight for survival started by focusing on the three must-win battles: First, simplicity no complexity, by halving the number of components in the company's product portfolio and by managing the time it took to develop an idea and bring it to market. Second, restore competitiveness by focusing on retail customers (rather than kids), and, third, raising cash by selling off assets, such as the LEGOLAND theme parks.

On top of this, the company became truly customer-driven by co-creating its products with both kids and passionate adult fans in mind. LEGO also looked beyond products and learned to leverage a full-spectrum approach to innovation, leading it to discover uncontested, “blue ocean” markets, even as it thrived in brutally competitive red oceans.

Further, the company installed a navigational system that defined the different degrees of innovation, from incremental to radical. They then used the matrix to map which innovations they’d pursue with each product line, and finally, by conducting quarterly stage-gate reviews, where executives conducted in-depth checkups with the product development teams.

LEGO’s brand rebirth kept inspiring me at different stages in my turnaround efforts.

What do I do now?

As I mentioned above, I started with my top priority, which, at that moment, was—managing cash flow. I wanted to transform SEWA from a cash-eating monster into a money-making machine. I began this process by asking myself, *Do I need to cut costs to grow sustainably or re-direct my focus to conventional cost management?* I also believe that total business restructuring requires total buy-in, and it entails a series of serious decisions—decisions that must not be made lightly to solve some of the current problems that have been weighing us down.

Cost Control v/s Cost Management

Cost control is about the application of procedures to monitor expenditures and performance against the progress of operations. It includes measuring variance from authorized budgets and allowing effective action to be taken to achieve minimum costs. Tight cost control gives a company a considerable influence over its cash flows and reported profits, while cost control is also a function of cost management, together with resource planning cost and estimation.

On the other hand, cost management is a continuous process; a multi-faceted discipline that involves estimating, budgeting, planning, and cost control to measure cost and productivity. I practiced cost leadership to meet strict quantitative targets. With cost management in mind to avoid certain pitfalls that may occur otherwise because I knew well that focusing on understanding and managing costs is the path to ensuring long-term value creation and embracing large-scale organization transformation.

Sustainable Cost Reduction

To gain my sanity and avoid getting overwhelmed by operational chaos or organizational gridlock, I reevaluated the situation and selected the two cost-reduction levers: portfolio rationalization and zero-basing. I scrutinized various other levers, but decided upon these two because they fitted well into SEWA's situation.

Portfolio Rationalization

Portfolio rationalization systematically helped me to analyze the profitability across various categories, such as products, customers, and channels, to identify where complexity is driving high costs, understand the root causes, and take out both the costs and the underlying drivers of complexity. The goal is to reduce complexity by not adding value, while building the capability to manage the good complexity that drives profits.

Zero-Basing

Next, I wanted to justify what to keep, not what to kill; hence, I adapted zero-basing. This is a repeatable process for rigorously scrutinizing every dollar in a company's budget and instilling a culture of cost management across the organization. A well-executed zero-basing program yields sustainable cost reduction, and fosters a mindset of questioning the need for every activity. In short, zero-basing demands that a strong case be made for every expenditure.

Project Expenditure

As you may know, electricity and water projects are very expensive and consume most of the budget, and if not controlled from the beginning, they go *creep*. Therefore, a strong approach is needed, which may lead you to ask: how do I approach/assess project expenditure in such a huge organization? Well, apart from cost rationalization and zero-basing, I tackle projects expenditure mainly by asking a few critical questions at the outset of any project:

- Is the project a revenue or non-revenue generating project?
- What is the Return on Investments (ROI)?
- What's the payback period? Or, when do we get our money back?
- What about the Net Present Value (NPV)? What are the long-term results from this project worth today? And finally,
- How rapidly will an investment be returned? And what is the Internal Rate of Return (IRR)?

Ask what, why, how?

What does research show our customers or end users need? How will they make use of it?

Why is this the right project? ...is it the right time for our organization?...how does it fit with our strategy and with currently available resources?

How are we going to deliver what customers need? What particular skills do we have that make this project the right choice?

Assumptions and Considerations

Assumptions

Scope: How big is the project?

People: Who can help deliver this project?

Physical Resources: What equipment will be available?

Considerations

Time: How much of it do we have to complete in our project?

Cost: What is the available budget?

Quality: Are we aiming to deliver something fairly basic, or more of a Burj Khalifa model?

Value Engineering (VE)

Once I found the answers to the above questions, I moved on to infusing value into the projects, through Value Engineering (VE). Don't panic? I will not want to spin your head by giving you a heavy dose of project management glossaries. In layman terms, *value engineering* is an organized attempt to optimize the overall value of the projects in project management endeavors.

Why use VE?

I apply VE for multiple reasons during my turnaround journey. I have listed some of the most significant here:

- Do more with less.
- Improve project schedule.
- Reduce operating costs.
- Reduce overall project costs.
- Mitigate risks.

Later in the chapter, I share my experience of value engineering in live SEWA projects, where I have provided further information about VE. Keep reading!

Brand-shaking Events

I vividly remember my early days, which were often hazy and chaotic. I was under intense economic strain because of the loss incurred by the previous (mis)management and the high cost of the fuel to keep our turbines running. However, I remained upbeat and positive. I can recall my first day at work, when I asked if there was a written leadership philosophy or corporate values and principles, the answer was, “We have never had such things around here!” That was quite an eye-opener to me, as I believe that values are the fundamental elements that build an organization or a business. And by practicing them alone, you witness sustained growth.

Marketing Room

The above story could tell you the DNA-level restructuring I was aiming toward, because I believe that you are either the best at what you do, or you don’t do it for long. Before we proceed, let me share another striking incident that kind of motivated me to pen down this book. I remember the day I walked into the so-called “marketing room” of SEWA. Marketing room? Hearing it for the first time, eh? Yes, you read it right. Here’s why I called it “a room.”

I asked the employees sitting in that room whether they had a marketing and branding strategy—a physical one, not the one in the nook and corner of their minds. To this, they replied that they don’t even have a Marketing Department! Shocking, isn’t it?

They further continued to state that they only have a marketing unit, which deals in publishing an in-house, bi-monthly magazine called *Al-Anwar*. The magazine supposedly covers the current stories of SEWA, such as current events, participations, awards, and accolades. When I took over, the magazine had a “rigid” pattern and a boring design/layout, often with mismatched and low-resolution photos. Moreover, the magazine frequently published outdated content. For instance, January’s news would get published in April’s issue. To add to this disaster, the

in-house magazine was poorly circulated/distributed. As a result, hundreds of old issues got piled up in the store room, collecting dust and occupying valuable space. What a mess.

The situation drove me crazy, to the extent that I immediately ordered the recycling of the old issues of the magazine to create some much-needed space. Then, I thought about how I could clean up all the unnecessary practices and ineffective methods my employees had been using. However, this bit was not as easy as de-cluttering the storeroom. Here, I needed a rear-window perspective in order to move the organization forward.

Chief Restructuring Officer

At this stage of the brand turnaround, I felt that I needed to give myself a self-proclaimed, non-official title. Hence, I retitled myself. Once a Turnaround Specialist, I gave myself a new, catchy title—Chief Restructuring Officer. Restructuring an organization requires a completely different set of capabilities. As a Chief Restructuring Officer, I had to put together some decisive objectives, such as:

- Prepare a plan to fix the marketing department.
- Build a winning marketing team to implement and execute the plan.
- Monitor and control progress.
- Make changes when necessary.
- Replace some employees, as well as some top management positions who did not keep a watchful eye.
- Create a positive buzz by rethinking marketing and branding.

Rethink

I aligned myself with Stephen Covey's second habit of highly effective people: "Begin with the end in mind," which means knowing where you're going so as to understand where you are now, and to take your next step in the right direction. It's amazingly easy to get caught up in an activity trap in the business of life as one works harder and harder at climbing the ladder of success, only to discover it's leaning against the wrong wall.

Was I successful in my endeavor? Read on to find out more about how I zoomed in and zoomed out.

Helicopter View

To accomplish the aforementioned tasks/objectives, I took off to get a 'helicopter view' of SEWA. The helicopter view refers to the ability to rise above the specifics of a particular situation and to see it in its overall context and environment. There are three steps that one must practice until it becomes second nature.

First, zoom out, distance yourself mentally from the current situation; *second*, set different scenarios, ask yourself in years to come, let's say five years, what will you do if such and such happens, and *third*, zoom in and zoom out repeatedly, in order to stay on the right path without losing sight of the details.

I zoomed out to get an overview of the current situation without any intricate details, which is an essential practice in big-picture decision making. You know when you are far out, you can map the whole territory before taking action.

Eagle Eye View

Eagles have excellent long-distance vision. They can see clearly about eight times as far as humans, which allows them to spot and focus at a distance of about two miles. Having zoomed out, I didn't want to

fall prey to the trap of neglecting novel threats and opportunities by dismissing them as too insignificant or underrating them. Moreover, I wanted immediate results as I needed to match my broad vision with small wins. Hence, I zoomed in to an “eagle-eye view,” bringing details into sharp focus, seeing and observing keenly, scrutinizing/analyzing the *tiniest* of elements, and relying heavily on my personal instincts and principles.

In this frantic fight back to recovery, I formulated a set of core values that would serve as an anchor to hold SEWA from being swept away by the tides. It was at that point that I thought to myself, *Values can't work alone, they would need timeless principles to rest upon.* As I am a great believer in timeless principles, for without them, values would be meaningless.

Yes, that made much sense to me. I decided to formulate the company principles first. For, in the end, it is impossible to have a great business unless it is a meaningful business. And it is very difficult to have a meaningful business without meaningful work.

Mindfulness: Get back to the Present

This is a state of active, open attention on the present. Instead of letting our life pass us by, things were moving so fast and in different directions that I needed to slow down to make sure I was heading in the right direction. Mindfulness means living in the moment and awakening to experience. In short, it is a technique for learning to live in the present moment. Why do we need be mindful? Scientific research suggests that the practice of mindfulness can help individuals to gain clarity, reduce stress, optimize performance, and develop a greater sense of well-being.

It's a Winning Strategy

Mindfulness helps us to unclutter our mind and cultivate contentment. When we are mindful, we observe our thoughts and feelings from a

distance, without making judgments. In doing so, we break free from the claws of past and the mystery of the future. Paying attention to your attention! It's the power of now. As Anais Nin said, "We don't see the things as they are, we see them as we are."

I was going through a numbing feeling of paralysis. Have you ever seen a fish out of water? That was my state. At this point, I resorted to being mindful and became conscious of my own self. I took an inward journey. Detour!

Conscious Leadership

My experiences taught me to take time-off during tough times and to find inner peace and the right attitude before going into what I call a "business war zone", and one way of doing so is by practicing conscious leadership. *Conscious leadership* concerns more than just being seen by others; it's about seeing yourself. In order to embody conscious leadership, one must start by looking at how he can be of service to his own growth, his own expansion, and his own willingness to repeatedly step outside of his comfort zone.

Here are five questions that helped me develop conscious leadership skills:

1. What do I notice about myself?
2. What can I learn about myself?
3. Can I accept myself for being just where I am?
4. Is there an opportunity for me to grow/shift?
5. How do I grow/shift?

Need for a New Approach

I found the answers, and I realized that if I get mired in the horrible mismanaged history of SEWA or get entrapped by unforeseen future, I

would land nowhere. There is a British saying that states: “The past is a foreign country. They do things differently over there.”

Hence, I drew a line of demarcation between the horrid past and the unknown future. Literally speaking, I picked up my pen and started jotting down my guiding principles. This brought me back to consciousness and presented a fresh perspective of my state of affairs.

My New Mission

Owing to the financial crisis, the organization faced a sharp decline in revenue, and consequently, SEWA lacked the time and the resources. Eventually, SEWA principles became my *first aide* in my early war period. Undoubtedly, they became dear to me, so much so that I was inspired to write a book based on the 15 winning principles I formulated for a winning future. Of course, in those days, I faced great opposition for this too, and keeping the organization vibrant and intact seems impossible to me, but that is another book!

Now, before we move ahead, it would be nice (and wise) if I get you acquainted with our *constitution*—The SEWA Way principles, so that you can place yourself in my shoes. These would reveal the foresight, insight, and cross-sight of SEWA’s change management. I have also heard some of my engineers calling it “the corporate theory” of SEWA’s growth.

These principles are intrinsic to SEWA, however, they will also harmonize seamlessly in any corporate arena (where transformational change is required). These principles attune and blend with my leadership style and are emblematic of my professional acquisition of knowledge and skills. Further, this set of principles embody my 15 years of experience in government, semi-government and private companies.

Hence, they reflect my personal core values and the translation of those values into a comprehensive set of operating practices, business strategies, and cultural norms. To avoid potential pitfalls, I not only let them

govern my actions but also my internal compass. Further, they served as the building blocks of my transformation efforts, and the foundation steps of the big change.

My SEWA Way: The 15 Winning Principles

Principle # 1: SMILE

The Happiness Loop

As Thomas Jefferson said in 1809, “The care of human life and happiness is the first and only legitimate object of good government”. Although this statement was uttered more than two centuries ago, recent research suggests that smiling can change your brain and make you feel happy, even if you are in a grim state of affairs. Why is a smile so powerful?

In his best-selling book, *The Happiness Advantage*, Shawn Achor mentions that if we smile often enough, we end up rewiring our brain to make positive patterns more often than negative ones. Achor writes, “Happiness is a work ethic... It’s something that requires our brains to train, just like an athlete has to train.” The more we train, the easier it becomes to think positively, shut out negativity, and, in turn, boost our productivity and creativity, which allows us to perform better at work and life. Hence, we create a Happiness Loop.

Smiling City

There’s no doubt that the leaders of this region were far ahead of their time. To create the same happiness loop, in 1971, His Highness, the late Sheikh Khalid Bin Mohammed Al Qassimi, the ruler of Sharjah, installed a signboard, stating “Smile – You are in Sharjah” in Sharjah’s Al-Arouba Street—the main street. He wished to see a smile on everyone’s face who lived in or came to Sharjah. This positioned Sharjah as the smiling

city in the region. Later, when His Highness Dr. Sheikh Sultan took over in 1973, he supported the idea by laying down a bed of roses running along the two largest bridges in the heart of Sharjah, in Al-Arouba Street, with “Smile, You are in Sharjah” engraved on it.

Thank you, your Highness, for positioning Sharjah as the city of smiles. I strongly believe that smiling is the most peaceful language on Earth, yet also the most powerful, while it is also the only language that does not need any medium of translation to be conveyed. Max Eastman said it right when he stated, “A smile is the universal welcome.”

SEWA Smiles

A big signboard with a smiley on it welcomes people right at the SEWA head office’s entrance. I had it installed with the intention of strengthening His Highness’s vision of spreading smile and happiness. Through this signboard, I aim to encourage positivity in the customer, as well as greet the employee with a smile when they enter or leave SEWA.

This action of mine was an instant hit! You can’t imagine the positive feedback I received from both employees and the local community. I also received a number of posts with the smiley sign on social media channels, such as Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook, with many complimentary comments. In short, the new signboard was so popular that it went viral overnight! This motivated us to install smiley boards at the entrances of all our facilities, including power plants and substations.

At this point, I claim that SEWA is among the government entities dedicated to making customers happy and converting our existing customer base to comprise positive and proactive customers who are willing to provide suggestions and contribute to the development of innovative services that create happiness.

A Smile Really Works

Mr. Ryszard Janicki, head of sales and marketing in TB Hydro, Ontario, Canada, visited SEWA on August 8, 2017, where he was taken on a tour of SEWA brand turnaround journey. He was astonished at the positivity and smiling employees around. He laughed, and then said to me, “I have never seen so many smiling faces in a company in my life, like what I have seen here. So, the smile principle really worked out very well for you.”

What a Legacy

As spreading smiles in and around SEWA was my top priority, for obvious reasons, *Smile* secured 1st place in my SEWA principles list, and that was back in May 2014. My book, *The SEWA Way*, beautifully narrates my struggle and efforts towards propagating smiles around.

In February 2016, I woke up to the news of the formation of a new UAE Cabinet. Her Excellency Ohood bint Khalfan Al Roumi was elected the Minister of State for Happiness. This new ministry aimed to promote the UAE’s plans, programs, and policies to promote the happiness of the UAE society. I had never, even in my wildest dreams, thought that we were the pioneers of “upping” the smile agenda. Today, it makes me proud to see the “smiley icon” adorning the offices of government entities in this region. I feel great because we created the wave and it was embraced by all. What a legacy!

It deserves a mention here that spreading the message of happiness through the “Smile” project hasn’t been easy, and I was even ridiculed and mocked several times for it. In the early days, people would just make fun of it, considering it as trivial and insignificant, while others found it petty and irrelevant. However, as a conscious leader, I knew what I was doing, and was well aware of the power of the smile. Today, as I write this chapter, my smile principle has been welcomed and adapted across the country. Many streets have been renamed as Happiness Streets; a big smiley icon has been laid down on the highway that links all the UAE’s seven emirates, with the last one being in Dubai

city; and even the red lights at all traffic intersections in the emirates of Ajman have been transformed into smileys as part of its effort to spread happiness and positive attitudes among the residents. I feel triumphant and proud to see that SEWA was the pioneer of such a revolutionary agenda.

Smiling Restaurant

One fine evening, I was invited to a local restaurant in Sharjah city. I was pleasantly surprised to see the “smiley face emoticon” glued up on its glass entrance door. Smilingly, I asked the owner, who didn’t know who I was, as to what made him do this. He frankly admitted that he got inspired by the smiley board at SEWA’s entrance. I was rendered speechless and filled with pride.

The Virtue of Smile

A local house, located in Dubai, was undergoing construction work; hence, the town planning department decided to build a temporary pathway around the house for the people to pass by. This caused inconvenience to the pedestrians because the road would get too congested and crowded.

The owner of the house, an Emirati gentleman, realized that this was making passers-by unhappy and a bit frustrated. Therefore, to ease the tension, he put up a smiley board with a very lighthearted and motivational message on it. And guess what, it worked! The passers-by smiled at the placard/board, and forgot about the hindrance. Take it easy!

I often advise people around me that there’s always a reason to smile; we just need to go seek that element of happiness. The following story proves that I seek happiness in trivial things and always find a reason to smile.

The beginning of 2018 was quite electrifying for me. I had a hectic schedule of having to attend the Sharjah University board of trustees

meeting for the entire week, which stretched from January 7-11, 2018. The meeting would start at 8:30 a.m. and would continue till 5 in the evening. I knew this week-long affair would eat up my SEWA work schedule; hence, I decided to come to the SEWA head office as early as 7:00 am to ensure there would be no pending or “piling up” of work, and that regular work processes were not delayed in my absence.

Of course, the hasty days took a toll on my physical and mental health. Everything seemed urgent those days. At SEWA, I had bundles of files to be signed and approved every morning, with no end in sight. I found this quite annoying and maddening, however, eventually, to keep my sanity, I reminded myself of my first principle #1: *Smile*. Against all odds, this worked! I felt quite relieved and positive to face the day ahead.

While driving home one such busy day, I was thinking deeply about the work issues. Immediately, I spotted a truck carrying gallons of water bottles, passing my car. The truck had a big smiley face on it with the message “Drink and Smile,” which brought a smile to my face. I was deeply touched to see my SEWA principle, *Smile*, flashing as a marketing message in front of me.

Talking and Joking

I am aware of the fact that a smile can do wonders to people around you. If I have to describe my typical day in SEWA in one word, I would say, “back-breaking” (yes, you guessed it right). Still, I insist on wrapping up my days talking and joking as I walk out of my office. This helps me to unwind and infuses my employees with positivity and enthusiasm (which is much-needed after a long day’s work).

In the following section, I would like to share an interesting story with you.

March 15, 2017, was one of my busiest days. We were organizing our 2nd Annual Bankers Meet, where bankers, financial institutions, and rating agencies would network and meet. SEWA meets are exclusive,

invitation-only events that bring together top executives from multiple industries to encourage discussions on best practices across the following fields: Energy & Utilities, Financial Services, Media, and Partners.

The content-rich agenda provides a unique combination of cross-industry thought leadership sessions, intimate roundtable discussions, interactive panel sessions, visionary keynotes—all focused on the relevant topics necessary to succeed in a changing world.

The meet proved to be an innovative platform for networking, knowledge sharing, and discussing future challenges and opportunities in the banking sector.

That afternoon, my PR manager, Ahmed, and I had to rush to the South African Visa Office in Wafi center, Dubai to obtain visas to visit Johannesburg, where I was invited as a keynote speaker by The Power & Electricity World Africa Forum, which was held between March 28-29, 2017.

Strange enough, while walking towards the visa center, I noticed that almost everyone was looking and smiling at us. It seemed quite awkward, and we kept wondering what the reason could be. Even when we reached the council's counter, the ladies at the desk gave us an ear-to-ear smile. At that moment, we realized that we were wearing our smile badges, and that was the reason why all the smiles were showering upon us. That's what we call SEWA's repel effect!

Chennai Airport Smiles

August 12, 2017, was undoubtedly a memorable and exciting day. I was invited by the Indian Human Welfare and Vigilance organization to be awarded an honorable Doctorate in Social Sustainability through Innovation. Well, what made me really excited was the 'smiley' icons installed at Chennai airport. The all-too-familiar smiley emojis decorated the walls there, which made me think, *Is the law of attraction working in my favor?* Smiling is my first principle, and I see smiles welcoming me wherever I go.

Smile with the Austrian Ambassador

The smile principle has been successful in creating positive energy both within and external to the organization. The Austrian Ambassador to the UAE, Dr. Andreas Liebmann, paid me a visit on December 21, 2016. The meeting was to strengthen our relationship and share knowledge and industry insights. He was awestruck by SEWA's work environment and the smiley badge that we wear was also to his liking. He willingly wore a SEWA smiley badge and appreciated my endorsement and practice of a universal message.

I am convinced that the organization of the future will look much more different than the organization of today. Since empowered customers will continue to shape/transform our businesses, a learning-enabled culture should be implemented in most organizations. This knowledge has inspired me to put "Teaching and Learning" in the second-ranking on my list of the fifteen principles.

Read on to find out how important teaching and learning is in the brand-building process.

Principle # 2: Teaching and Learning

Where Does Learning Happen?

Learning need not—and most of the time does not—take place in a formal training environment with a certified instructor; rather, most teaching and learning happens informally throughout the working day. As Bossidy and Charan stated in their book, *The Discipline of Getting Things Done*, "Keep in mind that 80% of learning takes place outside the classroom. Every leader and supervisor needs to be a teacher."

Developing talent is becoming an increasingly critical part of a leader's job description. When writing *The SEWA Way*, I initially intended SEWA to become a customer-driven, talent-powered learning organization. In these pages, I feel able to proudly claim that I have achieved most of

my stated intentions, and now is the time to take SEWA a step further in becoming a teaching organization. In his book, *The Leadership Engine*, Noel Tichy writes, “Such organizations are more agile, come up with better strategies, and are able to implement them more effectively.” As a part of the bi-directional learning process, the SEWA line manager’s job is to recognize his subordinates’ developmental needs, to help them cultivate new skills, and to provide them opportunities for professional development and personal growth. This is because, generally speaking, teaching others reinforces earlier learning.

In my opinion, both teaching and learning go hand in hand, one has to be a learner to be a teacher since they are essentially two sides of the same coin. There is no end to learning in life, as Prophet Mohammed (Peace be upon him) said, “Seek knowledge from the cradle to the grave.” Never stop learning because learning is never restricted to only classrooms. It is all about challenging your perspective and coming out of the classroom bubble/delusion. In an organization or any other workplace area, the manager becomes your role model; thus, knowingly or unknowingly, you are constantly learning one thing or the other from your leader, which I would describe as a mutual phenomenon. The following quote by John F. Kennedy sums up my feelings, “Leadership and learning are indispensable to each other.”

At SEWA, we aim to engage ourselves in such a learning process wherein anybody can learn from anyone and embed a culture of openness of ideas and views. Through this practice, we continue to measure our self-motivation to learn something new each day. Here, our learning is bi-directional, and as we learn from each other, the pillars of the organization get stronger and pave the way for an A-class organization.

70:20:10 Explained

The above maxim has a number of different interpretations and applications. The most common view is that it describes how we learn at work. For example, 70% of our learning comes from challenging assignments

and on-the-job experiences, 20% of our learning is developed from our relationships with other people, our networks and the feedback we receive and 10% of our learning comes from formal training, such as courses and workshops.

At SEWA, we incorporate the 70:20:10 rule in our Learning & Development (L&D) functions, and we further seek to organize and model our learning activities spread across the organization around it. It is fair to say that 70:20:10 has captured the attention of the L&D world, because viewing workplace learning through the lens of 70:20:10 can provide solutions for L&D functions. It says that even if you are building the best courses and things like that, you are still only dealing with 10%. What are you doing with the other 90%? Tough to answer, isn't it?

Savvy Saturdays

Here in the UAE, the business working days stretch from Sunday to Thursday. So, Friday and Saturday make our weekend. In my effort to bring SEWA closer to its customers and provide seamless customer-centric services, I announced Saturdays as business working days. However, I made Saturdays the shortest working days, stretching to only 5 hours. It is a day for covering up the week's backlog and pending assignments. Generally, Saturdays are little easy for employees. They are not burdened with much work, and hence they enjoy some breathing space.

Soon enough, my chief knowledge officer, Syeda, shared an exciting idea with me. She was keen on utilizing Saturdays in peer learning and peer-to-peer coaching activities. She proposed the idea to me, which I immediately approved.

As explained above, 20% of our learning is developed from our relationships with other people. So, we had decided to infuse some short learning sessions into Saturdays. Since employees had some spare time, why not make productive use of it? Employees were encouraged to

conduct quick knowledge sharing sessions on each Saturdays. Soon this initiative became everyone's favorite. Employees started flocking from various substations to the head office, just to attend the workshops. The positive response was unbelievable. I renamed our Saturdays to Savvy Saturdays.

Teachable Point of View

Teaching is all about fostering more collaboration between colleagues, which eases the exchange of ideas and views and tickles the critical faculty of our mind, thus leading to innovation, which is critical. It's not about "my point of view" or "your point of view;" rather, we believe in the "teachable point of view." SEWA aims to instill the passion of lifelong learning in its employees, in a world in constant flux and in dire need of positive solutions. In the words of Chip Wilson, "The pursuit of new knowledge generates excitements along with opportunities."

Walking, Talking, Joking

Walking-Talking-Joking became a SEWA tradition the moment I joined, on April 23, 2014. Being the chairman and running such a huge organization, I often go through periods where unexpected events, interruptions, personal concerns, and day-to-day chores cause me to be reactive, rather than acting peacefully and according to a plan. To get back on track and focus on the business at hand, I have had to invest a great deal of time, which often involves sorting out the small stuff.

To fix this, I have adapted a best practice called *walk and talk* meetings, however, I extended this to joking—because work needn't be serious all the time. Haven't you heard the classic phrase, "All work and no play, makes Jack a dull boy?" Having fun and being light-hearted is extremely important to ease out work-induced stress. This practice helps me to make small and quick decisions while leaving my office towards other offices, walking down the corridor, or even on my way to the parking lot.

I break the ice by interacting with my frontline officers, cracking jokes and laughing together. Sure enough, my behavior infuses positive emotions in them and saves me a great deal of time. Not surprisingly, this approach has found favor with many great leaders, such as Steve Jobs and Mark Zuckerberg. So, why not follow the C-suite?

To top it all off, I preach to my managers that one best way to connect with your team members is to get up from your desk, come out of the glass walls of your office and go talk to them, work with them, ask questions, and help them when needed.

Management by Walking Around (MBWA)

John le Carré rightly pointed out that “a desk is a dangerous place from which to view the world.” Management by walking around is a leadership technique that has stood the test of time and can be used by any manager. This is because it opens up more channels of informal communication and produces stronger team dynamics and performance.

Deep Divers

“To understand the tiger, go to the jungle, not the zoo.” Have you heard this phrase before? It may sound funny, but it has a great meaning attached to it. The quote is in alignment with my MBWA practice which in turn fits into SEWA principle #9: *Facing the reality of where we and the organization are now.*

One of our IT teams—*Deep Divers*—conducted research on company email account usage, and found out that around 200 active SEWA employee email accounts had not been accessed in past one year. I was taken aback and felt dismayed because I ensured that each and every SEWA employee gets the best and the latest technical tools and gadgets for them to seamlessly accomplish their work, only to find out that emails are not being read at all. What a mess!

There's one more reason, we discovered that most of the non-active users didn't even need an email ID in the first place. They were mostly in blue collar jobs and doing on-site fieldwork.

Here's another interesting story to illustrate how executives worldwide employ MBWA in their life. Thomas Stemberg, the founder of Staples, believes in seeing the world at ground level. He shops his own stores like a customer would. He asks questions that a customer would ask, such as "Where can I find printer cartridge number 6534?" By being a *mystery shopper*, he would see his organization through the customer's eyes and would find the pain points to improve or rectify.

The reader may debate here that today's modern organizations frequently boast of having satellite offices, remote offices, home offices, virtual offices, and the electronic mail that underpins—and promotes—they. Nevertheless, I hold the view that the human touch is still the best approach.

I fervently believe that most people in an organization want to contribute to its success. This belief made me adapt MBWA, and in return, I reaped enormous benefits. Practicing MBWA at SEWA has helped me to:

- Share and invite good news.
- Invite ideas and opinions to improve operations, products, services, etc.
- Be responsive to problems and concerns.
- Project the image of a coach and mentor.
- Give people on-the-spot help.

Above all, the real picture about the organization is seen from the operational room, not from the boardroom.

Meetings

Do you sit in meetings that just seem to ramble on whilst your other important work mounts on? Ineffective meetings are the devils—the monsters that bug most organizations. And SEWA was no exception! In fact, I was personally affected by such unproductive meetings, to the extent that it ate up almost 25% of my time in SEWA. I was spending too much time working *in* the business and not enough time working *on* the business. It was really bugging me, as some meetings would take more than three hours. I had to do something. I came up with different types of meetings. Let me share some with you.

A show-and-tell Meetings

I had come up with strict rules to manage the meetings, such as: “I have to have daily morning meetings;” “My morning meeting should never run longer than half an hour so we can all get to work;” “This is not a show-and-tell meeting. It is a show-and-share meeting;” and “We talk about the needs of the day and what we need to do, and how to fix problems. If you have nothing to say, don’t speak. Just listen.”

Decision Meetings

These meetings happen early on Sunday morning at 7:30 am sharp with my internal auditor’s team. We talk for over an hour about what is going on and raise other pressing issues to see a bigger picture of the whole organization. Since such meetings are serious, I often poke fun at them or joke around a bit to ease the tension in the room.

Stand-up Meetings

We all know that well-run meetings are effective ways to make decisions, solve problems, and build social bonds. In my search to find the most effective way of conducting meetings in SEWA, I chanced upon, stand-up meetings. A team of psychologists in 1999 conducted research

on the difference between sit-down and stand-up meetings across 56 different groups. As reported in the *Journal of Applied Psychology*: sit-down meetings were 34 percent longer than stand-up meetings, but they produced no better decisions than stand-up meetings. The role of stand-up meetings is not to work on strategic issues or even to resolve an immediate issue. The role is to discuss the issues of the day and identify the ones that need to be addressed outside the meeting room. Since then, I keep reminding my managers to stand-up to get-down to the issue.

Manage up

If confronted with a ‘thorny’ issue or a speculative problem, I try to manage up the situation by doing this little exercise: I ask my employees to put themselves in my shoes and answer the following questions:

- How can I better serve my boss?
- Is there any work that I can do to help my boss work on mega and multi-disciplined projects?
- How can I improve my working relationship with my boss?

This simple and effective exercise helps employees analyze the situation from my standpoint and reaps benefits most of the time.

Smart Meetings

As our Smart meetings needed immediate attention. I found the solution in a European Business Review article that stated a magical “4 Ps” model of effective meetings. I was so moved by it that I incorporated it immediately into my daily work routine. It showed immediate benefits and streamlined most of my day’s meetings, while it also proved to be a life-saving piece of information. I can’t help but share it with you in the following info graph:

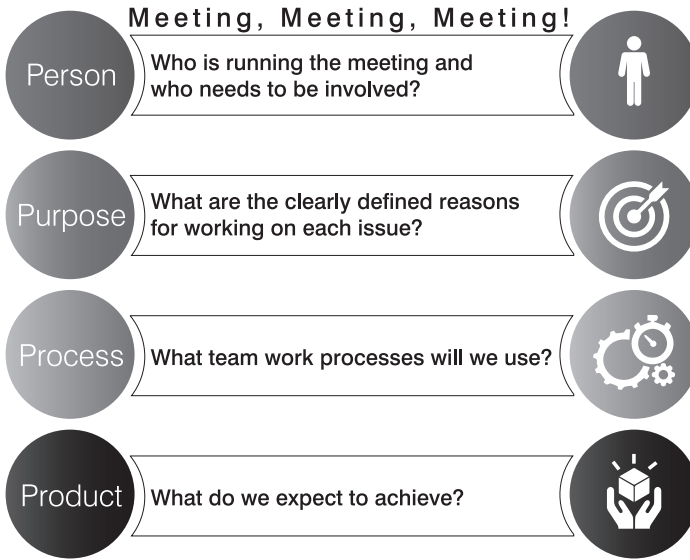


Figure 1.1 The 4Ps Model

Whenever you are about to engage in meetings, or any form of teamwork, it pays to set out the above 4 Ps, which I have highlighted in the following paragraphs:

Person: Having a clearly identified leader marshals activities enormously. The other job for the “person” is to clarify who needs to be involved in each part of the agenda. In SEWA’s case, the “person” was not necessarily the agenda owner, the team leader, or even the subject expert, but simply someone who is good at setting and keeping a focus on the task at hand.

Purpose: The Purpose question provides a strategic analysis of what you need to be working *on* at the team level in order to achieve your business plan. Further, this question is a relevance check that helps to maintain balanced teamwork. For us, asking ‘Why’ helps to bring clarity, priority, and a sense of ownership into the meetings, which was heavily lacking.

Process: The “process” is linked with the “purpose.” In fact, the process you use to achieve your purpose will be driven by the nature of the purpose. This is where SEWA teams were going wrong. To ease it out, we asked a simpler question: “Is your purpose more strategic or more operational? Are you looking to set or refine direction (strategic) or report on progress or deviations against plan (operational)?” Processes for working with strategic purposes are, of course, different from operational ones. This set the tone right for us right from the beginning.

Product: The final P, and in many ways, the most important one, is having ‘the end in mind’. If the Purpose is at the strategic level (the ‘why’), and the Product is at the operational level (the ‘what’), then you won’t achieve a thing. Specifying the “product” at the start of the meeting allows us to arrive at a clear destination.

Following the above 4 Ps led us to better, more result-oriented, and shorter meetings. To put them into practice, we put up wallpapers of the 4 Ps in all our meeting rooms, to serve as reminders to adhere to them. Doing this not only saved us time, but also energy, morale, and oxygen to focus on other priorities. Now, you have to decide what will you do with the 25% of the time you will save?

Russell Stokes Exclaimed!

When GE Global CEO Mr. Russell Stokes visited me on December 11, 2017, he was quite fascinated with the 4 Ps model for meetings. In fact, he got so hooked on this particular model that he took a picture with me standing with the model in my meeting room. As a part of the SEWA culture, I personally took him around the SEWA tour. I had explained the PDCA, 80/20 principle, when I came to this model. Then, he stopped me and requested if he could take a picture with his personal smartphone, because it would help him sort out his meetings.

His gesture brightened up my day because the best practices of SEWA are being acknowledged and appreciated by global CEOs around the

world. This was a clear signal that we are on the right path of the brand turnaround venture. I got confident about the positive outcome of my efforts.

Grab-and-Go

Today, leadership is all about conversation and smart communication. Smart leaders are always on the lookout to find ways to use conversation to manage the flow of information both honestly and transparently. In order to quickly cut out the nonsense and get to the crux of the matter, we practice quick *grab-and-go* (quick and convenient) sessions to exchange bite-sized organizational knowledge. This may sound like a spur-of-the-moment decision-making style, but it's not! In offering advice to a colleague in the hallway, answering an employee's question via email, and providing perspectives based on past experience during a meeting, these techniques form only a few of the many types of grab-and-go learning situations in SEWA. This practice is simple and conducive and further encourages the sharing of knowledge and experiences across teams and the organization and also shortens the learning curve on time.

KISS Meetings

Being detail-oriented, I wanted my direct reports to update me on their progress without consuming much of my time. In an effort to limit myself to on-point discussions with my team, I encouraged KISS (**keep it short and simple meetings**). Jokingly, I would tell my employees, "If you can't summarize the agenda of the meeting in two sentences, then you don't have an agenda at all!"

This practice cleared a lot of bottleneck meetings. In fact, this principle can help you ace every meeting.

Learn or Die

In this tumultuous era, where *uncertainty* pervades over everything, only an innovative learning organization can survive. This is simply because of its ability to respond quickly to change and distinguish itself from its competitors, thus creating a position in the consumers/customers mind. Continual learning is the key to how you continue to grow in life. Dr. Edward Hess says it clearly in the title of his book: *Learn or Die*. The book examines the process of learning from an individual and an organizational standpoint. From an individual perspective, the book discusses the cognitive, emotional, motivational, attitudinal, and behavioral factors that promote better learning. Organizationally, *Learn or Die* focuses on the kinds of structures, culture, leadership, employee learning behaviors, and human resource policies that are necessary to create an environment that enables critical and innovative thinking, learning conversations, and collaboration.

No Email!

Here's an inside story: I once instructed one of my HR officers to send an email to her colleague regarding the recruitment procedure of a candidate. Days passed by, and still I hadn't heard anything from her. Curious to know the reason, I dug deeper and found that the HR officer didn't know how to send an e-mail using Outlook. Given the fact that an Outlook email ID was created for her, she still preferred to work with physically drafted papers/letters. For a moment, I was at a loss for words! How is it *plausible* to not 'know' how to send an e-mail in today's tech-savvy world. However, I soon realized that certain people need to rid themselves of their fear of technology and embrace it. I jokingly told her, "Learn or die!"

For the Love of Reading

In Finland, there's an amazing example of public sculpture of a man drowning but not letting go of the book he is reading. The beautiful

stone sculpture caught my eye because we shared the same love of reading. The statue also had the following quote inscribed on it: “Read, even if you sink.”

SEWA Reads

The next thing that caught my attention was a mid-sized meeting room that had been converted into a dumping station where old files and PCs were stacked. I felt that was definitely the wrong place to store such things, as they should either be placed in recycling bins or filed in the right place. *What the hell is going on in this place?* I asked myself. After some thought, I decided to clean up the room and transform it into a knowledge paradise, where management, motivational, and self-help books are kept for employees to come and read in their free time. You can’t imagine how popular this place became with employees for reading and holding small meetings to share and exchange their knowledge. It made me proud to say that SEWA reads.

In order to build SEWA as an innovative learning organization, my top priority is to personally seek employees who are willing and able to learn, have open minds, and embrace change. I am fully aware that today’s best and brightest employees want more from their jobs as they are constantly seeking growth opportunities to develop their abilities.

Thank You Energy Market Company (EMC)

Capacity building was a part of the MOU signed with Energy Market Company (EMC), Singapore, back in October 2016. EMC is the exchange for wholesale electricity trading in Singapore, providing a transparent and competitive trading platform. Early this year, a team of young SEWA engineers traveled to Singapore for a two-week seminar, where they received on-the-job-training, gained, hands-on experience, and had access to the latest industry insights.

SEWA Edutainment Trip

SEWA edutainment trips are a balance between fun, excitement, entertainment, and education. Who gets on board such trips? Usually, I handpick the outperformers, employees who had gone that extra mile, and those who performed extraordinarily well throughout the year. This cultivates emotional positive energy, while the employees also feel appreciated, have fun, enjoy their time, and acquire the best practices across the sea.

We had a similar edutainment trip in collaboration with Energy Market Company (EMC). The key business priorities in the edutainment trip included: the availability of market systems, accurate pricing and security of settlement, the provision of market information, compliance to market rules, and evolution of the market framework.

My sincere appreciation extends to EMC, and specifically, to Mr. Tan Liang Ching, Senior Vice President, Business Development, for his great efforts.

Principle # 3: Learn from Experience

This principle closely relates to the former, as learning from experiences is very important for any organization attempting to build a well-recognized brand.

Given the rapid pace of change that confronts managers, employees, and employers today, it is critical that they develop the capacities to learn from current work situations and adapt this learning to new situations. Executives worldwide know that failure is an integral part of breakthrough innovation, as supported by Albert Einstein when he said, “Anyone who has never made a mistake has never tried anything new.” However, the major issue concerns how to encourage the right kind of mistakes. From my experience, I often tell my employees, “Life isn’t fair: Don’t get affected by failures.”

Projects, Projects, and Projects

You might be wondering why have I repeated the word projects in the subtitle above; here's the reason: when I took over the chairman's position at SEWA I was confronted with *mammoth-size* challenges, particularly with the organization's projects. The SEWA projects were draining/sapping a lot of resources, money, and time. What's more, they gave me sleepless nights, sleep-walking nights, and nightmarish nights! I was confronted with projects that had experienced massive scope creeps. In fact, they had been on 'no-scope' mode for ages, I guess! On the other hand, SEWA also had some 'never-ending' projects, some of which were *creeping*; those were always-on projects. Finally, some were 'mal-nutritioned' projects; that is, those on the verge of death owed to a lack of 'healthy-balanced' resources. This haunted me! Here's a list of major complications I had to put up with during my initial days at SEWA:

1. Lack of visibility and clarity in all projects
2. Insufficient resources (funding and personnel)
3. Unclear project objectives
4. Overruns of schedule and cost
5. Starting projects but not finishing them on time
6. Managing scope creep
7. Poor communication
8. Non-collaborative working atmosphere

Face the Issues

In a nutshell, the organization was losing its focus. Though I had listed down the dissonances, this was only half of the story—the remainder concerned how to tackle such mighty challenges. I knew that I was the lone *warrior* and *savior*. In this situation, I reminded myself of a quote

by Aldous Huxley, “Experience is not what happens to you. It’s what you do with what happens to you.” But how? To straighten things out, I capitalized on my intellect, information, and knowledge garnered in managing differently-sized projects during my entire working life. So, as you have probably guessed, I devised a SEWA Project Management Model.

Take Action

The above challenges were like a shot in the arm. My priority then, was to *redress* the mega projects. Being an academician and a corporate leader, I borrowed my thoughts and wisdom from both the theoretical and the practical background, and viewed SEWA projects in my own way. Now was the time to slice down the challenges into bite-sized chunks.

Lastly, in order to ‘size-up’ the projects and find that breakthrough moment, I sketched out a fool-proof plan that would put the projects back on track and mitigate the associated challenges.

Being a huge organization housing over 5000 employees, as well as rendering electricity, water, and natural piped gas to a population of over 1.5 million people was bound to involve a host of long-term projects. Hence, I began with the long-term complex projects with the intention of either increasing future revenue or reducing future expenditure.

Go/No-Go Decision

To make my job easier when deciding whether to accept or reject a project, I considered the following critical questions:

- Does the project present a sound commercial argument?
Let’s weigh up the pros and cons.
- What are the risks involved? Let’s evaluate the risks.

Besides evaluating the above concerns, I also considered whether the project fell under the category of a brownfield or a greenfield project. Demarcating a brownfield project from a green field was crucial and set the project on track from the outset.

Defining the Grey Area

Today, the term *Brownfield Project* is used in many industries, including software development. The brownfield indicates starting a project based on prior work or to rebuild (engineer) a product from an existing one. In a Brownfield Project, the structure would sometimes need to be demolished or renovated.

In contrast, the term *Greenfield Project* implies a work that is not the continuation of a prior work. In infrastructure, projects implemented on unused lands, where there is no need to remodel/refurbish or demolish an existing structure, are called Greenfield Projects.

Once I ‘guesstimated’ the above, I applied my SEWA project management model to the concerned project in the hope to achieve the fruition of my mission.

Prepare yourselves, for I will now present some profound material. Have a look at the infograph below. Create a visual representation of it in your mind, and then experience it. The effect can be nothing short of transformational.

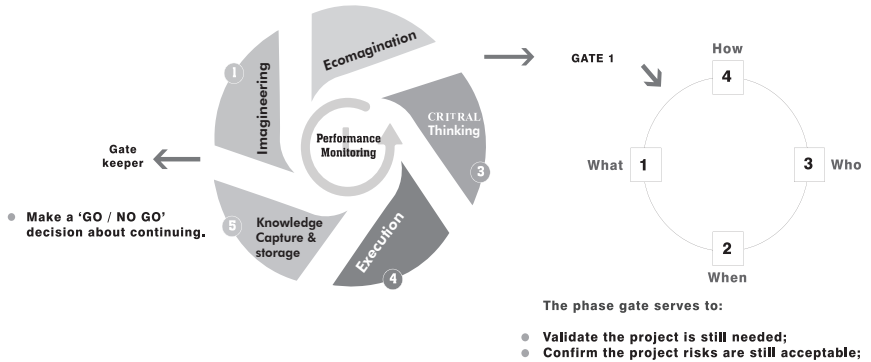


Figure 1.2 SEWA Project Management Model

By now, your mind must have explored the dynamics of the model. Let's move on to explore it further through *my* eyes. The SEWA project management model consists of five stages, with stage-gate reviews between each stage, and performance monitoring encircling the model from the start till the end.

Why Stage-Gates Reviews?

This is the first question I get asked whenever I present the model. Why stage-gate reviews? My answer has always been logical and simple: the project phases are connected by virtual stage-gates. At the completion of every stage, before we transition to the next stage, the stage-gate review serves the following purposes:

- To validate the project's relevance,
- To confirm the acceptance of project risks, and
- To make a 'go/no-go' decision about continuing to the next stage.

At each stage-gate review, the continuation of a project is decided by a stage-gate keeper (typically a team member of the project) who is skilled with the knowledge and expertise. He/she is *not* necessarily the project manager. The stage-gate keeper answers the following questions:

- What technical/non-technical work needs to be done at each stage?
- When are the deliverables to be generated at each stage?
- Who is involved at each stage?
- How to control and approve each phase?

His/her decision is based on the information available at the time, upon analyzing the business case, and on the risks involved and the availability of necessary resources (e.g., budget, other resources, competent staff, etc.)

Now, let's get back to the model. The model consists of five stages:

- Imagineering
- Ecomagination
- CRITRAL Thinking
- Execution
- Knowledge Capture & Storage

Performance Monitoring

Performance monitoring is an ongoing process at the heart of the SEWA project management model. This starts at the inception of the project and continues throughout the model's stages. It helps to prevent *scope creep* (in project management, scope creep refers to changes and continuous or uncontrolled growth in a project's scope at any point after the project begins) and ensures that the project accomplishes what it sets out to do on time and within the allotted budget. This allows us to make the necessary adjustments regarding resource allocation or budget. Furthermore, it clarifies any comparisons made between our original plan and current progress.

Stage 1: Imagineering

This is an old technique that has been used by numerous big corporates around the world, with Disney being one of the most famous examples in its combination of the words *imagination* and *engineering*.

Imagineering means the implementation of creative ideas into practical forms. In other words, imagineering is letting your imagination soar, and then engineering it back down to earth.

In PowerPoint presentations, all projects can be made to look simple, when in reality the situation is much more complex. Failure to see those complexities leads to the *underestimation* of schedule and budget, plus a host of other ailments. In my view, any project is created twice. The first creation is the *mental* creation, while the second is the *physical* creation. The Imagineering process enabled us to visualize both creations and witness success.

Visualization

SEWA embeds the principle of “learning before, during, and after” in each and every program and project’s life cycle. Most humans are visual creatures, anyway. *Visualization* is the ability to see the *mental* creation of the project. Visualizing allows the SEWA project team to understand the scheduling situation so that they can react or respond within a short period of time, according to whether the input conditions change or not. Thus, visualizing helps managers make difficult decisions, even in unstructured environments.

Project management is an ever-evolving discipline. A lot has changed since the time I did a crash course on project management at the Stephen Covey Institute back in the early 2000s. At the time, I had just been promoted to an executive role, but my interest in project management pushed me to take up that crash course.

Project management still interests me, and I keep myself updated by reading most of the latest discoveries in this field. One such new tool that impressed me was ‘The Cusp-Tool’, which is a Premortem tool introduced by Gary Klein and published in the Harvard Business Review in September 2007. I have summarized the tool in the next page:

The CUSP-Tool: Premortem Tool

In a project Premortem, prior to the project launch, the project team imagines the project has failed and brainstorms all of the reasons that could lead to this failure. The team then develops plans to mitigate these reasons for failure. After that, the team has an intensive discussion about the pitfalls.

At SEWA, we adapted the CUSP-Tool, which reaped enormous benefits. Moreover, it paved our way towards the ‘initiation’ phase of SEWA projects.

Initiation

The initiation phase takes place at the beginning of the project. In this phase, the idea for the project was explored and elaborated. The goal of this phase was to examine the feasibility of the project. In addition, decisions were made concerning who was to carry out the project, which party (or parties) would be involved, and whether the project had an adequate base of support among those involved.

Next, we formulated our SEWA project charter.

Project charter

A *project charter* is a formal, typically short document that described our project in its entirety in terms of what the objectives were, how they would be carried out, and who the stakeholders were. It was a crucial ingredient in planning out the project because it was used throughout the project lifecycle.

The SEWA project charters vary in specific content, but typically document the following:

- Reasons for the project’s initiation.
- Benefits of the project.

- Objectives and constraints of the project.
- High-level scope statement describing all expected deliverables.
- Who the main stakeholders are.
- Identified risks.
- General overview of the budget.

I felt the need of *another* tried and tested tool. As one of my philosophies says: “We cannot solve today’s problems with yesterday’s solutions.”

Hence, I clamped my fist on BOSCARD.

BOSCARD

The BOSCARD is a strategic planning tool used to give the terms-of-reference for new projects. The acronym stands for **b**ackground, **o**bjectives, **s**cope, **c**onstraints, **a**ssumptions, **r**isks, and **d**eliverables. These headings are typical in terms-of-reference and project initiation documents.

Background: Provide background information that includes the reasons for creating the project and mentions the key stakeholders who will benefit from the project’s outcome.

Objectives: Describe the project goals and link each of them with related, S.M.A.R.T.E.R project objectives.

Scope: Provide a high-level description of the features and functions that characterize the product, service, or result the project is meant to deliver.

Constraints: Identify the specific constraints or restrictions that limit or place conditions on the project, especially those associated with project scope.

Assumptions: Specify all factors that are, for planning purposes, considered to be true. During the planning process, these assumptions will be validated.

Risks: Outline the risks identified at the start of the project. Include a quick assessment of the significance of each risk and how to deal with them.

Deliverables: Define the key deliverables the project required to achieve the stated objectives.

When initiating a project, it is important that all the parties involved agree upon a detailed list of objectives the project was to achieve before it started. Failure to gain formal agreement almost always leads to some expectations not being met.

The nice thing about the BOSCARD was that it provided a quick way of delivering all the necessary project information to the stakeholders, without having to complete a full project initiation document.

It was a lot more *digestible* for busy stakeholders who might not have time to wade through a lengthy project initiation document when looking for a quick, but detailed overview of the proposed project.

The 5 Whys

At this stage of the project, we conducted *The 5 Whys*, also known as ‘The root cause analysis’. I have shared a self-explanatory infographic below. It is simple yet effective and is guaranteed to reap enormous benefits for your organization. Give it a try!

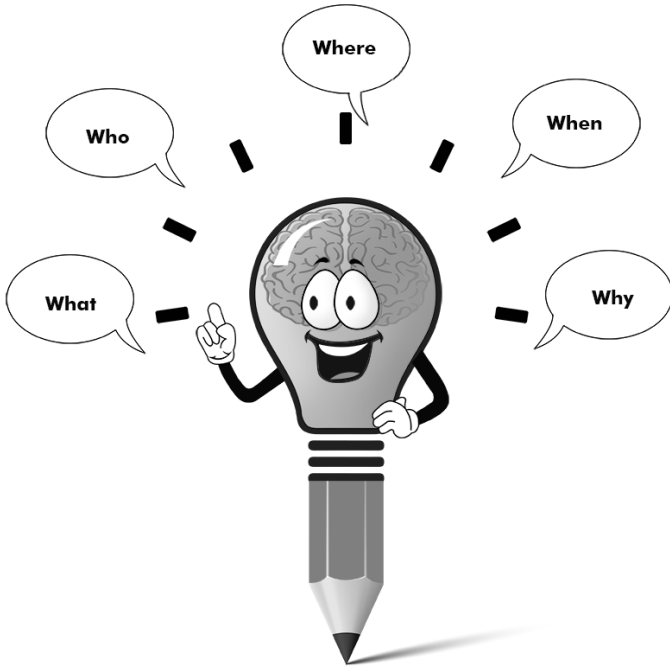


Figure 1.3 The 5 Whys

We asked several other questions, such as: Why this project? Why at this time? What were our expected results? Then, we set the expected deliverables and smarter goals.

Define Crystal Clear Goals

Most of us have set goals for ourselves in life. Goals help us to focus our minds on achieving what we set out to do. Most of us are aware that blurry goals lead to blurry places, and that setting goals makes us more likely to attain what we want. As the saying goes, “Without having a goal it’s difficult to score.” Having said that, the struggle may become easier if your goals are well thought out: People set S.M.A.R.T goals. At SEWA, we have taken this concept further by creating S.M.A.R.T.E.R goals.

The acronym **S.M.A.R.T.E.R** has many variations, including this:

S—Specific, significant, stretching.

M—Measurable, meaningful, motivational.

A—Attainable, action-oriented, agreed upon.

R—Realistic, relevant, result-oriented.

T—Timely, tangible, traceable.

E—Explicit, encouraging.

R—Resolving, radical.

Making your smarter list can be fun, but remember that the completed list will be very useful. Usually, a S.M.A.R.T.E.R session was followed by constructing an action plan to seize the opportunity at hand. What happened if the action plan didn't work? We changed the plan, but *never* the goal. Therefore, it was necessary to develop a rock-solid goal and remain open to altering the plan, both when and if required. Being a utility giant, SEWA had a lot of short-term and long-term projects to execute.

The Stage-Gate Keeper

I will now share the story of a successful project accomplished by the Imagineering Department of SEWA. The project focused on the construction of the 32/11 KV Substation. The project team did a brilliant job in the Imagineering phase, particularly in terms of their *picture-perfect* visualization and engineering efforts. And they thought that moving on to the next stage would come easily. However, to their dismay, the stage-gate keeper, who happened to be the financial controller, popped up and said, “Dear team, well done! You have hit the nail here; however, you will only transition to the next stage when you challenge me and find an answer to my questions.”

He was flashing his beefed-up muscle like an invincible *Sumo Wrestler*. The stage-gate keeper made it a point that, in order to get a green signal, the project team had to defeat him by answering his questions. Looking at him, the team really wished they had *Aladdin's genie* to answer the questions and defeat the sumo wrestler. The following four challenging questions were pitted against the team:

1. Have you incorporated lean management in your process? If yes, then how?
2. How did you intend to incorporate value engineering?
3. What about systems thinking? Did you consider the big picture?
4. And, which principles of target value design would you implement?

The Heat Is On

Clearly, no one could make heads or tails of the above questions. Hence, a disquieting atmosphere prevailed! The project team member's eyes widened with fear and urgency as they turned to face each other in search of answers, leaving a prevailing sense of numbing chaos all around. Some team members rolled up their sleeves to punch back the answers at the wrestler, while the others squirmed away in fear. To them, the wrestler seemed invincible.

After a while, they realized that in order to defeat the opponent, they first had to team up against him.

And what followed next? A dance. Not just any dance, but 'The Haka dance.'

The Haka dance is an ancient posture dance of the New Zealand Māori tribe that was traditionally used to prepare a war party for battle. It is a posture dance performed by a group and characterized by vigorous

arm movements, stamping feet, and rhythmic shouting. Dance haka were originally performed by warriors before a battle, proclaiming their strength and prowess in order to intimidate the opposition. The ferocious nature of the haka created a united frenzy among the war party, preparing them mentally and physically for the reality of war and impending conflict.

If you are still trying to figure out the right answers to the questions thrown by the sumo wrestler aka the stage-gate keeper, let me lend you a helping hand by defining the terms used:

1. Value Engineering: Value engineering includes taking an *in-depth* look at the functions of any equipment, facilities, services, systems, and materials used in the project. This part of project management requires an analysis to be performed on each of these components. When analyzing these components, managers will be looking for ways to improve cost effectiveness without negatively affecting the quality, reliability, performance, or reputation of the product or service.

2. Lean Management: Lean is the elimination of waste. However, more importantly, lean means continuous improvement in all work processes. SEWA supports the concept of continuous improvement, so lean management was a must-have. Improving the work process(es) by those who do the work, or by those who are on-the-spot, is the essence of lean management.

3. Systems Thinking: Systems thinking has been defined as an approach to problem-solving that attempts to balance holistic thinking and reductionistic thinking by taking the overall system into account, as well as its parts.

4. Target Value Design (TVD): This contains three key elements:

- A feasibility study at the beginning of the project (ideally with the key project participants) to determine SEWA client's values and constraints;

- Setting the target cost to the amount that SEWA's client is willing or able to pay; and
- Designing a construction to that target cost.

Applying this technique promises to help the construction projects raise the number of successful outcomes by allowing the project team to effectively control project costs.

Now, let me transport you back to the scene of action. Since you 'know the ropes' and are well-acquainted with the terminologies, while my project team seemed as nonplussed as ever, why don't you help my project team out of the sumo wrestler's clamp?

Once the team found answers to the questions, the sumo wrestler would then give them a 'green signal' to move ahead to the second stage of the project management model.

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Stage 2: Ecomagination

This term doesn't need much explanation. It has secured a safe place in business dictionaries worldwide and is widely used in manufacturing companies. GE first introduced the term *ecomagination* to the market on May 9, 2005. GE describes the term *ecomagination* as a business strategy to deliver clean technology solutions that drive positive economic and environmental outcomes for customers and the world.

Why do we Ecomagine?

Prior to my tenure at SEWA, the organization tended not to adhere to sustainability principles much. Also, many products, processes, and projects were not 100% environmentally friendly. Being a *sustainalist* (a sustainability specialist), I infused eco-friendly and environmental psyche in all the functional and manufacturing units of SEWA. On the

other hand, my prime intention was to rebrand SEWA as a Green Giant, which I will elaborate further in chapter 8. Therefore, we adapted the ecomagination philosophy.

At SEWA, we strongly believe that whatever innovative products or services we introduce to the society must be safe and will not harm either people or the environment. In addition, we aim for our products to help us meet the pressing environmental challenges of today. We define ecomagination as the ability of the mind to be creative or resourceful with the aim to find environmentally-friendly solutions. Our ecomagination progress depends on the following principles:

- Conscious leadership.
- Co-creation and collaboration with like-minded companies and suppliers.
- Agile innovation.
- Lean six sigma.
- Advanced technology and digitalization.

SEWA Ecomagination Statement

Keeping the above principles in mind, it is important to ensure that ecomagination was one of the main stages of our project management model. For this reason, I formulated the Ecomagination Statement for SEWA, which is described below:

“Ecomagination is SEWA’s top strategic plan to reduce environmental impact at a local scale through providing clean and green solutions for our community and through our own operations. As a part of this strategy, we are investing in cleaner technology and business innovation, developing solutions with our partners to create a cleaner, greener, and smarter tomorrow.”

Benchmarking

At this stage, it was very important to conduct in-depth research to find the best fit solution for the projects at hand. In so doing, we used a tool called benchmarking to bring the best out of our projects while conducting our business as green as possible.

Robert C. Camp, in his book, *Benchmarking: The Search for Industry Best Practices that Lead to Superior Performance*, states that benchmarking, by way of a working definition, can be best described as, “The search for industry best practices that lead to superior performance.”

The definition that I like most is: Benchmarking encourages an external view to ensure correctness in setting objectives and developing the internal actions necessary to achieve those objectives. Further, benchmarking also involves key process steps that are indigenous to any industry. At SEWA, we benchmarked the following areas:

- 1. Planning:** Identify what required benchmarking.
- 2. Analysis:** Determine the current performance gaps.
- 3. Integration:** Establish functional goals.
- 4. Action:** Develop action plans.
- 5. Maturity:** Practice fully integrated action plans into processes.

The above is only a summary of my project benchmarking framework. For an elaborated explanation, you may refer to my book on Project Management: *Simplifying Project Management and Mitigating Risk*.

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Stage 3: CRITRAL Thinking

Critical thinking is defined as the objective analysis of facts to form a judgment, while *lateral thinking* is defined as solving problems through

an indirect and creative approach. Both are vital in and instrumental to problem-solving situations. My self-coined term, CRITRAL Thinking, blends both types of thinking. CRITRAL Thinking is a unique blend of ‘critical and lateral’ thinking. Critical thinkers analyze the nitty-gritty of any issue on the basis of facts and figures, whereas lateral thinkers—also known as creative thinkers—look beyond the face-value and come out with solutions that are not mundane.

Why this type of thinking?

A utility has both technically and non-technically driven projects, as well as those that are unique. Depending on the project, either a linear or a multi-disciplined way of thinking is necessary. To run them right, you need people with a specialized type of thinking. This is a major challenge that project managers face most of the time. If you are a project manager, you will most likely know exactly what I am talking about! However, fret not, for I have the solution.

In our project management model, this was the team building stage. First, we identified the key purpose of the team, which may vary from project to project. Some very common reasons for the team to come together were to interact with each other’s ideas and share common beliefs and to leverage their collective strengths, perspectives, skills, and experiences to achieve a set of commonly-shared goals. The following keywords have been formed as a result of team building in SEWA:

Synergy: Team synergy was attained when the team could collectively generate more creative ideas than individuals could generate. This phenomenon occurred through the *cross-fertilization* of ideas, where an idea or suggestion from one person could stimulate spontaneous ideas and suggestions from the other team members. As a result, the output was greater than the input.

Problem Solving: Teams were able to apply their range of complementary skills with brainstorming and synergy to generate a number of possible solutions and alternatives.

Commitment: The best decisions were collective decisions because once a project team had made a collective decision, the team members would be committed to supporting the agreed course of action owing to mutual peer pressure.

Plan and control: When people worked in project teams it was easier for the project manager to plan and control the work. Teamwork enabled the work of individual team members to be organized and controlled cogently by other team members.

Succession: Succession planning enabled project teams to continue to perform when team members left the team. This happens only when you have a *tight-knit* team.

Closeout Reports: Teams were able to analyze and scrutinize their past performances. This helped the team to build on its strengths and support its weaknesses. It was vital in managing mega projects.

What makes a successful Project Manager?

A strong project team coupled with the right skills isn't enough. A team leader with the right interpersonal capabilities is also paramount. He/she ought to have the perfect mix of both hard and soft skills (i.e., a brave heart and a brilliant mind). The bullet point list below details the common global traits required to excel at being a project team leader:

- *Highly intelligent* but not too clever.
- A *visionary* but also a risk assessor.
- *Forceful* but also sensitive to people's feelings.
- *Dynamic* but also patient.
- *Fluent communicator* but also a good listener.
- *Decisive* but also reflective.

- *Expert* in a wide range of different fields.
- *Pioneering* but also an expert in task delegation.

Many people have often asked about the effective use of my CRITRAL thinking philosophy. In response, I have always given the same answer. The method works best when it is used with other unconventional tools, such as:

Brain-Steering

This is a powerful new approach to creating better ideas by taking traditional brainstorming and “steering” it in more productive directions. Business strategists (and brothers) Shawn and Kevin Coyne developed a breakthrough approach to developing better ideas. *Brainsteering* is a comprehensive, research-based, tried-and-tested approach to the principal challenge in business and life: how to consistently and effectively create powerful new ideas. In their book, the authors argue that brainstorming is an unfocused activity that takes people’s creative energy and scatters it in all directions, rarely producing breakthrough ideas. Meanwhile, *Brainsteering* takes people’s creative energy and steers it in a consistently productive direction by following two key principles. First, by asking what they called the “Right Questions,” people are able to approach their ideation challenge from new perspectives. Second, by using what they called the “Right Process,” people are able to add just enough structure to the process to focus their efforts. Following these two principles has consistently helped people come up with ideas they could never previously have imagined.

In short, *Brainsteering* reflects the way people actually think and work in problem-solving situations, and why intertwining creative (right brain) and analytic (left brain) thinking can generate powerful new paths to ideas, which resonates with my CRITRAL Thinking philosophy. Isn’t it?

Reverse Thinking

Have you ever heard of it? Reverse thinking is interesting and fun. It works wonders, especially if you are stuck in a negative thought spiral. The SEWA project teams used this technique to avoid getting trapped in thinking that solutions had to be realistic or feasible. This tool helped us to open up our minds, to think big, and not allow ourselves to be limited by what was possible.

How to Perform

To perform reverse thinking, we identified and stated the problem and then reversed the problem by asking, “How can we make the situation even worse?” Then, we used regular brainstorming to develop various ideas and suggestions. And now for the twist: we reversed the suggested solutions so they became solutions to our initial problem.

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Stage 4: Execution

This was a critical stage of the project as almost 80% of the work was carried out here. Now it was time to put the plan into action. The plan served as the main communication vehicle to ensure that everyone was aware and cognizant of the project objectives and how they would be accomplished.

Importance of Project Schedules

Project schedules grew out of the basic documents that initiated the project (i.e., the Project Charter), which included start and end dates, budget information, and the scope statement. SEWA Managers often cited that failure to deliver projects on time was one of their biggest challenges. Time has the least amount of flexibility; it passes no matter what happens on a project. At SEWA, project schedule issues were the

main reasons for conflicts in projects, particularly during the second half of their duration.

Mega projects equated mega challenges. Hence, I focused on breaking them down into several mini projects using the ‘slice and dice’ method. This method entails dividing a quantity of information into smaller parts to analyze it more closely or in different ways.

Why do we need Slice and Dice?

Slice and dice refers to a strategy for segmenting, viewing, and understanding data in a database. Users “slice and dice” by cutting a large segment of data into smaller parts and repeating this process until arriving at the right level of detail for analysis. Slicing and dicing information helped us to further analyze the business, thereby enabling us to get the results we needed. Furthermore, the method presented data in new and diverse perspectives. In summary, since I prefer being data-driven as well as data-informed, this process proved effective.

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Stage 5: Knowledge Capture and Storage

This stage was the last, as well as one of the most important stages of the SEWA project management model. In essence, it was the closeout stage of SEWA’s projects; that is, the stage of wrapping things up and handing over the ownership to others in the organization or stakeholders.

Final Project Documentation

At this stage, a plethora of lessons were learned for future projects. This required conducting lessons-learned studies to examine what went well and what didn’t. Through this type of analysis, the wisdom of experience was transferred back to the project organization, which in turn

helped future project teams. The closeout document answered three important questions:

- 1) What should we keep doing?
- 2) What should we stop doing?
- 3) What should we start doing?

SEWA Knowledge Management System

The answers were vital, and simply jotting them down on a piece of paper would not be justifiable. The immense knowledge deserved to be archived so that it could later be pulled out of the archived library/system and put to use. After all, we cannot anticipate the value someone else will find in our knowledge, can we? In light of this, I needed a comprehensive and systematic documentation system. In short, we were aiming for a cohesive knowledge management system.

At that point, we began our extensive research, looking for global organizations that have put their hands on proven, and tried and tested knowledge management systems. Our tireless research directed us to NASA's Chief Knowledge Officer's website. I immediately downloaded a couple of interesting publications pertaining to my pressing need. The NASA knowledge journal gave us a great head-start, while the NASA' Knowledge Toolbox, which contained tools, resources, and information for individuals and teams to enhance their knowledge-sharing efforts on real-life projects and programs, was a treasure trove of project stories. These stories later formed the basis of SEWA's knowledge management system.

What is KMS?

KMS stands for Knowledge Management System. Practically, KMS involves identifying and mapping an organization's intellectual assets, generating new knowledge, making the knowledge available to everyone, sharing best practices, and using technology to assist it. SEWA

was in dire need of a KMS, primarily because we wanted to foster continuous improvement, ensure 24/7 access to information, improve productivity, create a learning organization by linking knowledge, and create sustainability by promoting organizational communication—a pretty long list! To ensure that SEWA KMS was real, effective, and not merely symbolic, I created the SEWA Knowledge Management Model.

SEWA Six Pillars of Knowledge Management

As Peter Drucker asserts, “The most important contribution management needs to make in the 21st century is to increase the productivity of knowledge work and knowledge worker.”

The SEWA project management model reaped huge benefits, and a wealth of information gained from managing our projects led us to create the KM Model. Keeping the benefits of knowledge management in mind, I devised SEWA’s six pillars of knowledge management. Below is a brief summary of the six pillars:

1. *Document:* To conduct lessons-learned studies to examine what went well and what didn’t. Through this type of analysis, the wisdom of experience was transferred back to the project organization, which, in turn, helped future project teams in improving their performance.
2. *Champions:* Champions encompass talented employees with a focused vision and the aptitude to align knowledge management with business tactics, ushering strong and dedicated leadership to SEWA. SEWA KM champions played an instrumental role in managing the efficient functioning of the SEWA knowledge toolbox.
3. *Promoters:* The promoters developed, promoted, and facilitated organizational knowledge, while they also created, collaborated, and aligned the operational processes and SEWA strategy with the KM framework.

4. *Technology*: Technology is the main tool that leveraged the SEWA KM framework. All technical solutions added value to our processes, while the simultaneous lack of them further added to failure. Knowing this, it is clear to see that technology was clearly fundamental and that having the latest machines and programs is a must.

5. *Learning*: The best tools and strategies could fall flat if the desire to learn and acquire knowledge is missing. Learning is a never-ending process here at SEWA, and I have emphasized the importance of education by making it an important pillar of SEWA's KM.

6. *Sharing*: Knowledge should be *free-flowing*. Hindering knowledge from being shared with each other is detrimental to any organization. In light of this, I consider knowledge as wealth, which multiplies when shared and collaborated. The more you give, the more you get back.

The Safeguards

To safeguard our SEWA knowledge management model, three safeguards were needed:

1. Leadingship
2. Knowledge Architects
3. Interested People

1. Leadingship was a vital element. It formed the solid base upon which the six pillars could stand. I always reminded SEWA managers that, although the key success factor was leadingship, however, *interested people* (i.e., a willing and winning team) was also crucial to the success of leadingship. Leadingship is about leading the interested people towards the *true north* in order to realize the common shared vision. Hence, the following model was created to illustrate the six pillars:

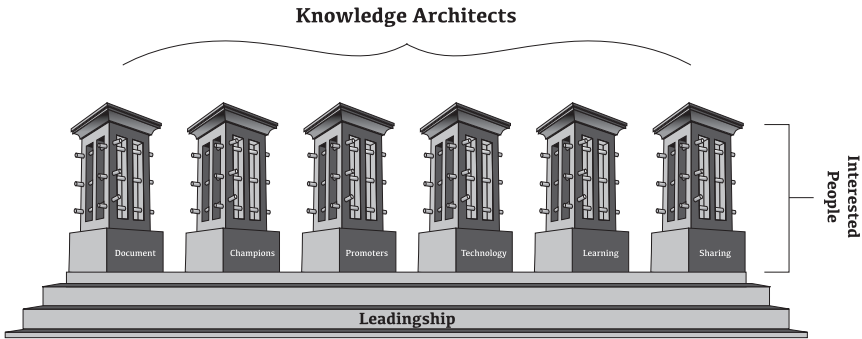


Figure 1.4 SEWA Six Pillars of Knowledge Management

2. Knowledge Architects

On the other hand, there were also good people around who liked to create a difference and beautify the SEWA KM framework; we give the term *Knowledge Architects* to such individuals. Knowledge Architects were important because they helped the organization adapt and swiftly reconfigure the internal processes and resources to meet new challenges. SEWA facilitated the role of knowledge architects as *lubricants* of the organization. SEWA knowledge architects were responsible for the implementation of SEWA Knowledge Management and helped to identify, organize, and provide access to the information when needed.

3. Interested people

Success can only be achieved if all the members of the project team give their best. Interested people were the essential element of pursuit here in SEWA. If genuine interest was missing, we bade goodbye to the employee right at the beginning.

Why Interested People?

The reason we need interested people is because we inevitably encounter *emotional vampires* in life. These people, who suck all the positive energy out of us to fuel their relentless hunger for negativity, leave us drained, exhausted, and unhappy. These are the authentic, predatory,

mind-clouding, shape-shifting creatures of darkness. Whatever you call them—emotional/energy vampires, energy suckers, or negative-toxic people—they can wreak havoc on your life and projects if you don't have effective strategies in place to deal with them.

This reminds me of an interesting conversation I had with my HR Manager. It made me laugh and I'm sure it will also tickle your funny bones.

It was the "let's get together" monthly gathering day. This day is special for two reasons: First, SEWA outperformer employees get awarded and rewarded for their monthly contribution under various nomination categories. Secondly, I address the employees with a short motivational speech at the beginning or the end of each event. I love this routine. Hence, many employees anticipate this day.

Here's the incident; we had just wrapped up one of our monthly gatherings. I had centered my speech on the significance of eliminating negative, gloomy people and adverse forces from our lives. I had also announced the formation of "SEWA Mars Team" (you will learn more about it soon).

Over breakfast, my HR manager caught me off-guard when he said, "His Excellency, do me a favor, please. I loved your idea of the SEWA Mars team, but this team is for positive and optimistic employees. What about the negative ones? What do we do with them? Kindly share your key strategies to keep the negative people at bay."

I could see a question mark on his face. I replied, jokingly, "Of course, we can't fire them all. For now, I will send them to Pluto, the farthest planet of all. This cold and dark planet is the best fit for those energy-vampires." The question mark changed to an exclamation sign. I laughed and continued, "Enjoy your breakfast, I will tackle them in my own way. I am sure that the negative ones will soon start to infuse positivity. Just wait and watch."

He let out a big sigh of relief. We laughed together.

We moved on to chat about SEWA's current project updates. I advised my HR manager to begin with a crash workshop on SEWA Project Management Model. I knew that if this model was 'dragged-and-dropped' in the project team's mind, then we could go sky-high.

Further, I explained to him the wonderful benefits of The SEWA Project Management Model.

The Model Benefits

The benefits of adopting the SEWA PM Model are many. Here are a few of them:

- Projects are usually completed before time, on or below budget, and according to specifications.
- Meeting goals and business objectives.
- Meeting/exceeding return on investment (ROI).
- Increased customer happiness.

Principle # 4: Generate Sound Ideas

Fresh and creative insights are invaluable, and I believe that creativity is not a trait reserved for the lucky few. Once we conquer the initial challenges, creativity comes easily to us.

On the other hand, innovation is inherently risky. Being sure and getting the most from a portfolio of innovation initiatives is more about managing risk than eliminating it. Since no one knows exactly where valuable innovations will emerge from, and searching everywhere is impractical, I usually tell my employees something along the lines of, "Don't push yourself too hard, the best ideas show up when you are relaxed! Aim for excellence, that's it!" This philosophy stems from a mantra in the book, *Think like Zuck* by Ekaterina Walter. In the book,

Mark Zuckerberg says, “Make innovation personal! Involve your employees and give them freedom to create.” He strengthens the case that the most innovative companies give their employees the freedom to experiment and take risks that drive product ideas.

I am Creative

When appointed by His Highness to chair SEWA, I had a dream to create an Innovation Promotion System (IPS). My dream became a reality by establishing a fully independent department, called the Excellence Department, in which a section was created under the name, ‘I Am Creative’ on May 15, 2014. This section was dedicated to collect ideas and suggestions from nearly five thousand SEWA employees. The employees came from different background and ethnicities. The SEWA creative team was responsible for collecting and evaluating ideas and rewarding good ones on a timely basis.

In my journey to make ‘I Am Creative’ successful, I noticed that employees connected with SEWA across three dimensions:

Rational: The 'logical' thinking part. I asked them the following question: “How well do you understand your role(s) and responsibilities in the “I am creative” section.?”

Emotional: The ‘touchy-feely’ part. Here, I asked them the following question: “How much passion and energy do you bring to your work?”

Motivational: The 'acting' part. I asked them the following question: “How well do you perform your roles? How much effort do you put into personal improvement?”

The above responses helped me to move on with the initiative, as well as my observations of their behavior. As of today (first quarter of 2018), and as I document this page of this manuscript, we have collected over 1200 ideas in two-and-a-half-years’ time.

Well said!

My efforts paid off when I received a gratifying compliment from Mr. Peter England, CEO of RAKBANK, UAE. He said, “Unlike other CEOs, who are keen on collecting money, you collect ideas.” I was thrilled with his statement.

Another similar compliment that inspired me came from Arif Maazmi, the relationship manager of Sharjah Islamic Bank, who visited my office on June 29, 2017. His visit was followed by the ‘SEWA Brand Turnaround tour’ in the headquarters. He was highly impressed by the recent transformation of the organization. The tour, which started from the *Majlis* (an Arabic term meaning ‘a place of sitting’) and moved through to the *hall of fame* (a corridor)—a *customer-centric* wall in *The SEWA Academy*, and finally to *The Sustainability Pathway* (a staircase), filled him with excitement.

He left my office on the premise that he would ask his HR managers to pay a visit to SEWA to learn and adapt our employees’ creative bent of mind. He also mentioned that, prior to my appointment in SEWA, he had friends here who discontinued working purely because their ideas were not appreciated. He said, “I wish I could tell them, go back to SEWA now. The new chairman not only appreciates ideas but implements them too.”

A Revolutionary Change

Vahe Atmadjian, CEO of Bahra Electric International, had worked with the previous management of SEWA, in the past, for several years. He happened to visit SEWA recently, and was pleasantly surprised with the phenomenal transformation of SEWA. Being impressed with the changes around, he quoted, “This is not a transformation, this is a revolution.”

P.I.C.K Chart

How do we pick up the good ideas? To pick the best idea, we scrutinize it every month through a PICK Chart. When faced with multiple

improvement ideas, this chart comes in quite handy. In fact, it helps us to cluster ideas and prioritize the most useful ones. There are four categories in a 2*2 matrix: the horizontal row represents the scale of payoff (or benefits), while the vertical columns represent ease of implementation. Below is the matrix:

	Low Pay Back	High Pay Back
Easy to do	P ossible	I mplement
Hard to do	K ill	C hallenge

Figure 1.5 SEWA P.I.C.K Chart

Competitive Necessity

Innovation is a growth multiplier. Millennial companies have claimed that innovation is a definite driver for rapid and profitable revenue growth. In fact, they consider it as a “competitive necessity” for their organization. In PwC’s recent study, *Unleashing the Power of Innovation*, 74% of CEOs regard innovation as equally important to the success of their company as operational effectiveness, if not more. This is the first time in recent history that innovation has been in parity with operations in the C-suite.

Principle # 5: Instill Cultural Core Values

SEWA was viewed as a sluggish company in the society for many reasons. Apart from being a poor service provider, the major reasons were that suppliers and vendors were not paid on time, corruption prevailed, and employees accepted bribes or inappropriate gifts. These malpractices created a tarnished image and distorted the brand’s value. For

these reasons, a set of strong cultural core values were needed to solve, control, and overcome challenges.

Talking about cultural core values is challenging because these values remain hidden, ambiguous, and intangible. That is, until they are tested.

You are the Culture-Creator

“To be among the best authentic organizations in the world,” reads SEWA’s vision statement. Admittedly, although this is a bold and ambitious vision, it’s easier said than done! However, to achieve our vision, I needed the right culture that would catapult SEWA to its peak performance. In so doing, I took up the task of a culture creator and chartered out the core cultural values for SEWA to help me reach that challenging vision. I sincerely hope that whoever reads this book also begins to think of himself as a culture-creator; maybe not for an entire organization but more for the culture-creator of a team, a family, or even an individual.

Culture Eats Strategy at Breakfast

Peter Drucker originated the following phrase: “Culture eats strategy at breakfast.” In essence, the phrase explains that there is a direct correlation between a healthy, productive culture and a company’s bottom line. Nearly every person holding this book knows that bottom-line results are a product of human results; therefore, any company disconnecting the two is putting their success at risk. Moreover, I believe that if you give freedom to people, they will amaze you with real, super-sized results. Strategy, capabilities, and culture are a powerful trio, and all three need to be aligned and designed together to create true organizational transformation.

SEWA’s Cultural Core Values and Timeless Principles

At SEWA, our cultural core values are a part of our organization’s DNA. We believe that living by strong values and adhering to timeless princi-

ples and fundamentals opens up a myriad of avenues for good business and its sustainability. Our cultural core values create a vibrant company culture, where people can smile, ideas can blossom, and success can flourish. Our cultural core values inspire us to make a positive contribution every day. This is the reason why these cultural core values, along with a rigorous code of conduct, are at the heart of *every* decision that SEWA makes.

Hence, I came up with the following list of cultural core values that reflects what is truly important to us as an organization. These are not values that change from time to time, situation to situation, or person to person; rather they are the underpinning of our company's culture. Let's have a closer look at SEWA's cultural core values:

1. Authentic and Effective Leadership

People will not follow an inauthentic leader. Authentic leaders are stewards who build long, sustaining organizations that do well for people and make a great difference in the world. Such leaders put people, the planet, and prosperity before profits. To us, it is about “seeing the bigger picture”, having a clear vision of SEWA's aims and objectives, building a stronger business, and creating a diverse talent pool.

Our Leadership Philosophy

At SEWA, we have our own unique philosophy, which reads as: “The ability to continuously strive to establish and manage a creative climate of continuous learning in which associates and teams are empowered and self-motivated to build true, lasting success in an environment built on the principles of mutual trust, collaboration, and respect.”

2. People & Safety

Our employees are our most valuable assets. Moreover, we invest in the development and support of our staff and leaders. Safety is *never* compromised at SEWA. Conducting safe working methods requires a conscious effort and an absolute commitment that no job is so urgent that it cannot be done in a safe and an environmentally-responsible manner.

3. Passion for Winning

We have a healthy dissatisfaction with the status quo. Driven by our compelling desire to improve and succeed, we are determined to excel at everything we do because we love success and celebrating our achievements. At SEWA, each employee has the opportunity to be coached and mentored, which, in turn, enables them to achieve positive results. Finally, as a formal acknowledgment of individual and team accomplishments, we celebrate our success together. All in all, we are a winning team.

4. Passion for Customers

We strive to develop long-term customer relationships by *consistently* delivering quality, innovation, and business value that either meets or exceeds our customers' expectations. SEWA strives to maintain excellent customer service and ensures reliable and quick responses to complaints with 100% adherence to ISO 10002 standards. This international standard provides us with guidelines to implement our complaints management system, thus enabling us to identify complaints, their cause, and how to eliminate them. SEWA is preparing to meet the criteria for "The UAE Global Star Rating Program," a system that assesses and measures each government department's service center performance on the scale of "two to seven" star ratings, through an official assessment process conducted under the umbrella of The Prime Minister's Office (P.M.O).

5. Trust

We share a confidence in each other's capabilities and intentions. SEWA believes that all individuals can and want to contribute to their fullest potential. We only take tough calls in the knowledge that we are able to push our boundaries and explore new opportunities. The company trusts in its employees and invests in them to grow and prosper by ushering them with global-standard training programs and self-development programs. We believe that if we don't have trust inside our company then we *can't* cascade it down to the customers.

As Stephen Covey states in his book, *The 7 Habits of highly effective people*, “Trust plays a vital role in common life. If there is no trust relationship between employees and the organization’s leader, there will be no effectiveness and efficiency. Trust is the most supreme section of any relationship.”

6. Embracing Excellence

Excellence is a *continual* quest at SEWA. We work together to achieve world-class standards in all aspects of operation. We have a dedicated team of ‘Quality & Excellence’ which encourages the convivial and passionate pursuit of excellence and improvement through a formal system of benchmarking and assessment. Simply put—mediocrity out, excellence in.

7. Ownership

A sense of belonging and engagement, responsibility, and accountability are the vital steps towards employee motivation and the key to “think like an owner.” We focus on employee involvement in the decision-making process (big or small)—whether it regards owning the problem or owning the project. Hence, mutual interdependency is a way of life at SEWA. The employees treat the company’s assets as their own and SEWA, in turn, makes explicit efforts to seek out and address the concerns of the entire workforce regarding fairness, thereby establishing a sense of trust and security and showing them that “We are a family.” In this way, I ensured that the employees realized that they were special to me.

8. Ethics

Since we are an honest and straightforward organization, acting in an ethical way is the bedrock of our business. Therefore, we treat each other with respect and do not tolerate harassment or intimidation. Further, we uphold the values and principles of SEWA in everything we do in order to demonstrate the unwavering commitment to doing business the right way—the SEWA Way.

9. Integrity

We are guided by a *moral* compass of integrity. This means that we refuse to offer bribes or make questionable payments, and neither do we give/receive inappropriate gifts or hospitality. Moreover, we regularly communicate accurate financial and relevant information/reports to our stakeholders. Transparency leads to trustworthiness.

I have cited a classic example below to elucidate on the significance of ethics and integrity in a business set-up and what missing parts may transpire:

The Lesson of Lehman

Lehman Brothers, the global financial services firm went bankrupt in 2008. In the nation's 240-year history, no American company of such considerable wealth and stature had collapsed so completely. So, how did this happen? A general answer could be greed and fraud/forgery, but my many years of research and experience tell me that there's more to it. The senior leaders at Lehman made a series of choices that contravened/violated the crucial principles concerning company's purpose/mission, strategy, and synergy.

The Lehman leaders failed to establish a genuine higher purpose for the organization. They failed to institutionalize an honorable business model, which further deviated them from the right path. The opportunistic pursuit of profits further put the organization at risk, ultimately creating a "me," not "we," culture, where people were motivated solely by personal gains.

To avoid meeting a similar fate, I injected "ethics" and "integrity" into my cultural core values list and appointed a Chief Ethical Officer.

10. Teamwork

Teamwork leverages our individual strength and binds us to a common vision that is among the best authentic organizations in the world. Everyone is expected and encouraged to actively participate and communicate up, down, and across the organization. We also believe in TEAM (Together Everyone Achieves More). At SEWA, discussing problems

or difficult issues is considered healthy, while we also offer constructive help/criticism in the attempt to resolve such issues.

11. Every Idea Counts

The diversity of its workforce, which comprises more than 20 different nationalities, makes SEWA an arena of burgeoning ideas where everyone willingly shares their ideas and resources. Whether a veteran or a novice, we “teach and learn” from each other. Here, everyone has a voice and individual contributions are respected and valued. Our success depends on encouraging the knowledge, skills, and creativity of the employees and instilling in them the sense of being admired and appreciated for there is no such thing as a silly idea.

These cultural core values supported SEWA’s vision, shaped the culture, and reflected what SEWA values the *most*. They are the quintessence of SEWA’s identity—its philosophy. Eventually, these values became the bedrock of our daily activities and gained immense popularity in and out of SEWA. In the course of time, I had to think of hiring a Chief Culture Officer to maintain the entity and sanctity of my much beloved cultural core values. You will meet him later in chapter 8; ‘Becoming a Customer-centric Organization’.

Why 11?

That’s a long list, isn’t it? Mostly, organizations tend to have a portmanteau of four to five cherry-picked cultural core values, while SEWA has eleven, which is unusual and rare, and could even be considered *passé*.

The reason for such a long list was because SEWA had undergone real transformation after having endured a very rough phase where I faced resistance from each and every corner of the organization. At this critical juncture, I decided to start from scratch. SEWA had to take baby-steps, and *only* an elaborate set of core values that would infuse positivity could help bring about that (much needed) change. However, I wouldn’t be surprised if, a few years down the line, the cultural core values shrink in number to meet the future needs of the organization. Let’s wait and watch.

Principle # 6: Create Positive Emotional Energy

Creating positive emotional energy begins with an authentic energy that communicates to others your confidence, poise, and willingness to get the job done. Indeed, it is a strenuous task to create a positive emotional workforce. Yet, as they say, “Where there is a will there is a way.”

Why Positivity?

After the release of my last book, *The SEWA Way*, I received a plethora of heartfelt feedback and wise comments and queries from all around the world. Some personally conveyed their opinions, while some others flooded my social media feeds. One question that made me smile was, “In a government-owned organization where red tapes and bureaucracy dominate day-to-day operations, what made you incorporate creating positive emotional energy as one of the principles?”

Yes, for positivity to secure a place in a government entity principle’s list is quite a rarity; however, I did it for a reason. On the first day of my appointment as a SEWA chairman, after a historic meeting with His Highness Sheikh Dr. Sultan Al Qassimi, the ruler of Sharjah, I was escorted to the SEWA Head Quarter by Sheikh Mohammed bin Saud Al Qassimi, a royal family member and the Chairman of the Central Department of Finance in Sharjah, to officially announce my appointment as the chairman.

Sadly enough, from the reception through to the director general’s office, I was greeted with the sad-looking faces of my employees. Everyone had a long face, and not a single soul was smiling; there was negativity all around, which left me shocked. I felt negative vibes around me. I could see faces, painted with questions such as: Who is he? What is his plan for us? What changes would he bring here? Can he do it?

The best I could get from the director general was a mysterious smile, which I called a *Mona Lisa* smile. It seemed that I was in an adult

daycare center rather than the business we were actually in. *This has to change*, I said to myself.

That very moment I had decided to put “smile” and “create positive emotional energy” as my first corporate principles for this organization.

Mentoring

In addition to my primary role, I am also a mentor. A *mentor* is a wise, trusted, and influential supporter or counselor. As professional mentor Edmund Lewis states, “There is a time in life when you have to realize that it is not about you. It is about what you can do for someone else.” This is what I love about being a mentor—to be able to “touch people’s lives”. The process is forward-looking, change-oriented, and developmental. Even if I am able to make a difference in one person’s life, it’s a great achievement for me. Though no single approach works for all, inspirational leadership and effective mentorship require a bite-your-tongue, wait-to-be-a-critic mindset and attitude. In addition, mentorship requires intentional investments of time and energy. As the saying goes, you get what you put in.

Coaching

I mainly enjoy coaching because it allows me to see immediate results. When I am being a coach, my focus is on meeting very specific objectives within a set period of time. *Coaching* is mainly concerned with performance and the development of certain skills within my coaching practice and usually takes place on a one-to-one basis with a very specific purpose. There is usually a planned program with a much shorter timeframe than in mentoring, so the learning goals are usually determined in advance. Mentoring and coaching can be ‘stand-alone’ activities, but I find myself using it complementary to each other. In the end, what matters is the improved performance of my mentee or coachee.

A Magnetic Leader

Personally, I have met many great leaders in my life who showed a technical proficiency. Most of the time (if not always) they have amazing skills and accomplishments in their backgrounds but lack the special something that unites employees behind them. That doesn't mean they are doomed. That special something is "the magnetism/attraction to be liked, or may be loved."

All I want to bring home is that, when you put others first. And when your employees feel that you are visible, accessible, and knowledgeable, you become lovable. When you are thankful and fair, employees feel safe to not only share the work-related matters but also their personal matters. It is at this moment when you become a magnetic leader as it eases your job of a coach or mentor.

SEWA Coach and Mentor Council

One of the beliefs I live by is, "I want to leave behind a legacy of future leaders." Coaching and mentoring are my tools to achieve that and I thoroughly enjoy the processes. However, as anticipated, as time flew by, it became strenuous, thus leaving me with a burn-out feeling. Hence, I often tell my executives jokingly that I don't want to be the candle burning herself to light up others, all the time. Single-handedly bearing the onus to coach and mentor employees was eating up a lot of my time and energy, so much so that I thought I'd eventually become a victim of *Karoshi*. Therefore, to save myself from a fateful end, I emphasized the importance of imparting social support at work, which lent well to the overall level of helpful social interactions available on the job from both co-workers and supervisors.

In leaving behind my legacy, I prioritized the formation of the SEWA Coach and Mentor Council. It was decided that I would hand-pick the members of this council and that they would be obliged to engage themselves in coaching and mentoring activities with the rest of the employees of the organization. The mission of this council would be to

share knowledge, provide peer-to-peer learning, and to practice my *The SEWA Way* principles and cultural core values.

R.O.W.E

We at SEWA use many techniques to create and maintain positivity in our work environment, such as R.O.W.E, as explained below:

A **Results-Oriented-Work-Environment** is a strategy co-created by Jodi Thomson and Cali Ressler. ROWE gives team members the complete freedom to do their jobs how and when they see fit, as long as they produce agreed results to specified deadlines.

The most important part of working successfully in a R.O.W.E is setting clear, meaningful and measurable goals for our people, as well as monitoring their performance. This practice necessitates discussing this with them individually, as well as making sure they agree that each one is relevant and fair. Then, we hold people accountable for the delivery of these goals; otherwise, the whole R.O.W.E approach falls apart.

I hope I don't sound like someone who favors a *results-at-any-cost* approach. In this book, you will find an organizational approach that satisfies both approaches. This is because I believe that numbers matter, and so too do the people who generate those numbers. Proof of this is contained in the following pages.

First, have a look at the following model that we have been using at SEWA:

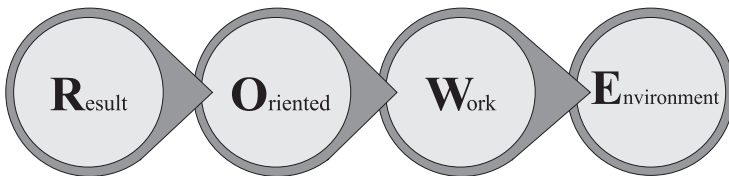


Figure 1.6 R.O.W.E Model

'The SEWA Way' spreads Positivity

My book, *The SEWA Way*, was well-received by the community, so much so that the chancellor of Sharjah University requested to keep a few copies for PhD students in the university library. The book was also made a must read for every PhD student. I felt triumphant that my book found a special place in its reader's minds, which was what I had intended when I set out to write the book; that is, to leave no stone unturned. Today, I am reaping the fruits of my relentless efforts.

Though I didn't do a grand celebration for the launch of my book, *The SEWA Way*, I was pleasantly and emotionally surprised to see the world-wide acceptance it received. Shortly after its soft-launch, I received an acknowledgment letter from the Egyptian Syndicate of Engineers mentioning that they would be interested in keeping copies of my book in their library. *Give yourself a pat on the back, Rashid, you have accomplished another milestone in your life*, I said to myself.

Principle # 7: Make Tough Decisions

My past experience has taught me the 90/10 rule—that there is no perfect decision, and that the last 10% of anything takes 90% of the effort. Decision-making is tricky and strenuous. I adapted some of the tried and tested techniques that never failed me.

Conjoint Analysis

Conjoint analysis is an advanced market research technique that gets under the skin of how people make decisions and what they really value in products and services. We employed this very technique to improve and innovate our existing line of products—Zulal water and Zulal Facial Tissue. There is no doubt that product innovation is vital in revitalizing many brands. In this light, you may say that SEWA is a *product juggernaut*—a brand where product development is ongoing and interactive. Our Zulal water bottle packaging has evolved over time, and after conducting serious conjoint analysis, we found out that 'pink' is

the most appealing color in this region, as well as its closely-related variants. Hence, we changed the usual aqua blue packaging to a soft pastel pink.

However, conjoint analysis wasn't enough to tackle our toughest decisions since there was a big deal of risk involved. We maneuver the high tides of *risk intelligently*. Wondering what this fancy term is all about?

Intelligent risk-taking is having a process for making good risk-decisions. The trick is to foster a culture of intelligent risk-taking supported by systems that also encourage it, which consequently increases SEWA's edginess and risk tolerance. At SEWA, we are wary of *analysis paralysis*. Many opportunities that come your way can often be time-sensitive, which means you need to be decisive and catch them swiftly, not rashly; however, not all intelligent-risk taking will achieve positive results. The following section describes one case that went wrong:

Who dares Wins!

Taking intelligent risks will often mean taking bold decisions rather than "making do" with working arrangements. The 1980s heralded an era of change for Coca-Cola. In July, 8, 1982, Coca-Cola's Diet Coke product was launched in the United States. It was evident that Coca-Cola was prepared to take risks by bringing in new products in the soft drinks sector. In April 1985, the company took the ultimate risk by removing market-leading Coca-Cola from the US market and introducing New Coke. Of course, this decision was made after extensive market research.

However, the market reaction did not match the research. The consumers overwhelmingly preferred the original taste of Coca-Cola to the new Coke. So, what went wrong? Coca-Cola had minimized the "product" risk, but completely under-estimated the "*brand*" risk. To consumers, Coca-Cola was more than a drink; it was a brand that was an integral and an inseparable part of their lives! What happened next?

The Coca-Cola Company listened and then dared to *replace* its winning formula. It was now *daring* enough to admit it had wronged to do so. The original Coca-Cola reappeared as Coca-Cola Classic to regain the top slot as the USA's leading soft drink.

Then, Coca-Cola's chairman and CEO, Roberto C. Goizueta, characterized the new Coke decision as a prime example of taking intelligent risks. If you look at the decision in a different way, what appears dangerous at first is not really such a risk after all, but it is important to remember that intelligent risks are based on honesty, careful calculations, and anticipated results.

Intelligent ZULAL

Zulal, our drinking water subsidiary, intelligently risked the market conditions to enhance its sales by resizing and reshaping the existing bottles. Despite the general noise created by the decisions, I seriously went on to introduce a competitive price for Zulal water. I speculated that if I set the price too low, unit sales would increase, albeit at the expense of profits. On the other hand, if I set it too high, some of the customers would willingly walk into the *waiting* arms of our competitors. Hence, along with my market research team's insight and my very own understanding of the current drinking water market scenario, I priced Zulal fairly—not too high, not too low. In this way, we had started to mint profits in an over-competitive and over-saturated drinking water market.

We also introduced a new product line—Zulal Facial Tissues. Zulal tissues are the first in the region to be free of Optical Brightener Additives (OBA). This is a classic example of intelligent risk-taking. Below I have cited some specific steps that Zulal took. You may take inspiration from it:

1. *Problem/Outcome Identification:* First and foremost, we clearly defined what was need to be addressed at the outset, otherwise, we would act on something that's not directly related to the real issue. Then, we

moved on to do a SWOT analysis while keeping a short-term/long-term aspect of this analysis.

2. *Taking Stock of the Past:* At SEWA, it's important to learn from the past so, that we are aware of patterns (both positive and negative) that might affect what's happening or being planned in the present.

3. *Action Plan and Timeframe:* We decided to assess whether the risk was worth taking, followed by coming up with a time-bound action plan for achieving the intended outcomes.

4. *Execute the Plan:* We realized that we were pressed for time and this was no time for hesitation, particularly because the opportunity was time-sensitive. We embarked on this phase to decide whether the risk is worth taking; hence, we got moving.

5. *Evaluate the Results:* This final chunk of the process is essential for learning what worked and what didn't. We documented the valuable lessons that would help us in the future in terms of SEWA's next intelligent risk ball game.

Principle # 8: Use vibrant stories that motivate others to reach for a better future

There is nothing more motivating than a vibrant story—it immediately lightens up the mood and boosts morale. This is a sure-fire way to connect with the employees and let them know that toils and turmoil are a part and parcel of work life challenges, and I, as a leader, “have been there and done that.” I also shared my experiences with my employees, which could be used as a step tool to reach for a better future.

Encourage the Heart

An inspiring leader is a story-teller. He motivates his employees with powerful, vibrant, and actionable stories. Incorporating stories in

conversations, emails, and presentations is an absolute must. A great message or even compelling facts and figures can fall flat if it is not backed up with a personal story. A motivating story not only adds a personal touch to your conversation but it also effectively communicates your message and leaves behind an indelible mark in the minds of your employees—such is the power of vibrant motivational stories.

As far as my personal contribution towards implementing this principle goes, story-telling is one of my ways of inspiring the employees in SEWA. In almost every occasion, like weekly leadership team meetings or monthly progress meetings with the executives and the senior team members, or annual meetings, I use the stories of my own successes (and failures!), or inspirational stories of other great thought leaders. The motive is to inspire them and infuse in them the passion to keep smiling in the face of adversity and have the confidence in themselves to become future leaders.

My First Speech at SEWA

This reminds me of May 2014, when I delivered my first speech to my employees. This was the time when I had been newly appointed by His Highness to chair SEWA. The memory of that day fills me with emotions because I spoke from the bottom of my heart and the employees were so overwhelmed by my speech that they expressed their feelings in a daily TV program called “Good Morning Sharjah.”

I was completely unaware of this and only got to know about the program when I received a direct call from His Highness saying, “Rashid, did you listen to yesterday’s program about your wonderful speech? Your leadership qualities and words of wisdom were appreciated and welcomed by your employees.” He further mentioned that he was happy to have chosen me for SEWA. “I am happy, I have chosen the right person,” he added. What a proud moment it was!

Engage your Employees

Back then, my focus was to enchant and engage my employees. Maslow links high job satisfaction with high performance. Maslow has rightly referred to the desire for self-fulfillment as a tendency to become more and more what one is, to become everything that one is capable of becoming. These are self-actualized people who tend to experience a steadier, more grounded sense of well-being and satisfaction with their life and work. In the modern world, these ideas are manifested in the concept of employee engagement.

In my view, the first step for a leader is to create a climate that enables employees to unleash their potential by creating an environment where employees start loving their job and have a strong feeling of belonging. If you want to improve your organizational performance, then you need to first change your leadership behavior and build trust. You need to understand the difference between compliance and commitment. Leaders cannot *demand* more engagement and stronger performance. You need to set up the system—the combination of the optimal environment and culture that makes employees listen to what you have to say.

The Change Leadership

Leo Tolstoy, a Russian novelist, famously wrote, “Everyone thinks of changing the world, but no one thinks of changing himself.” In this field, there’s leading through normal times, and then there’s leading your organization through *change*. Putting this into perspective, you might think of it as the difference between *peacetime* (normal) and *wartime* (change) leadership. The changes that leadership demands and requires are a different mindset and an extra set of skills. It concerns the driving forces, visions, and processes that revolve around large-scale transformations.

Silent killer

Trust me, ‘change leadership’ is here to stay as I truly feel that the era of sustained economic *uncertainty* has already dawned upon us. I call

it the era of the silent killer, which I have explained in greater detail in my book, *Alleem Sustainable Development Goals*. I sum up my opinion through the following quote by Mark Sanborn, “Your success in life isn’t based on your ability to simply change. It is based on your ability to change faster than your competition, customers, and business.” And that’s what exactly Samsung did to transform itself from a low-cost original equipment manufacturer to a world leader in R&D, marketing, and design, with a more valuable brand than Pepsi, Nike, or American Express—it’s about speed and efficiency. The book, *The Samsung Way*, by Jaeyong Song and Kyungmook Lee, describes how Samsung successfully introduced a culture of innovation into an organization focused on continuous process improvement.

A great example of economic uncertainty and turbulence is the recent slashing of oil prices. Over the last two and a half years, the oil industry has experienced its deepest downturn since the 1990s. Executives say they think it will be years before oil returns to \$90 or \$100 a barrel, which was pretty much the norm until the price collapse in late 2014.

Principle # 9: Facing the reality of where we are now

Leadership Imperative

In his book, *Good to Great*, Jim Collins highlighted his findings of a research as “confronting the brutal facts of current reality”. It is imperative for a leader to define and confront reality and provide hope. University of Southern California professor and leadership expert Warren Bennis says, “Only the optimists survive.” What he means here is that optimism is fine, but living in denial of the current situation, and convincing oneself that things are better than they actually are, leads to leadership failure. As vision is necessary, today’s era demands a pragmatic vision. In 1962, President John F. Kennedy’s bold aspiration to “go to the moon in this decade” motivated a nation to unprecedented levels of innovation. A far-reaching vision can be a compelling catalyst, provided it’s realistic enough to stimulate action today. Likewise, Mercedes-Benz co-founder Gottlieb Daimler promised that, from his company’s inception in 1886, the company’s vehicles would be “the

best or nothing.” Here, I am reminded of one of the oft-quoted quote by Jack Welch, the former CEO of GE, “Face reality as it is, not as it was or as you wish it to be.” If only we adhere to this wise recommendation, we would not dupe ourselves from reality. I utterly believe that getting to the truth is essential for getting better.

One of the top-most imperatives of a leader might be to face reality, however, it’s often the most neglected leadership practice. As leaders, we often get caught up in talking about grand visions, bold goals, and exciting plans. Whilst having a vision is necessary, we cannot lead effectively unless we are willing to face reality. Yet, it seems that many leaders choose to ignore reality and live in a world of their own making. Although this suits some bosses, it never suited me. I had a standing rule for my staff: “I want to hear all the bad news related to my organization. I want all of it, not part of it.” You probably know the old adage: Bad news, unlike wine, doesn’t get better with time. Moreover, I didn’t want my employees to fall prey to the “mum” effect where followers hesitated to deliver bad news out of the fear that the boss will shoot the messenger.

Elephant in the Room

Most of us have been in situations where there’s a relevant issue/problem that nobody seems willing to raise in front of senior management or bosses. How many times we have said to ourselves, “There’s obviously an elephant in this room, I wish someone would tame that animal.”

I believe that in order to tame or to stomp that elephant, we, as leaders, need to make our organizations a safe haven where elephants and similar issues can be openly talked about and addressed. As employees should be trampled under the elephant’s feet, I created this ambience by listening with empathy and inquiring to discover the truth. In turn, this created acceptance so employees could openly deal with their concerns.

Brown Nose

Guess what? Sometimes I come across employees who are just plain and cheeky brown nosers—sycophants, who try hard to please me for

their motives. Further, they try to please me by sharing an ‘underground’ news that’s buried. However, I can easily decipher that they are trying to appease me by fluking a story that doesn’t exist.

SWOT Analysis

SWOT analysis is one of the tools that I apply from time to time to find the reality and assess where the organization is heading to. It is one of the old proven tools for leaders to assess what’s going around in their organization and what move to take next. Originated by Albert S. Humphrey in the 1960s, SWOT Analysis is as useful now as it was then. It helps you understand your strengths and weaknesses, as well as identify both the opportunities and threats that are facing you.

We at SEWA use SWOT from time to time to ensure that we are catching up with what’s happening within and outside. Now, we have a specific time for it. It is used when needed, and normally we use the following table with questions in each quadrant:

	Helpful to achieving the objective	Harmful to achieving the objective
Internal origin (attributes of the organization)	Strengths <ul style="list-style-type: none">• What advantages does SEWA have?• What do we do better than anyone else?• What is our Unique selling Proposition (USP)?	Weakness <ul style="list-style-type: none">• What could we improve?• What should we avoid?• What are people in our market likely to see as weakness?
External origin (attributes of the environment)	Opportunities <ul style="list-style-type: none">• What good oppotunities can we spot ?• What interesting trends are we aware of ?• Is our business sector is expanding with many future opportunities for success?• Local Govt. wants to encourage local businesses?	Threats <ul style="list-style-type: none">• What obstacles do we face?• Is changing technology threatening our position ?• Do we have bad debt or cash-flow problems ?• Developments in technology may change this market beyond our ability to adapt?

Figure 1.7 SEWA SWOT Analysis

The RED Team

I came across an interesting book called *Red Team: How to succeed by Thinking like the Enemy* by red teaming and security expert Micah Zenko. There's an interesting history behind the formation of the red team. In the early times, the Catholic Church felt that too many people were being designated as saints. Hence, to bring some ordered approach to the process of conferring sainthood, the church designated someone to argue against the individual being considered. He was officially named the "Devil's Advocate," and his job was to list all the reasons proving that the individual did not deserve to become a saint.

Today, the church has abandoned the concept but it has percolated and well-adapted in both the private and government sectors. The mandate of a red team is to discredit the opinions or action steps of their employees; or, in short, to prove them wrong. Red teams are used by corporations and countries to prevent untested assumptions and blind spots from undermining efforts to identify potential threats.

However, doesn't a red team, or any team for that matter needs a leader to function efficiently? Most definitely. This brings me to mention another amazing book. Continue reading to find out more.

Authentic Leadership

Bill George's book, *Authentic Leadership: Rediscovering the Secrets to Creating Lasting Value*, sketches out an authentic leader's virtues. Authentic leaders demonstrate a passion for their purpose, practice their values consistently, and lead with their hearts, as well as their heads. Moreover, they establish long-term, meaningful relationships and have the self-discipline to get results. The most important quality; they know who they are.

Principle # 10: Developing, Implementing and Using Winning KPIs

Most assuredly, throughout the past couple of principles, you have been enjoying every bit of this book. Hence, your handy notebook

must contain a decent amount of notes by now and it may either feel a little overwhelmed or underwhelmed depending on your own present situation. Here's a helping hand for you to organize the thoughts and actions you are capturing; this principle is focused on the importance of developing, implementing, and using winning KPIs (Key Performance Indicators).

What is a KPI?

There are many definitions of KPIs, but I prefer David Parameter's view: "KPIs represent a set of measures focusing on those aspects of organizational performance that are the most critical for the current and future success of an organization." To put it simpler, KPIs should tell you what action is needed. KPIs, when implemented wholeheartedly, should bring a sea change in a company's performance. This principle was named after reading David Parameter's, *Developing, Implementing, and Using Winning KPIs*.

Usually, KPIs involve gathering, storing, reporting, and analyzing business data to help us make business decisions. A KPI tells us what action needs to take place. Therefore, KPIs were formulated, developed, and implemented in SEWA to measure, monitor, and manage performances that were most critical to the organization for its present and future success. I officially introduced the concept of KPIs in August 2015 as I needed accurate and timely information to make *both* strategic decisions and operational improvements. Managing and analyzing KPIs took in a lot of time and effort; therefore, it was important that the right and apt KPI was chosen to target the exact needs of the organization.

While formulating the KPIs for SEWA, I kept the following domains in mind:

1. Timely

KPIs should be monitored daily, or perhaps even weekly; that is, daily for the finance and account department, and weekly for rest of the organization. We believe that a monthly, quarterly, or annual measure cannot be a KPI because it cannot be key to our business if it is not reviewed/monitored regularly.

2. Chairman Focus

I firmly believe that “we shouldn’t hide the facts”. Each and every KPI made a difference and they should be under the chairman’s constant scrutiny and attention. It should mean business to us. Therefore, I encourage my staff to update me on any update (big or small).

3. Simple/Straightforward

A KPI should be short and simple. It should be definite and easy to comprehend and implemented upon. My challenge was to have all the senior staffs and employees understand the corrective steps needed to be employed. Simplicity is the key. Convolutd/confusing KPIs cause a delay in performance.

4. Team Based/Oriented

Our organization was not a “one man army”, so the KPIs had to be formulated keeping teamwork in mind. Besides responsibility and accountability, the involvement of employees was vital in the entire process. A KPI should seep deep into a company. Also, it should not be tied to the managers or top executives alone, and it should permeate into the different strata of SEWA.

5. Significant Impact

The developed KPI should have a major impact on the organization, which should affect most of the critical success factors. The KPI should affect the big picture and the ultimate goal and vision of the organization.

Considering the above domains, I formulated an indigenous process for SEWA KPIs which I have summarized below:

SEWA 3Ms of KPI

The 3Ms of SEWA KPI is a three-step management method for the control and continuous improvement of our KPI process:

1.Measure: KPIs can be used as a *measuring* unit of performance, thus leading to *tangible* results.

2.Monitor: KPIs can monitor the progress timely/frequently and help to proactively plan accordingly.

3.Manage: KPIs can facilitate managing the success rate of performance and make more effective follow-up decisions.

KPIs are definitely the cornerstone of a company's success. Any decision or process, if measured, monitored, and managed, will eventually yield *extraordinary* results. The 3 Ms enabled us to formulate actionable and effective KPIs. I was definite that if KPIs have been correctly assigned to SEWA's processes, they will have an immediate "flow-on effect", which, in turn, will facilitate benefits to the organization.

The 'Flow-on Effects' of KPIs

As anticipated, the 3Ms of KPI proved rewarding right from outset. Further, the method benefitted our organization by revealing potential strengths, which allows us to utilize any opportunities and make real-time adjustments to our strategies. There were two immediate 'flow-on-effects' that are worth sharing;

SEWA Performance Dashboard

Performance dashboards are generally used to facilitate the easy monitoring of a company's KPIs. The dashboard checks the rate at which the chosen KPI is succeeding or failing, and accordingly, measures are then taken to either facilitate a successful KPI or corrective measures are taken towards a failing KPI.

We decided to use performance dashboards as they are meant to facilitate getting "the right information to the right users at the right time to optimize decisions, enhance efficiency, and accelerate results." The performance dashboards were a great way to map and track current reality to establish benchmarks. The employees were also welcomed to 'see' and 'assess' the current scenario of their processes and could foresee the future moves he/she needed to act upon or implement.

Employee Commitment

Remember, nothing is ever sold by logic. Nowadays, people are more psychological than logical, since products are primarily sold through emotional drivers. Thus, we had to focus on the emotional drivers that mattered most to the employees. We started by asking questions, such as: Do you know which of our success factors are critical? The performance dashboards helped the teams keep track of their progress, while a broader purpose supplied meaning and emotional energy. In turn, the employees received both emotional and psychological investment. The entire 5000 employees could see their progress and began challenging themselves to improve their statistics. It was overwhelming to see the entire organization binding together towards a shared purpose.

By now, I was sure that the ‘*goal/vision*’ of any organization is a cumulative outcome of small milestones (KPIs) that are frequently set out and achieved (measured/managed/monitored) at fixed intervals.

Having said that, who enables and accelerates your mission to accomplish your vision? Who is the torchbearer of the business and organizational practices? It’s the huge talent pool that you, as a leader, has brought into existence. However, the mightiest challenge remains engaging the organizational talent.

The next principle explains my take on employee engagement in SEWA.

Principle # 11: Pour Creative Energy & Dedication into Everything we do

For the benefit of all our employees, SEWA promotes individualism and a healthy work-life balance. We know that beauty lies not in creating a distance between one’s work and personal life, but rather, in integration—work-life integration! Interesting concept, isn’t it? Well, it’s absurd to say that an individual can live two different lives—one at work and the other at home. Think about this; if we have had a great day at work, having dinner with the family also becomes delicious, in

turn. Likewise, if a family member is unwell back home, we feel sick at work. Hence, our work life and personal life is integrated.

Indeed, technology has made our lives easier. Seminars have evolved into webinars, while boardroom meetings have extended to cafeterias and coffee shops. In addition, the formation of virtual teams and offices has shrunk the business world. In short, technological advancements have made us efficient, and our businesses lucrative.

At SEWA, we encourage dedication towards our jobs, but not to the extent that we incur deteriorating effects on personal relationships or health. The work-life balance is disturbed when one starts seeking perfectionism at work. According to executive coach Marilyn Puder-York, PhD, who also wrote, *The Office Survival Guide*, “As life gets expanded, it’s very hard, both neurologically and psychologically, to keep that habit of perfection going.” I agree with her, and believe that we should strive for excellence and not perfection.

The Five Fs

In my book, *2016 Resolutions to Succeed*, I have mentioned “Find the balance” as one of the resolutions, which regards striking the right balance in life. Here’s an excerpt from the book.

Keep Balancing the Five Fs:

Faith (the substance of things hoped for; the evidence of things not seen).

Family (ironically, family is everything).

Fitness (when you’ve got your health, you’ve got just about everything).

Friends (tell me who you hang out with, and I’ll tell you who you are).

Finances (I don’t want to be a millionaire. I just want to live like one).

And an optional sixth ‘F’ could be **Feng Shui**—a Chinese philosophy

that aims to bring about peace and happiness in our lives by harmonizing the natural energy around us. You may be surprised to know that simple tasks, such as uncluttering your table or planting seedlings near your kitchen sill can bring positive energy to our lives.

What fosters Employee Engagement?

One of the mighty challenges in my fight for survival days was employees pouring no passion into their work. Tackling this issue was overwhelming, and to assuage my rather tense state of mind, I grouped my employees into four distinct categories in relation to their engagement level:

1. **Engaged:** These were employees who worked with *passion* and felt a profound *connection* with SEWA. They drove innovation and moved the organization forward. Sadly, they comprised only 10% of the entire lot.
2. **Not Engaged:** These were employees who had mentally quit, yet they continued to stay with the company. They were *sleepwalking* through their workday, putting time—but not energy or passion—into their work. They were essentially *checked-out* and comprised a reasonable portion of 30% of the entire lot.
3. **Disenchanted:** These people are partly disengaged. They have lower scores on rational and emotional connection with SEWA, especially the emotional connection.
4. **Actively Disengaged:** These were employees who weren't just unhappy at work; they were busy acting out their unhappiness. Every day, these workers undermined what their engaged co-workers accomplished. They comprised a humiliating 60% of the entire lot and this group was of most concern to me. We called them a *noticeable drag*, because they drag even the most motivated employees out of focus, without contributing to the organizational success in any way, shape, or form.

The Royal Road

Inspired by Dale Carnegie's statement, "The royal road to a person's heart is to talk to him about the things he treasures most," I took the royal road to amend the situation. External motivation is important, but *nothing* comes close to self-motivation. A self-motivated employee will know how to tread the right path. He will, in fact, push himself every day and actively look for ways to expand his skill set. At SEWA, I personally do not miss any opportunity to motivate employees and further ignite the fire in them to be self-motivated by giving some milestones to achieve and rewarding them for doing so. I believe in the old adage, "Wake up with dedication and go to bed with satisfaction."

I would now like to tell a truly motivating story about Sami Jo Small, who played goal for the 2002 Canadian Olympic Women's Hockey Team. Sami made a number of sacrifices in her career, and dedicated years of her life to training. When her coaches told her that she would not play for gold in the finals, Sami was torn apart. In spite of her devastation, she decided to not waste her energy feeling sorry for herself and instead cheered her team on to the best of her abilities. She said, "In life, you don't always get to choose the role you play, but you do get to choose how you play it." A great motto to live life, don't you think?

My Way

First, I set my eyes on actively disengaged employees. Any person within the organization knows how much energy those problem employees can drain! If you are like me, you know it hurts your psyche, and your physical and mental bodies feel the stress. If you think like this, you're not alone. In fact, welcome to the majority. So, what can you do? You may want to learn from what I did.

I knew that I could no longer afford disengaged employees because the rest of my people were becoming the recipients of all the toxic venom they hissed out. I decided to step in diplomatically. I started off by having candid conversations with the disengaged and actively disengaged employees to find out their pain points. Mind you, they could often be

real foot-draggers at the early stages of such meetings. However, I shifted the employee-employer relationship by informing that the foremost action the employees could do was to pour their creative and emotional energy in everything they did as mentioned in SEWA's winning principle. I believe that if an individual can assimilate the beautiful blend of dedication and discipline in his or her work, as well as personal life, no dream will be unachievable. It's not as easy as giving an order or waving a magic wand, but it's doable.

Do you still believe me? Well, tag along to learn a bit more.

At the same time, I was internally prepared for things not happening the way I wanted them to. On the other hand, I showed them that I would step up to the plate and not give up until I coach them around to go get it. Did you find all this a tall glass to drink from?

The Naysayers

Once I found the antidote to cure up the actively disengaged employees at SEWA, I soon discovered a significant proportion of employees who were experts in passing the buck to escape additional work. I called this group the *naysayers*, whose favorite one-liner was, "This is not my job."

This lousy attitude was intolerable and I didn't waste a second in repairing this broken mindset. Firstly, I added "ownership" onto the list of SEWA's core values, which sent the message loud and clear that any employee who was seen *not* to be taking the responsibility and accountability of any concern facing him/her would be taken to task. And, secondly, I announced that the saying, "This is not my job," would be considered a serious offense here at SEWA, henceforth. If any employee was unable to provide the right solution, the least he/she could do was to refer the right person, and more importantly, follow up later.

Energized Employees

Today's complex, volatile, and fast-paced business environment is constantly posing threats to our organization in one form or the other. It is no wonder that today, the average youth leads quite a stressful life! Stress is undoubtedly the most stressful word of the millennium, but who is at the receiving end of the brunt of this stress? The answer is obvious: It's us and our organization that suffers. However, the good news is that we can reduce (if not eliminate) stress in our lives. So, how do we go about it? How do we unlock our potential? How do we bring positive energy into our workplace?

Creating Positive Change

This section details *four* dimensions of leadership that can enable you to unlock your and your organization's potential. These dimensions can also help you to enhance your leadership performance. The four dimensions are:

1. Follow your intuition.
2. Find meaning at work.
3. Move on.
4. Identify toxic people around you and keep them at bay.

First, and most important, *follow your intuition*, your inner voice, and connect with something higher and greater than yourself. It's about your *spiritual* development program and inner peace. This will help you to discover or re-discover your divine self. I say, "When your inner self is at peace, you are emotionally more intelligent and make better decisions." Not a bad way to start the day.

Second, *find meaning at work*. This is of paramount importance. You have to enjoy your work and be thrilled about your pursuit of goals, which may have a significant impact on both your work and personal life. Also, inspire your colleagues through storytelling; in turn, this will

touch both their hearts and minds. Further, have a meaningful purpose attached to your goals and leverage your employees to feel the same. Ask yourself, “Are you a purpose maximizer or a profit maximizer?”

Third, *move on*, and have a positive frame of mind, as psychologists claim that optimists often have an edge over pessimists. When faced with stress, fear, or insecurity, humans have a tendency to fight, flight, or freeze. Optimists choose to fight and shift the fulcrum of their mind-set towards positivity. We all should learn to see opportunities in uncertainty. Once we have mastered this, we can help others to learn this skill, thereby seeding the conditions that result in a safe environment for employees. Leaders should encourage innovation and creativity and make it OK to fail!

And finally, *identify toxic* people around you and *keep them at bay*. It is often said that you are the product of the five people you spend the most time with. Toxic people are those pessimistic and negative people who hold you back. I call them *energy vampires*, as they suck out your positive energy leaving you drained, exhausted, and unhappy, and ultimately, they wreak havoc in your life. The flair to manage emotions and keep calm in times of tension/pressure has a direct influence on performance as well as productivity. So, turn a blind eye to those negative elements in your life and you will eventually see them disappear.

Leadership is a journey, not a destination, and it starts with a highly professional decision. Transformation starts with you and your willingness and ability to transform yourself. This way, you can tap a broad constellation of internal and external constituents, which can help your organization in the long run.

Principle # 12: Continuous Generation of Leaders

Leadership is Influence

Leadership is influence—it is that simple. The person with the most influence in any given group at any given time is the leader of that group at that time—it is a position, not a title.

Today, the long-term success of any organization rests not only on great leaders, but it also needs great future leaders. To maintain success, the organization has to invest in generating future leaders. Obviously, this takes time, focus, and a generous amount of financial investment. However, trust me, it's worth it. To me, investing in people is an asset, not a liability.

In an article written by Kevin Carmody for McKinsey & Company entitled *Maintaining a long-term view during turnarounds*, the author stated that investing in people is one of the best strategies towards creating a company's long-term health. Further, it also stated that there were companies who dramatically reduced hiring for entry-level leadership positions during the 2009 recession and that now they struggle with a gap in future leaders at the middle levels of the organization.

I completely agree with this research article and I would share a personal experience that shows how I weathered the storm when I witnessed the financial meltdown of September 2008, which resulted in the crash of the global economy. During that time, I was managing and leading the Four Big Sisters (The four big departments in the Sharjah Government). Back then, many of the companies and organizations around me were slashing employee numbers and looked to trim any nook and cranny in order to cut costs. In short, hiring had come to a standstill and firing was in full swing.

SEWA Invests in Future Leaders

Interestingly, contrary to the prevalent view of companies and leaders at that point in time, I set about creating fresh benchmarks for the industry in an effort to mentor and prepare the future industry leaders to withstand crises. I knew, just like the good times, the bad times don't last long either. Hence, I invested in capability building and the learning and development of my people with the aim to equip them with the resilience to endure any rough phase and weather any storms that may arise.

The result? Today, governments, semi-governments, and private sectors struggle in the creation of a robust succession plan for middle-class managers to lead the way, whereas SEWA boasts a powerhouse of top-level, mid-level, and future leaders.

Nurture the young folks!

I see leadership as a *legacy* in which it is our prime duty to pass it on to our next generation. It gives me immense pleasure to see people flourish and become the leaders of tomorrow, for the youth are the torch bearers of the millennial age, and we, as leaders of today, must equip them to be our successful descendants.

As a tribute to my acumen and contribution in the field of Training & Human Capital Development, I was awarded the Middle East Business Leaders Award in 2012. I am recognized within the society for identifying and developing young and talented leaders and feel proud of my contribution toward achieving this goal. To illustrate, some of the people who have become great leaders under my protégé include the current Chairman of Tourism Department, Director General of Tourism Department, Sharjah Charity International General Manager, Chairman of Sharjah Health Care City, Director of Hamriyah Free Zone, Director of Sharjah Ports, Director of SAIF Zone, Director of Customs, and the recently appointed University City Director General.

How Did I Do It?

I have found that there is no magic formula or recipe to reach the top, but there are some key leadership principles that anyone can aspire to and learn from, including the following five global strategies that I usually apply:

1. First, *identify* and *target* employees with the highest potential for leadership positions. Competency, character, and commitment are the benchmarks.

2. Second, you need to ensure that you *assign* roles, responsibility, and accountability to all employees. As leaders often need to stretch themselves, this will push them out of their comfort zone. In the likelihood of setbacks or failures, be prepared for them by stepping back and watching how the employees manage in the face of adversity.
3. Third, *invest* in executive development programs, such as coaching and mentoring initiatives, global exchange workshops, and international leadership programs, etc. This gives the high-potential employees the time and space they need to really focus on building and acquiring new skills, new knowledge, and new capacity for judgment.
4. Fourth, keep *challenging* tomorrow and never say impossible. François de La Rochefoucauld said it rightly: “Nothing is impossible; there are ways that lead to everything, and if we had the sufficient will, we should always have the sufficient means. It is often merely for an excuse that we say things are impossible.”
5. Finally, place a focus on achieving a *paradigm-shift* in the employee mindset by encouraging the employees to see things in a new and different way that can add novelty to their thinking approach and behavior.

I have authored a book called *My Leadership Secrets*, wherein I delve deep into the leadership arena. The book details an impressive range of leadership traits and empowers the reader to inculcate the qualities within. It is a must-read for all aspiring and existing leaders. Hence, my leadership secrets are no longer secrets! I have revealed them all in the book and you can download a free copy from www.alleem.com.

Nature or nurture: What makes a star?

My observations may help tease out some common myths about the star performers of your organization and help you recognize their *puzzling* qualities, not all of which come naturally. Leadership is an offshoot of effort and focus, and doesn't happen by title.

Talent Management for the 21st Century

Every talent management process in use today was developed half a century ago. Therefore, it is high time we developed a fundamentally new approach to it by remodeling the original process. At SEWA, we define talent management as a holistic process built around three primary areas:



Figure 1.8 SEWA Talent Success Triangle

1. Talent Identification

At each stage of the employment life cycle

We don't select talent, we identify it. We develop employees for forward-thinking and faster-moving enterprises. Identifying the right fit is the catch.

2. Talent Development

Assessment of current talent

For all employees, we assess and hone their abilities regarding orientation, skill-development, and succession planning. We believe in developing global talent competencies.

3. Effective Talent Planning Resources

Sustained talent

We invest in knowledge management. Keeping our employees engaged

and informed, letting them be coached and mentored, and even giving them the leverage to choose their own career path.

Principle # 13: Foster a culture of continuous Improvement

Incremental Improvement

I value exploring the power of ordinary people who achieve extraordinary feats and enjoy observing those who follow their passion and make it a reality. In doing so, I believe the pursuit of objectives concerns connecting your inner world with the outer world. Moreover, it is about nurturing your inner passion, values, and then striving to present your objective as a tangible benefit for the world so that it becomes sustainable. I strongly agree with Ty Warner when he stated, “Even perfection has room for improvement.”

This is what defines continuous improvement for me—in being able to equip oneself with ever-changing workplace dynamics, to be keen on learning and improving and being updated/competent with the practical knowledge of the outer world. It gives me great satisfaction to see people transform their enthusiasm into a product or business with continuous improvement in their competence, knowledge, and skill. I greatly admire Winston Churchill, who once said, “To improve is to change; to be perfect is to change often.”

Using Kaizen and Gemba Management

Kaizen is a Japanese business philosophy of the continuous improvement of working practices, employment, production, and efficiency. It is a long-term approach to work that systematically seeks to achieve small, incremental changes in processes in order to improve efficiency and quality. According to the Kaizen philosophy, “Big results come from many small changes accumulated over time.” Kaizen is the idea that one need not wait for something to be broken in order to fix it.

Rather, one should grasp the opportunity to improve upon current processes.

Further, Kaizen promotes incremental improvements that eventually lead to breakthrough innovations. Learning involves the *constant* re-evaluation of how we do things, and thus entails taking small steps to improve things incrementally. Listed below are the elements of Kaizen:

- a) Improvement (for the better and ongoing)
- b) Change (continuity)

Gemba

We will now turn to *Gemba*, the Japanese technique of optimizing the workplace. Gemba means real place, or in other words, where the real action takes place. So, in business terms, *Gemba* is where the value-adding activities to satisfy the client are carried out.

What is Gemba Kaizen?

Simply put, *Gemba Kaizen* means to make continuous improvements at the real place, where the action is going on, which can serve to enhance your organization.

Continuous Improvement

When faced with a problem, I encourage my employees to adapt the PDCA **Plan-Do-Check-Act** cycle, which is a problem-solving technique. It is a four-step model for carrying out change. Just as a circle has no end, the PDCA cycle should be repeated continuously in order to affect change. Also popularly known as the Deming's wheel, the PDCA was invented by the late William Edwards Deming, an American statistician. I often borrow his famous quote to motivate my employees to run the PDCA effectively. Deming's lovely quote states: "In God we trust; all others must bring data."

This proactive problem-solving tool is adapted in many companies worldwide and is a proven strategy that leads to effective problem solving as well as continuous improvement. The cycle looks like this:

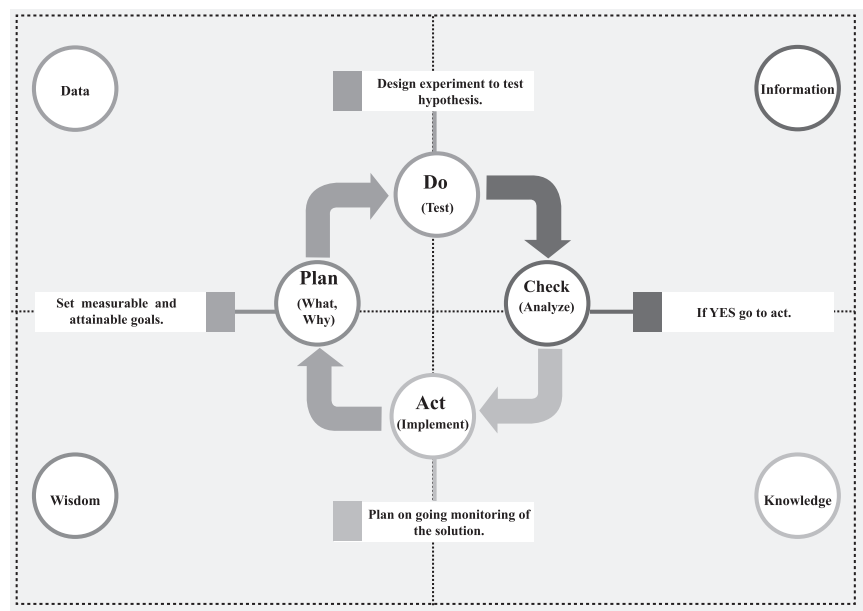


Figure 1.9 PDCA

When To Use Plan-DO-Check-Act

I believe that PDCA can and should be used in every process enhancement program. After first introducing this model to my employees, it has been frequently used in SEWA in the daily chores of many employees throughout the organization. In the list below, I have cited the top four realms of when implementation the PDCA process is a must:

- As a model for continuous improvement.
- When starting a new improvement project.
- When developing a new or improved design of a process, product, or service.
- When implementing any change.

Plan-Do-Check-Act Procedure

After understanding when to use the PDCA model. We start implementing the model. Below is a quick summary of the steps involved:

1. **Plan.** Recognize an opportunity and plan a change.
2. **Do.** Test the change. Carry out a small-scale study.
3. **Check.** Review the test, analyze the results, and identify what you've learned.
4. **Act.** Take action based on what you learned in the study step. If the change did not work, go through the cycle again with a different plan. If you implement wider changes, use what you learned to plan new improvements, beginning the cycle again.

Principle # 14: Grow together with our Suppliers and Partners for mutual benefit

Seeking Strong Partnerships

The relationship with our suppliers and partners is built on intense loyalty and trust. We practice transparency and share accurate information so that negotiations can happen in an environment of trust and clarity.

SEWA works closely with its suppliers to form partnerships, which can deliver tangible benefits for both. In addition, we always keep our suppliers in the loop. The traditional approach to supplier relations is to play one off *against* the other to try and get a better deal. Most companies also try and avoid relying too much on any one supplier so they do not have the upper hand when negotiating. SEWA has turned this approach on its head by forming closer working relationships with its main suppliers over the long-term.

The 3 Cs

We have devised a simple regime for a lasting partnership. In so doing, we have created our own way to work closely with both suppliers and partners. We call this model the 3Cs—Communication, Collaboration, and Commitment. Here are the 3Cs of the Partnership Model:

Communication: Communication among partners promotes the dual goals of transparency and inclusiveness through the sharing of information and guidance.

Collaboration: Collaboration yields benefits for the partners. Beyond the immediate reasons the partners have for entering into a relationship, the connection/collaboration offers the parties an option in the future, thereby opening new doors and unforeseen opportunities. A developed ability to create and sustain fruitful collaborations gives companies a significant and competitive leg up.

Commitment: At SEWA, we are more than a member of the team; we are an active part of the team and committed to the partnership pledge to do successful deals in the future. Commitment and teamwork go hand-in-hand here.

The infographic below details SEWA’s 3Cs of Partnership:

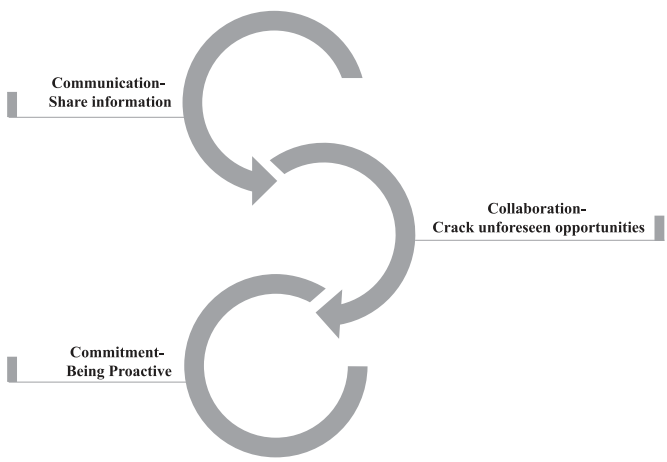


Figure 1.11 3Cs of Partnership

I think the above model is a must-have for any business partnership. The advantages of the SEWA approach in this area are:

- **Best Practices Peer:** Each company, SEWA, and its suppliers can focus on what they do best. This means that our partnerships end up generating better outcomes than would have been achieved by working independently.
- **In-sync problem-solving:** Problems can be solved jointly, thus allowing SEWA to benefit from the expertise of its suppliers and partners.
- **Co-ideators:** As a result, SEWA has an extraordinary relationship with its suppliers and partners. Considering ourselves co-ideators, our goal is to make productivity our top-most priority and adhere to the ethical business model. Our attitude is to foster a collaborative working environment for the betterment of the company. This requires having a respect for each other's values and principles and to ensure that we have a great time working together.

SEWA Annual Partners Meet

While writing this paragraph, SEWA was celebrating its second-annual partners meet on July 19, 2017, at Radisson Blu Hotel in Sharjah, where over 100 companies, both local, regional, and global, participated. This meet was an ethical non-commercial platform with no hidden motives, in which we recognized all our esteemed partners and suppliers. An additional purpose of this meet was solely to commemorate our partners for being our co-ideators and seamlessly working with us to create a better tomorrow.

Principle # 15: Achieve our common objectives through teamwork

“Teaming is the engine of organizational learning,” says Harvard Business School Professor Amy C Edmondson, whose quote aligns with

my Philosophy of Teamwork (for more information, refer to my book, *The 13 Critical Traits of Team Dynamics*), according to which the critical success factor of teamwork concerns the people, as opposed to the methodology or tools. Moreover, the philosophy of teamwork is about putting effective teaming into practice. In putting the philosophy into practice at SEWA, it is very interesting to see people come together, work together, create together, solve together, and ultimately, grow together. This is the quintessence of the SEWA Way.

Let's Collaborate to Innovate

Managers have one pressing need: to find ways to make teams work better and more effective. In the following list, I provide seven key characteristics from my book, *The 13 Traits of Team Dynamics*, on what defines a high-performing team:

1. **A common vision:** Team members should work towards a set goal and should pull together in the same direction to achieve that goal.
2. **Leadership:** A leader should constantly motivate the team members and boost their morale.
3. **Passion:** The team members should be passionate about working together.
4. **Unity:** The team members should be united by a common objective.
5. **Shared Roles:** Every human being is unique and bestowed with extraordinary expertise, the right people should be selected people for the right job at the right time.
6. **Diversity:** Diverse and varied team members with both creative and intuitive thinkers produce a rich and winning team.
7. **The Right Size:** Size is the key. The smaller the team, the more focused the team members.

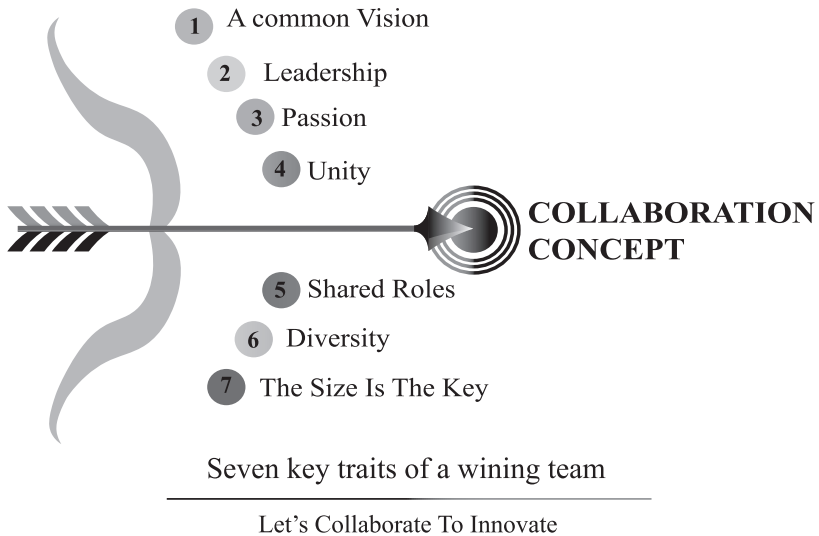


Figure 1.12 Seven Characteristics of Winning

The above image states the seven key characteristics of a winning SEWA team that works in synergy to reach its objectives.

The Nine Champions

I always advise against having more than nine knowledgeable, skilful, and smart members in a team. Throughout my business life, I have always used a maximum of nine team members, which I call the *nine champions*. Each has a unique role, accountability, and responsibility. These champions are described below:

1. The **sponsor**, who provides resources, removes roadblocks, and determines when to disband the team.
2. The **leader**, who ensures the team has clear objectives and makes sure everyone is involved and committed.
3. The **challenger**, who questions effectiveness and presses for continuous improvement and results.

4. The ***doer***, who urges the team to get on with the job-at-hand and does practical tasks.
5. The ***thinker***, who produces carefully considered ideas and weighs up and improves others' ideas.
6. The ***supporter***, who eases tension, helps them cover personal agendas or conflicts, makes things easier, and maintains harmony.
7. The ***organizer*** maintains schedules and makes sure all members stay on the same page.
8. The ***advisor*** advises the team about the risks may come along the way.
9. The ***energizer*** provides inspiration. He can view situations and opportunities with innate simplicity.

Countless studies have shown the benefits of smaller teams. Focus and responsibility are more challenging with too many people, which is why the outcome results in folks staring down silently at their laptops for an entire meeting. Hence, three conditions are essential to the nine champions' effectiveness: Trust among members, a sense of identity, and a sense of efficacy.

Attitude Is Everything

I always prefer right attitude over the right aptitude. Why? Simply because people with the right attitude are both motivated and adaptable, which makes them more open to learning new skills—that makes my job way easier. Teaching them the required aptitude becomes effortless. Moreover, forcefully fitting in the wrong attitude into SEWA could cause a culture-clash in the organization and disrupt teamwork, which, in turn, causes unrest and impacts overall performance. Also, the primary reason why my mind is fixed upon such people is that they are fully-loaded with determination, tenacity, and resilience—and that is everything!

Making Teams Click

Happy collaborators are more productive and less likely to look elsewhere for employment. Here, the challenge is how you help your employees to collaborate more often. First, you need to understand that people collaborate when they *share* the same interests, values, background, etc. Precisely, collaboration is the result of a great deal of commonality. Second, you need to *create* opportunities for them to understand each other more.

Coffice

At SEWA, the employees go for a *coffice Meet* (coffee out-of-office) to discuss a task at hand and organize peer brunches and other team building outings/gatherings, etc. All this helps them to strengthen their relationship and know each other to collaborate in a more productive way. These practices enable brainstorming as opposed to blamestorming, where the focus is on how to fix, not whom to fix.

Teamwork at European Space Agency (ESA)

I invited Astronaut Frank De Winne, Head of European Astronaut Centre Department, to visit SEWA. In fact, I intentionally invited him on October 1, 2017, to inaugurate our Happiness and Positivity Hub. He gladly accepted my request, and to my surprise, his wife, Lena also accompanied him, along with other delegates, such as H.E Dominique Mineur, Ambassador of Belgium to the UAE.

Awestruck by the enthusiasm and positivity around, Frank de Winne so enamored by SEWA's new image and the evident brand turnaround that he said, "The positivity around is contagious. Please allow me to click some pictures, because I'm going to steal some of your ideas and implement them back home," which instilled me with pride.

In a truly amazing presentation, Frank shared his space journey in the form of a presentation to my team. His entire elaboration was so

explicit and vivid that we felt as if we were actually with him in the space shuttle. What an awesome experience it was! He showed us some priceless footage taken from his six-month stint in space.

Here's what Syeda, my chief knowledge officer, asked Frank de Winne:

Being an astronaut who has been in outer space twice, working alongside diversified team members hailing from different races, creeds, and genders, can you share some of your wisdom of teamwork that would work here in SEWA, which houses over 20 nationalities from different corners of the world?

Frank de Winne was kind enough to share his wisdom regarding teamwork with my SEWA Team. In our meeting, he highlighted two vital elements of great teamwork:

1. Selection of the team members: The right teammate is crucial to the success of any task at hand. Irrespective of the diversity they hail from, each team member should be equipped with the right skills, knowledge, technical know-how, and attitude to carry out the venture jointly.

2. Performance and Behavioural Training: Once the right candidate is chosen, the entire team undergoes a training that ensures their compatibility. In this training program, they master essential interpersonal skills and gain the ability to work effectively with different people by learning how to put others at ease through acknowledging diverse opinions, addressing relevant concerns, minimizing conflict, and promoting harmony.

These were definite words of wisdom and aligned with my thoughts on the teamwork framework.

Frank's wife, Lena, showed her interest in publishing an article about SEWA's brand turnaround in their quarterly space journal, *Roomb*, which is highly-acclaimed in Europe. She mentioned that this one-of-a-kind business transformation story is rare and that it should be shared

with the world. She stated, “This is just like the big bang! This business rejuvenation is happening at the speed of light.”

The chapter encompasses the *fifteen* fundamental facts that form the spine of SEWA. As I conclude this chapter, I am deeply touched to see each and every corner of the organization intensely soaked up in the glory of my principles. Every nook and cranny has a winning tale to relate to the world. I would sum up this chapter with a wondrous comment by Mr. Lee Poh Choo, Nicholas, the principal of Carlo Solutions, in Singapore. His words were “These principles are not to be taken ordinarily. They belong to fortune 500 companies.”





PASSION TO WIN

If you've been reading the previous chapter sequentially, then by now, you will have subconsciously awarded me a bravery award. Thank you for the honor! In chapter 2, we will start to look at how a fully-scoped and embedded winning culture led SEWA down a visionary path.

The Man from Outer Space?

Yes, I acquired this strange nickname when a few of my employees had secretly called me “the man from outer space”. To them, my leadership style, my decision-making skills, and even my overall persona, seemed extra-terrestrial. Well, to some extent, I agree with them—I am a tad bit different, and so are my inherent capabilities. I like to do things that are most unexpected; sometimes I go by my gut, whereas other times I go by the graphs.

There's one more reason that would justify my supernatural or rather superhuman conduct—Star Trek.

A Great Start

As a kid, I was a die-hard fan of the *Star Trek* franchise—a sci-fi television series that debuted in 1966. The American series has given us

many characters who've acted as inspirational, pioneering leaders. Throughout the franchise, these captains and commanders have had very different approaches at times. *Primal Leadership*, by Daniel Goleman (along with co-authors Richard Boyatzis and Annie McKee) revealed the six key leadership categories showcased in the series. In fact, the authors claim that all leaders fall into one of these categories. The six key categories are: the visionary leader, the coaching leader, the affiliative leader, the democratic leader, the pace-setting leader, and the commanding leader.

I realized that I fell into two broad categories; namely, the visionary leader and the coaching leader. The following sections give a description of the characters that have influenced me.

The Visionary Leader

Captain Jean-Luc Picard always promotes a clear vision of what Starfleet is all about. He motivates his crew members to be the best they can be and empowers them with the knowledge they need to get out there and make it so, providing excellent insight to his followers. Hence, visionary leaders are great for times when a new direction is needed.

Since SEWA had embarked on a journey of renewal and revival—being a visionary leader was my call of duty. This would set SEWA in a new direction with revived potential.

The Coaching Leader

Captain Jonathan Archer is definitely a coaching leader; as the captain in command of the first Starfleet starship, he's got to be. Archer helps his crew members recognize their strengths and weaknesses while forming close connections with his team. Like some coaching leaders, his style can come across as micromanagement, however, his methods ultimately help lay the groundwork for Starfleet's long-term capabilities.

To salvage the mismanaged SEWA, a micromanagement approach was required. This comprised of identifying troublesome people and processes and striking them out the right away. As crude as it may sound, this laid a strong foundation for the steadfast growth of SEWA.

Limping back to Normalcy

By the summer of 2016, SEWA employees had begun to believe in the company's 15 winning principles. *Continuous Improvement* and *Teamwork* had become a daily norm. Employees pledged to pour creative energy and dedication into their work, which had a ripple effect, spreading positivity throughout the organization. It was also reported that partners and suppliers were enjoying the new relationships. SEWA was on the verge of winning its first big battle. But the war was *far* from over.

Qualitative & Quantitative

To develop SEWA's branding strategy, I adapted both a qualitative and quantitative approach to assessment. Soon, I realized that I needed to move beyond qualitative analysis, which rendered *emotionally* driven and unquantifiable information. I felt the need for a robust and fact-driven approach—quantitative analysis that can render information on company's financial status and other competitive advantage(s).

Many challenges remained, and a lot had to be done to bring in productivity and profitability in our organization. My ultimate aim was to transform SEWA into a faster, nimbler, and cost-conscious innovator utility. However, the herculean challenge was to make employees understand the need to change and create positive energy and a sense of urgency around it. I believe that to revive a brand, a never-give-up attitude is required. It's the relentless passion to win that pivots an organization towards a more scalable and profitable business model. It's the appetite to win that keeps a brand alive and kicking.

To accomplish this mission, the 3 *Ps* formed my bedrock: **P**atience (the ability to wait something out or endure something tedious, without getting riled up); **P**ersistence (the ability to persist, in spite of difficulty), and **P**ositivity (the ability to be optimistic in attitude). Gradually, the employees had started to get a deeper understanding of the company's 15 winning principles. However, they lacked passion. They desired an aspirational vision that could propel them to action and get what they wanted.

GWYW: Get-What-You-Want

The author of *Turn Your Dreams Into Reality*, Gini Graham Scott, PhD, actualized the GWYW approach. The book revolves around the concept of clearly determining what we want, envisioning it, and then getting it. I chanced upon this wonderful book and was smitten by its mindful approach. Essentially, this approach consists of three simple steps:

- 1) You determine what you really want—and can realistically obtain.
- 2) You see a clear vision of what you want and see yourself achieving that.
- 3) You take the needed steps to get it, including overcoming any obstacles, making any modifications, and finally, enjoying the experience of achieving what you want.

Following this train of thought, I embarked upon a unique journey of translating my *mind-mapped* SEWA vision onto paper. I started with the most pressing link—PEOPLE, for which I literally had to move heaven and earth to lift employee morale and heal up SEWA's cachet and reputation. I was confident that once SEWA bounced back, it would experience a multitude of benefits. For the rest of this chapter, we shall examine the strategic steps that infused passion in SEWA.

Vision 20/20

At first, I worked up a visionary roadmap for SEWA. By now, the business world around me had already created lofty and sky-rocketing vision statements for the year 2031 and 2050, respectively. However, SEWA had just begun a brand turnaround expedition—a far-reaching vision may seem unrealistic and too far-fetched, ultimately throwing us out of focus. To infuse passion and a *GWYW*-attitude in the employees, I took strategic baby-steps, and set up the Vision 2020—a five-year roadmap.

Another fascinating fact that urged me to choose the year 2020 was that, according to ophthalmology science, a human needs 20/20 vision to clear the eye chart test. Only then can they be considered to have perfect vision.

SEWA Vision 2020—Road to Recovery

Businesses are under extreme pressure to perform better and better over time. To fight this mounting pressure, organizations need to set a realistic yet ambitious vision that is not a cookie cutter statement to impress the world.

By now, I had understood the demographic of SEWA and visualized its destiny in the years to come. I wanted my feelings to resonate with my team. In one of my early meetings with the team, I began my speech by saying,

The way we are working, isn't working! Today we will enter a new era. To drive exceptional outcomes, I have created Vision 2020 for SEWA. Our vision is bold but realistic. We need a roadmap that creates the right balance between short-term expectations and long-term experience. SEWA's 2020 strategic framework is a five-year guideline for tactical annual work plans and is based on SEWA's 15 principles, and core cultural values.

My ambitious vision was ridiculed and mocked by many in their making fun of such a far-reaching statement. Even my managers questioned as to how I planned to achieve such an unrealistic vision. I confidently replied, “In this hyper-competitive world, if you are not at the table, you are on the menu.” To draw a roadmap that will lead SEWA towards a brighter and sustainable future, we have to be able to respond to the 3 Aces:

1. Why is vision important?
2. What makes SEWA Vision 2020 unique?
3. How will SEWA Vision 2020 impact the community we live in?

SEWA’s 8Ps

Our responses to the 3 Aces have been translated into our vision strategy. SEWA Vision 2020 is built on eight pillars, which we call the ‘8 Ps’

1. People
2. Planet
3. Projects
4. Performance
5. Positioning
6. Partners
7. Prosperity
8. Profit

SEWA Vision 2020 is our *blueprint* to lead us toward a globally successful, highly innovative, and sustainable tomorrow. Achievement of this vision is dependent on 8 pillars, representing our core priorities, and which are our key focus in the coming years. *The 8 Ps* of SEWA Vision

2020 form the foundation of our future strategy and are an integral part of our future branding and marketing plans. As strategy guru Michael Porter of Harvard University points out, “The essence of strategy is in the activities, choosing to perform activities differently or to perform different activities than rivals.” We must define what these activities are if we expect to have a clear and sharp strategy.

ROADMAP TOWARDS A BRIGHTER FUTURE		
Our Vision	Our Goals	Our System Priorities
PEOPLE	Be one of the great places admired and to work for in the world	<div>Competent capabilities and happy culture that fosters National Identity</div> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Attract and retain the right talent• Skilled and experienced workforce with effective Knowledge Management• Smart integrated technology to support our business• Create Positive energy and happy work environment• Effective Emiratisation
PERFORMANCE	Meeting and exceeding customer satisfaction and expectations through delivery of reliable services of electricity, water, and natural gas at an excellent level of safety and quality standards in line with the most advanced technologies and under supervision of qualified and skilled employees.	<div>Sustainable Growth</div> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Continuous optimization• Ensure sustainable gas supply• Diversify fuel resources• Implement ISO 50001 - 2011 Energy Management• Demand peak load management• Supporting Sharjah's sustainable development "Sharjah Planning Council"• Reliable and high quality support of electricity, water and Natural Gas• Socially responsible business practices
PLANET	Reduce energy and water consumption and carbon emissions as well as reducing the environmental impact on our operations	<div>Reducing our impact on climate and environment</div> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Promote water and energy conservation awareness for 2 million consumers• Work with local and global organizations to help promote access to clean water and alternative energy sources• Increase the use of sustainable materials and recycle content• Promote using eco-friendly machines and equipments• Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all• Conduct visibility studies to incorporate environmental impact assessment (EIA)
PROJECTS	Successful and Sustainable delivery of right projects on the right time	<div>Projects to be completed Before time, below budget, on specifications by using SEWA project life cycle model</div> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1 Imaginering2 Ecomagination3 Critical thinking4 Execution5 Knowledge Management
POSITIONING	Establish a distinct position in the mind of the consumer in a way that effectively communicates our core values	<div>Create a unique impression in the consumer's mind so that the consumer associates something specific and desirable with our brand and services.</div> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Well written Marketing and Branding strategy• Participate in networking events• Latest trend solutions and technologies• Expand locally, regionally, internationally through exhibitions, conferences, forums, etc.
PARTNERS	Create ongoing win-win partnership with our partners through strong corporate governments and fundamentals	<div>Partners are one of the pillars of SEWA vision</div> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Have a round table discussion with our partners to improve our business/services practices• Update each other on the sustainability principles• Carry out joint workshops, training, and development programs• Mutual interdependency for Long-term relationship• Promote face to face interaction and visits
PROSPERITY	Authentic leadership building enduring institution and built to last business	<div>Excellent services</div> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Superlative services• World –class health, safety and environment practices• Highest corporate governance and management standards• World-class integrated internal and external communications• Happy stakeholders
PROFIT	Improving the revenue stream and the bottom line while maintaining the balance between social and commercial obligations	<div>Efficient revenue growth</div> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Operate the lowest cost manufacturing and logistics in business/service, while maintaining quality standards• Use of new technologies, tools and techniques for economic profit growth• Introduce cost management• Increase the overall revenue by 2% annually• Have a close monitoring to our assets, and benchmark them with the global best practices to ensure breakthrough performance all the time

Figure 2.1 SEWA Vision 2020

Let's have a closer look at each one.

Pillar 1: People

The first pillar is 'People'. At SEWA, we front-load our people investment. Even the best strategy will not succeed unless supported by strong employees. That is why we at SEWA live and foster an ownership culture—a culture that encourages every individual in our organization to give his/ her best shot. We believe that employee development is essential for extracting the best out of them. Hence, our first pillar of Vision 2020 is People. SEWA has taken great strides to promote a positive work environment. Employee satisfaction is one of our top priorities because we know that happy employees equate to happy customers, which leads to the success of the organization. For SEWA, its people are not only an asset but *also* a competitive advantage.

Theory Z

Theory Z is a Japanese management style popularized by Dr. William Ouchi. It focuses on increasing employee loyalty to the company by providing a job for life, with a strong focus on the well-being of the employee, both on and off the job, which resonated with me.

Theory R

I go beyond theory Z to the point where I encourage the sons/daughters of the retiring employees to join the organization. This is what I call Theory R, which spreads immense positivity and emotional attachment towards the organization.

In addition, SEWA provides full health insurance coverage for its employees, including their family members. I believe that the physical and mental health of an individual is intertwined, and that one cannot be separated from the other; hence, our physical illnesses adversely affect our mental health and vice versa. In light of this, keeping check of

my employees' health was my way of infusing optimism and a healthy work environment and fostering happy employees.

I leave no stone unturned in earning employee loyalty because it gives us the confidence to face any future challenges. Staying relevant is one of the biggest challenges that employees face worldwide. Further, improving their skills through continuous training programs enables them to stay updated in their relevant fields of expertise. We also believe in "Learning from experience"—especially first-hand experience; in this way, SEWA offers its employees opportunities for direct interaction with organizations/companies abroad to educate themselves about global best practices, learn about innovative technologies, and acquire the processes and tools that have the potential to be replicated or adapted in-house.

In alignment with the ambitious strategy of the emirate of Sharjah, SEWA is now stepping up efforts to earn the distinctive status of being one of the most desirable places to work for in the world. We intend to achieve our goal for 2020 by attracting competent capabilities and sustaining a happy culture that fosters national identity.

Grey-Collars

At SEWA, grey-collar is something used to describe those who work beyond the age of retirement. As a gesture to keep the lives and livelihood of loyal SEWA employees smooth, I even extend the employment tenure of some of the 'gem' employees, who are given the term because they are rare and unique in their own way. They have spent a good chunk of their lives at SEWA, participating and contributing to its success/progress.

Hence, even if they reach retirement age, I willingly extend their tenure and assign them the role and responsibility of a SEWA Coach & Mentor. In this honorary role, the employees act as coaches and mentors to currently-existing or newly-appointed employees and share their immense knowledge with them.

FedEx's PSP Philosophy

A couple of weeks back, I was reading an impressive book entitled *FedEx Delivers*, by Madan Birla. The book resonates well with my belief of fostering innovation and that innovation depends on quality leadership. I learned a fascinating philosophy from the book called, *The PSP Philosophy*. This stands for **P**eople, **S**ervice, **P**rofit, and encompasses a culture of putting employees first in everything; as a result, FedEx employees put the customer first in everything they do.

Putting Employees First

The customer is always king (or queen!). However, not at the cost of employees' happiness—never!

Yes, we work hard and around-the-clock to serve our customers, but never in the *Karoshi Way*. *Karoshi* is a Japanese word meaning “death from overwork”. So, what are the risk factors involved? Long periods of overtime at work, on duty during holiday periods, too much work-stress, attending a new job with no family members around, and working night shifts. Veritably, “high demand—low control” jobs increase the risk of Karoshi death.

No-vacation Company

Though I was pressed for time and efficient employees to bring the brand turnaround, I would never want SEWA to become a no-vacation company either. Veritably, I knew that well-rested and alert employees are able to concentrate better at work, for they must maintain a healthy family and social life. Of course, I would not want sleep-deprived *zombie-like* employees around me; at my organization, I need to see healthy and happy employees all the time.

Being so concerned about my employees, there are no *irregular* working hours at SEWA. As a matter of fact, we have a working hour policy

to *limit* overtime and stress the importance of rest and family time. I appreciated my people leaving and engaging in their real lives without fearing any repercussions for being away from the office. This laid the foundation for a time-off-as-the-norm culture.

R&R

Recreation & Refreshment—this is a unique practice that instills enthusiasm and positivism in SEWA employees. Unlike the prevalent trend of carrying work to vacation, SEWA discourages official work during an employee’s vacation since a vacation ought to be filled with recreation and refreshment. Taking a break from work should be holistically fulfilling and rewarding. Moreover, it should *reset* our mind and help eliminate the residues of negative thoughts and actions that we encounter in our lives.

An Optimistic Workplace

At SEWA, the above practices act as happiness indicators, thus making our organization an optimistic workplace that focuses on our customers and our commitment to keep going until the customer’s needs and wants are met.

To achieve this overarching goal, SEWA adheres to the following system priorities:

Attract and Retain the Right Talent

We hire S.W.A.Ns. SWANs? That’s right—**s**mart, **w**illing, **a**ctive, and **n**ice individuals. S.W.A.Ns are primed to go that extra mile because they are high-calibre participants from day one. To top it off, the training division develops employee evaluation systems and provides training needs and technical assistance in performance planning and evaluation. The objectives are to align individual and organizational priorities and promote continuous improvement. I knew very well that developing

and enhancing staff capabilities also calls for adopting and implementing relevant HR best practices, as well as ensuring a high level of employee engagement and a motivated work environment. We believe in holistic talent management; therefore, the focus is on developing everybody in the organization, not just the super achievers. The SEWA talent management strategy ensures that every employee is provided with the proper guidance and moral support to achieve their full potential.

A Skilled and Experienced Workforce with Effective Knowledge Management

SEWA searches continuously for tools that can enhance employees' competencies. We have developed three programs to measure productivity and create a framework for training and development with a greater focus on training future leaders.

SEWA has introduced its competency framework that includes 12 competencies under four categories; basic, behavioral, leadership, and technical, with a set of performance indicators ensuring the close monitoring of its manpower and expected future growth, which has also been linked to its training programs and recruitment practices.

Smart Integrated Technology to Support Our Business

SEWA embraces the smart way of doing things. By leveraging our operating IT framework for competitive advantage and through the innovative use of *trailblazing* technology, we aimed to *leapfrog* into our next phase of growth.

We believe that aligning business and technology is critical to mitigating business risks and maximizing the benefits from the technologies. The value proposition of transformation from a traditional model to a digital business is immense, while a strong digital workplace is also vital to achieving an organization's goals in the digital economy. A high-performance work system also builds on and develops the skills and abilities of frontline workers to achieve gains in speed, flexibility, productivity, and customer satisfaction. At SEWA, smart technology adoption is being used most effectively, leading both customers and employees to reap the benefits.

Create a Happy Work Environment

SEWA is committed to ensuring safe and healthy working conditions. We respect the dignity of the individual and support the rights of employees' freedom of expression of ideas, thoughts, views, and decisions, etc. We ensure transparent, fair, and confidential procedures for employees to raise concerns. In turn, these principles serve to create a friendly and motivating work environment. The following section details a number of SEWA's creative initiatives:

Takreem: *Takreem* is an Arabic word meaning recognition. Aimed at encouraging and motivating employees to excel, this initiative creates a favorable and competitive environment by honoring outstanding employees in various categories, which including *Hidden Heroes*, *Time Managers*, *SEWA Pioneers*, *Conservation Ambassadors*, and *I am Creative*, among others.

My Visit in SEWA: To raise awareness about the functions and responsibilities of the various departments at SEWA, we organize field familiarization visits to several worksites, stations, and facilities where the select employees can make their comments and suggestions about the nature of work, if any. Since SEWA is a huge organization that houses over 5000 employees, some of my branch offices are quite far-flung. For example, Kalba, one of our branch offices, is located on the outskirts of Sharjah City, which touches the border of the Sultanate of Oman. Even though it's a three-hour drive from the main office, I ensure my employees don't feel neglected and left out, and I make sure to regularly visit all the branch offices and operation sites.

Volunteering: SEWA believes in Volunteerism and recognizes that volunteering has an enormous impact on the health and well-being of communities. As such, the volunteering activities of SEWA employees with any social or charitable organizations is given due consideration in his/her annual performance appraisal.

Business Meal: Under this initiative, the manager of the department or the leader of the work team is fully empowered to meet his/her

members outside the work premises at a nearby coffee shop to lead a friendly discussion on matters relating to work. These meetings are sponsored by the company fully, which is a rarity in organizations today, especially those that are government-owned; however, I encourage this because healthy food fuels the mind with good thoughts. The brightest of ideas often come about while at a table laid out with a scrumptious menu, and the icing on the cake is when that meal is free!

Knowledge Café: The Knowledge Café resides in a small corner at the edge of the staircase, where we keep a daily newspaper, some magazines, and a few copies of the Reader's Digest. Here, SEWA employees often meet and greet over a cup of coffee.

This was an idea churned out of my *I am creative* initiative. With the help of this initiative, we were able to tap into the creativity of our employees. One of our star employees, Rasha, from SEWA's Marketing & Branding team, *ideated* and *created* the SEWA Knowledge Café.

Pillar 2: Performance

SEWA's performance vision for the year 2020 is to continuously meet customer satisfaction and expectation by using the unfailing services of electricity, water, and natural gas. SEWA aims to achieve this by reliably catering to the demand for electricity during peak hours, as well as providing a reliable gas and water supply to Sharjah residents, as well as industrial and commercial areas. SEWA uses advanced technologies, the services of major international companies, and highly skilled employees to meet its customer satisfaction, along with legitimate business practices. To accomplish this, I have set aside a few priorities that serve as guideposts:

The system priorities for Performance at SEWA are:

- Continuous optimization of our assets.
- Ensure a sustainable gas supply.

- Diversify fuel resources.
- Implement ISO 50001 Energy Management principles.
- Manage the peak hour.
- Demand peak load management.
- Support Sharjah's Urban Planning Council sustainable development Program.
- Reliable and high-quality support of electricity, water, and natural gas.
- Socially-responsible business practices.

Continuous Optimization

Continuous improvement is important, but SEWA goes beyond that to focus on the continuous optimization of our assets to ensure that our services meet or exceed our consumers' expectations. We achieve this by making our operations, processes, and projects as fully effective and functional as possible. To achieve our objectives for continuous optimization, we ask a simple yet important question, "How do we make it most effective?"

Ensure a Sustainable Gas Supply

Natural gas presents a solution to the world's economic and environmental challenges as it is a safe and sustainable source of energy. One of the cleanest hydrocarbons, natural gas is easy to maintain, easy to distribute, and simple to use. As Sharjah is becoming a touristic hub with an ever-increasing number of expatriates moving to live in the city, there is a greater demand for energy use. One of the services provided by SEWA, which is of great importance, is the provision of natural gas. All domestic, commercial, and industrial areas in Sharjah are supplied with piped natural gas; however, SEWA is always on the lookout to improve and troubleshoot its supply of natural gas to reach its residents without delay.

Diversify Fuel Sources

Across the globe, countries have started to look for ways to make, save, and correctly use energy. SEWA has started looking into greener, cleaner energy resources by replacing heavy fuels, such as diesel, which has a high sulfur content to a light fuel diesel with the lowest sulphur content possible, as per the international standards.

Introducing solar energy as a part of our smart grid strategy, we have installed solar panels in SEWA's parking lots that power the street lamps of a number of residential areas nearby. By implementing such projects, SEWA is taking small yet meaningful steps towards a greener future. You will learn more about this later in the chapter entitled "The Green Giant".

Implement ISO 50001 – 2011 Energy Management

Using energy efficiently helps organizations save money as well conserve resources and tackle climate change. ISO 50001 supports organizations in all sectors to use energy more efficiently through the development of an energy management system.

SEWA is also reducing its ecological footprint through its proactive energy efficiency policies and adapting to the challenges of climate change in partnership with other governmental institutions and the community.

It is worth mentioning that back on June 1, 2016, SEWA made a remarkable historic achievement in the energy sector by fulfilling the ISO 50001 requirements, and thereby became the *first* Utility in the entire Arab World to achieve ISO certification for the same.

Demand Peak Load Management

In the UAE, the steady growth in population is leading to an increased demand for power; therefore, peak load demand management is becoming crucial. In Sharjah, like in other Emirates, the demand for electricity

varies throughout the day and across seasons. The electricity system infrastructure is designed to meet the highest level of demand, so during nonpeak times, the system is typically *underutilized*. On the other hand, during peak times, when demand reaches its highest level, SEWA has therefore optimized smart grids, which can reduce peak demand by providing information and incentives to consumers to enable them to shift consumption away from periods of peak demand.

On October 27, 2016, SEWA signed an agreement with Diamond Energy, Singapore, for the delivery of Sharjah demand response. This represented the commencement of company's first project in the UAE to design, implement, and manage the demand response for electricity consumers in the Emirate of Sharjah. Diamond Energy now operates the first, largest, and most advanced demand-response portfolio in Sharjah. They bring revenue to SEWA, increase asset reliability, reduce national CO2 emissions, and help to secure energy supplies.

To effectively manage the supply of energy to our consumers during peak load hours, SEWA holds an annual Peak Hour initiative under the theme "One Hour Saving", which is held every year on July 1 from 2:30 to 3:30 pm. This day coincides with the highest demand for power and water during the summer season, and the initiative intends to raise awareness regarding balancing electricity use and reducing green gas emissions.

Co-ideators and Co-creators

This is an initiative to crowdsource inputs from you and the rest of the world. Please join hands with us in taking on the roles of the co-ideator and co-creator. I would appreciate your positive feedback on how to optimize energy management and would be delighted to receive your personal views. To do so, please communicate with me via the portal at www.sewa.gov.ae. We look forward to receiving your ideas, comments, and best practices.

Supporting Sharjah's Sustainable Development through Sharjah Urban Planning Council

I am pleased to announce my selection by His Highness, the ruler of Sharjah, to become a very active board member in a newly-born council, the Sharjah Urban Planning Council (SUPC), which seeks to enable citizens and businesses to establish a meaningful role in shaping communities that enrich people's lives by managing the right balance of new developments and essential services, environmental protection, and innovative change—all in perfect synergy. The vision is for Sharjah to become more sustainable, as a place of great experiences from a vibrant downtown with connected neighborhoods all the way to open spaces and productive industrial areas.

SEWA is one of the board members of SUPC and supports the “smart city infrastructure” for sustainable urban planning and development that has been adopted. SUPC's main aim is to develop an overall urban strategy to ensure that the infrastructure will match the accelerated pace of economic growth and urbanization in Sharjah.

Reliable and High-Quality Support of Electricity, Water, and Natural Gas

To keep our customers satisfied and happy, SEWA aims to have a constant supply of electricity, water, and natural gas for its residential, commercial, and industrial areas. We have the largest number of connected residential, industrial, and commercial customers, the most diverse customer base, and the broadest portfolio of services. Our robust and diverse energy utility infrastructure ensures access and reliability to match the demands of its customers at an affordable cost. Our priority in making energy and water available is a critical factor in the promotion of economic and social development in the emirate of Sharjah. We are also focused on conserving the many resources with which we have been entrusted.

Socially Responsible Business Practices

SEWA strives to be a trusted corporate citizen. As an integral part of society, we are committed to fulfilling our responsibilities to the societies and communities in which we operate. As a government entity and utility provider, our aim is to balance the needs of our customers and the communities in which we serve with the needs of the environment in which we operate. Through reducing lifecycle costs, developing and empowering our workforce and focusing on conserving resources, we reiterate our commitment to minimizing the environmental impact of our business and maintaining a sustainable operation.

Pillar 3: Planet

SEWA employees are committed to environmental stewardship. When implementing this mandate, I started with a message that we learned in our preliminary schools—the ‘3Rs’ of environmentally conscious choices: **Reduce**, **Reuse**, and **Recycle**. Practicing the 3Rs helps with the conservation of energy and resources, as well as landfill diversion. You know, sometimes the simplest things are the most effective ones.

Hence, our system priorities for the planet are:

- Reduce our impact on climate and the environment.
- Work with local, regional, and global organizations to help promote access to clean water and alternative energy sources.
- Increase the use of sustainable and recyclable materials.
- Promote the use of eco-friendly machines and equipment.
- Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable, and modern energy for all.
- Before embarking on a project, we conduct visibility studies to incorporate environmental impact assessment (EIA).

Reducing our Impact on Climate and Environment

With over 1.5 million customers dependent on SEWA for water, electricity, and natural gas, SEWA recognizes that only a change in consumer behavior and energy consumption practices will lead to sustained reductions in the use of our natural resources.

Tarsheed, an Arabic word meaning conservation, is the name of an initiative introduced with the aim to raise awareness of the need to conserve natural resources, especially water, which is the lifeblood of every city and a feature of cultural progress. The *Tarsheed* initiative empowers consumers by providing them with a set of educational and practical tools that aid in facilitating behavioral change to reduce energy and water consumption by 30% over the next five years.

Work with Local and Global Organizations to Help Promote Access to Clean Water and Alternative Energy Sources

SEWA is committed to building a sustainable tomorrow and aims to become a zero waste company with low carbon emissions. We will achieve this goal through innovation, collaboration, and global partnerships to increase understanding of environmental issues and disseminate good practices. SEWA also believes that teaching the young to develop environmentally-friendly values and behaviors is vital for the future of our children and the future of all life. SEWA has signed a Memorandum of Understanding with *Beeah* to recycle its waste as our commitment to adopt environmental sustainability initiatives and minimize the environmental impact of our operations and service activities.

Increase the Use Of Sustainable Materials And Recyclable Content

The most compelling argument in favor of energy efficiency improvements is that they represent an opportunity to free up resources that would otherwise be spent on energy costs, allowing water and

wastewater facilities to use those resources to make other needed improvements. Energy and natural resources have been closely linked to our community growth. The availability and efficient use of energy and water have become key factors in SEWA's efforts to promote economic and social development and the preservation of the environment. Sustainability is the cornerstone of SEWA Vision 2020.

Promote Use of Eco-Friendly Machines and Equipment

SEWA's Smart Home initiative presents some very exciting opportunities to change the way we live and work, while simultaneously reducing energy consumption. Smart home technology not only enables you to monitor how much energy your house has saved, but it also provides many opportunities for achieving more sustainable outcomes. For instance, we have replaced all our light bulbs with LED lights and have taken measures to recycle the printer ink.

In addition, by ensuring that our pumps are fully optimized and efficient by using an appropriate size and by installing variable speed motors whose speed varies to match flow conditions, we are further reducing energy costs.

Ensure Access to Affordable, Reliable, Sustainable, and Modern Energy For All

Lack of access to modern energy is a serious hindrance to economic and social development. At SEWA, we are always meeting customer satisfaction and promoting Sharjah's vision by providing electricity and water services adhering to the international standards of reliability, efficiency, safety, and environment through a competent workforce and by forging effective partnerships to support the sustainability of resources.

SEWA is the first utility provider in the Arab world that has secured 50001:2011 (Energy Management) and applied the principles of energy resources maintenance. We believe that using renewable and clean

energy technologies will ensure a secure and prosperous future and a healthy environment for generations to come.

Conduct Visibility Studies to Incorporate Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA)

SEWA is committed to making continuous improvements to the management of our environmental impact and to the long-term goal of developing a sustainable business. Accordingly, we conduct environmental impact assessment (EIA) studies wherein we evaluate the environmental impacts of a proposed project or development, taking into account inter-related socio-economic, cultural, and human-health impacts, both beneficial and adverse. The aim of adopting this systematic framework is to provide affordable, reliable, and sustainable water, as well as energy, for SEWA's valuable consumers.

Pillar 4: Projects

At the heart of the SEWA Vision 2020 is the universal triple-helix: People, Planet, and Profit. However, to consistently deliver positive business results and stay ahead of the pack in today's competitive and chaotic global economy, I turned to (serious) Project Management. Beginning at the portfolio level, where my strategic vision drove the initial investments and where value measures were established, our projects (big or small) fully aligned with vision and vice versa, dictating project execution at every level and aiming to deliver value at each step.

Our system priorities for SEWA projects are listed below:

Projects to be completed before the deadline, below the budget, and to certain specifications through the SEWA project management model, which consists of five phases:

- Imagineering
- Ecomagination
- CRITRALThinking
- Execution
- Knowledge Capture & Storage

Let's have a microscopic look at each stage:

Imagineering: Imagineering is a concept that blends imagination and creativity with engineering to implement innovative ideas and technological advancements. It is about reimagining the everyday, as no object is so perfect that it cannot be redesigned.

Ecomagination: This word is a blend of ecology and imagination. This is our commitment to building innovative solutions to enhance resource productivity and drive economic growth while reducing our environmental impact. Ecomagination lays a foundation to establish ideas that enhance ecologically positive designs where the use of non-hazardous, non-polluting, non-toxic materials and substances is considered and renewable sources of energy are incorporated.

CRITRAL Thinking: A combination of critical and lateral thinking, wherein the former uses reason to analyze ideas and dig deeper to get to our true potential and the latter resorts to an indirect and creative approach to solving problems. Striking the right balance between these two will help us connect the dots and lead to breakthrough ideas.

Execution: A critical phase in the success of a project. This refers to the effective and efficient utilization of resources, time, money, and energy in the implementation stage of the project's management life cycle. A range of management processes need to be implemented to properly monitor and control the execution of the project.

Knowledge Capture and Storage: Tacit organizational knowledge capture and storage describes the extraction of knowledge or experiential matter from individuals, groups, or organizations for the benefit of the same. At SEWA, we formulated the Knowledge Management (KM) model, which comprises 6 pillars: documents, knowledge champions, knowledge promoters, tools, learning, and sharing. The knowledge architects and interested employees ensure the pillars are sustained on the firm foundation of *leadingship*. This is the closeout phase, where a lot of lessons are learned and best practices are documented. In addition, we keep a close track on what went well and what didn't.

Pillar 5: Positioning

Positioning is to create a unique impression in the consumer's mind so that the consumer associates something specific and desirable with our brand and services.

Our System Priorities for Positioning are:

- Create a well-written Marketing and Branding strategy.
- Participate in networking events.
- Use latest trend solutions and technologies.
- Expand locally, regionally, internationally through exhibitions, conferences, forums, etc.

Create a Well-Written Marketing and Branding Strategy

This is crucial for SEWA as it drives us to deliver on the promises we make and gives the brand a quality image. A great brand strategy also helps us communicate more effectively with our customers. Our bi-monthly

magazine and newsletter contain industry insight and information that allows us to communicate our principles and core values to the readers.

Participate In Networking Events

SEWA not only actively participates in networking events but also enjoys membership status with over fifteen business councils in the UAE. At SEWA, we believe that networking is an effective low-cost marketing method for developing sales opportunities and contacts, and it is a great way to exchange knowledge, share our achievements, and learn new opportunities.

Use Latest Trend Solutions and Technologies

The adoption of emerging technologies offers a distinctive business advantage and impacts our organization's long-term plans, programs, and initiatives. It makes a huge difference to the way our business operates and how well our staff carries out their tasks. At SEWA, we believe in the power of lightning-fast word-of-mouth publicity through social media. Social media platforms including our corporate website, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, LinkedIn, and others that have become important tools of communication that help to build a strong direct relationship with our consumers and partners.

Expand Locally, Regionally, Internationally Through Exhibitions, Conferences, Forums, Etc.

SEWA participates in conferences and forums to strengthen relations with our existing partners and establish contact with new clients. Our engineers and experts from various departments represent SEWA at local and international exhibitions where they showcase the latest developments and techniques used in the field of energy and water. This face-to-face interaction is pivotal to building and increasing the awareness of our brand.

Pillar 6: Partners

For more than a decade, we have partnered with the world's greatest companies to ensure the sustainable delivery of water, electricity, and natural gas to cater to the needs of the people of Sharjah. Our customers, suppliers, and partners will attest that we are also committed to fostering trusting relationships.

We aim to bring about transformational change by focusing on the system priorities stated below. By joining hands with our partners, our aim is to drive a fundamental radical change to the whole system.

Our System Priorities for our Partners are:

- Have a round-table discussion with our partners to improve our business/services practices.
- Update each other on the sustainability principles.
- Carry out joint workshops, training, and development programs.
- Mutual interdependency for long-term relationships.
- Promote face-to-face interaction and visits.

Have A Round-Table Discussion With Our Partners To Improve Our Business Practices

Cooperation is integral to SEWA's 2020 Vision. The cooperation between SEWA and its valuable partners, such as: Oracle, ABB, Google, Philips, HP, Siemens, Cisco, and Schneider, in addition to a host of others, aims to establish an ongoing win-win dynamic partnership.

At SEWA, we hold round-table discussions to engage in direct and interactive communication with our partners and improve the quality of our service practices. Our partnerships are built to be dynamic and flexible and achieve results for both SEWA and our partners.

Update Each Other On The Sustainability Principles

The annually-held SEWA Partners Meet is designed to encourage a transparent communication environment and deliver innovation, enhance our competitive edge, build up a global reputation, and generate sustainable revenue and benefits.

Each partnership meet is distinctive and has an impact on our vision, mission, and sustainability.

Promote Face-To-Face Interaction and Visits

The SEWA 2020 Vision aims to continue and improve the joint workshops, which are integral to boosting SEWA's close relationship with its partners. We exchange the latest knowledge and practices, as well as training and development programs with our partners. We believe this is key to a sustainable long-term relationship.

SEWA has also joined a number of business councils in the UAE to learn and share new experiences and knowledge whilst also gaining access to the latest developments in the energy and alternative energy industry. It also enables our international partners to know about our facilities and the opportunities offered by the sole supplier of water, electricity, and gas in Sharjah.

Pillar 7: Prosperity

Building a successful brand is about creating an identity. I knew that this would set SEWA apart from the crowd, and that a strong identity would allow SEWA to prosper and flourish. To forge ahead towards prosperity, I prioritized the following objectives:

Our System Priorities for Prosperity at SEWA are:

- Superlative services
- World-class health, safety, and environment practices

- Highest corporate governance and management standards
- World-class integrated internal and external communications
- Happy stakeholders

Superlative Services

The key to good customer service is building good relationships with your customers. Thanking the customer and promoting a positive, helpful, and friendly environment will ensure they leave with a great impression. SEWA aims to provide the best services to its consumers and customers. Our employees work hard to maintain an excellent standard of service and certain departments stay open 24/7 to cater to any needs of the residents of Sharjah.

World-Class Health, Safety, and Environment Practices

We follow the green building code and adopt the principles of HSE (Health, Safety, and Environment) based on ISO 140001 (Environment Management) and 180001 (Occupational Health & Safety Management). Adhering to these international standards has enabled us to manage our environmental responsibilities.

Highest Corporate Governance and Management Standards corporate

Governance includes the processes through which an organization's objectives are established and followed in the framework of the social, regulatory, and market environment. We ensure transparency in all our dealings to ensure the company's culture and public image is that of an open, fair, and well-run organization.

World-Class Integrated Internal and External Communications

Most of SEWA's internal communications take place via e-mail. However, employees are free to leave the office to hold meetings in an out-

of-office environment to discuss issues related to work. Every month, managers of all departments present me with their monthly progress report, with all deserving staff recognized for their achievements. Our external communications relay authentic information about SEWA to the public and media, all of which serve to strengthen our public relations efforts.

Principle Tongue

SEWA is home to over 5000 employees. The head office itself comprises around 300 employees. Now, a greater number of employees mean a higher chance of communication errors and misleading information being spread around, which can become somewhat of a viral infection. Further, having more employees means a greater need for a fool-proof communication strategy. Hence, the first thing I made essential, once the culture-change ball was rolling, was that in almost every email and announcement, SEWA employees have to align and mention the 15 winning principles, core values, and vision. Hence, everyone must speak in “principle tongue”.

Happy Stakeholders

We realize that it is vital to keep our stakeholders satisfied. By communicating progress and performance in key areas at regular intervals, actively listening to their concerns and ensuring that stakeholders are on the same page then they become satisfied and happy.

Pillar 8: Profit

Quite surprisingly, profit sits at the bottom of my SEWA 2020 Vision pillar list. However, I am aware that this is debatable, because profit should be running the show, right? Wrong! Profit is the result or outcome we get if the rest of the pillars function seamlessly. If there is a glitch in *performance*, profit is badly hit. Likewise, if there is a setback in *projects*, profit is severely hit, or if the mark is missed in *positioning*,

profit is adversely affected. Hence, profit depends heavily on the above seven pillars.

Our System Priorities for Profit are:

- Efficient revenue growth.
- Operate the lowest cost manufacturing and logistics in business/service, while maintaining quality standards.
- Use of new technologies, tools, and techniques for economic profit growth.
- Introduce cost management.
- Monitoring our assets closely based on ISO 55001 Asset management and benchmark them with the global best practices to ensure breakthrough performance all the time.

Operate The Lowest Cost Manufacturing and Logistics in Business/Services, While Maintaining Quality Standards

Reducing manufacturing and logistic costs is often the number one priority for the bottom line of any business. There are many methods that can help improve supply chain processes and, in turn, save businesses money. Methods of reducing manufacturing and logistic costs include optimizing inventory levels, creating better processes, and improving supplier or third-party relationships, etc..

Use of New Technologies, Tools, and Techniques for Economic Profit Growth

Upgrading our SCADA (Supervisory Control and Data Acquisition) software has increased the efficiency of process monitoring and operating control.

Introduce Cost Management

This form of management accounting allows a business to predict impending expenditures to help reduce the chance of going over budget. At the same time, it's not about downsizing and trimming the budget to the bone. By following the cost management process, our aim is to increase the overall revenue.

Close Monitoring Of Our Assets And Benchmark Them With The Global Best Practices To Ensure Breakthrough Performance All The Time

Second to labor, energy use is one of the highest manufacturing costs associated with running any operation. Once you have optimized the process and the workforce, what is needed is to run at a slower pace to save energy. By making production decisions based on demand, we can save on energy costs without sacrificing output or customer satisfaction.

Below are the six areas to focus on:

1. Optimize air compressors and fix leaks.
2. Overhaul or replace aging HVAC systems.
3. Create an energy management team.
4. Reschedule usage of high-powered electric machinery.
5. Continuous improvement strategy.
6. Conduct an energy audit.

I wish to conclude by stating that, at SEWA, we believe that our Vision 2020 is unique because the goals and priorities are very practical, realistic, and above all, actionable. This is what makes it extraordinary and achievable. Although no one can predict the future, planning is inextricably important. Crafting a vision, laying out a roadmap, following a guide, and working on the right path are some of the first steps to be

taken to keep us on track. Our aim is to create a generation of focused employees, workers, partners, and leaders who can shoulder the responsibility of being accountable whilst moving towards a much brighter and more sustainable world.

What are the expected benefits of SEWA 2020?

The SEWA brand is our business asset. 2020 Vision was crafted with the intention to perforate the SEWA brand's asset value into both brand owners and investors. We expect the SEWA brand value to have a number of strategic functions, enabling us to:

1. Position a focused message in the hearts and minds of target customers.
2. Customize services to reflect the personal brand.
3. Persistent and be consistent in marketing efforts.
4. Project credibility.
5. Create strong customer loyalty.

I was confident that when SEWA's Vision 2020 came to fruition, it would free up the resources that are currently tied up in attempts to fix yesterday's problems and put out fires. In achieving this, SEWA would thus gain a firm foot-hold and never look back. I was waiting for that day, eagerly.

SEWA Vision 2020 and Beyond

"The future ain't what it used to be," Yogi Berra, the renowned American baseball coach, once said. Though tongue-in-cheek, this quote seems truer than ever. Many of us feel the future reaches us faster than it ever did. Hence, these days, markets can be transformed almost overnight due to new technologies, interruptive innovative business plans, mergers, etc.

How do we tackle the unforeseen future? As a management review recently reported, “No company can inoculate itself from the need to confront the most fundamental of today’s strategy challenges: how to anticipate and interpret change in and around your marketplace, and how to leverage that change into winning strategies.” Since then, a growing number of companies are turning to *futurists* to help them.

By the end of 2017, I decided to talk to my executives to discuss our journey so far. The meeting was held in our main boardroom *Sultan Hall*, a huge meeting room named after the ruler of Sharjah. No doubt, the room had an aura meant for critical and weighty discussions. I kicked off the meeting by saying,

Time flies. The year 2020 is approaching fast. Gladly, most of the system priorities of 2020 vision are either achieved or are to be achieved in near future. Training and development is in full swing. Projects rarely fail. Process performance has improved remarkably, and the profit margin has widened a bit too.

I continued, “Essentially, that was my quest, to bring about the transformation by not cutting corners but by getting maximum quality through efficient processes. We are doing really great!” I paused to see my executives swelling with enthusiasm and pride. Each one of them feeling victorious. I continued, “Now is the time to take that giant leap! We have plans up to 2020, the time has come that we look beyond 2020.”

“How do we do that?” I interrogated my employees with hopeful eyes. I saw my executives had begun to scratch their heads. I pacified them by saying that recently, I was invited to participate in the making of UAE Energy Vision 2050, where global professional futurists had flown down to lend a helping hand in constructing the plan. Eventually, I was able to pick their brains. Read on to find out the wisdom I shared with my team that day. I have distilled it into small nuggets of information for you.

Scenario Planning

Probably the best-known and fastest-rising technique of futurists is scenario planning. Scenario planning is defined as “a discipline for re-discovering the original entrepreneurial power of creative foresight in the contexts of accelerated change, greater complexity, and genuine uncertainty.” In essence, scenarios are stories about possible futures. The goal isn’t to predict the future but to get the organization to challenge its own assumptions about corporate strategy. When done well, it helps the organization to anticipate possibilities that it might otherwise ignore. This enables organizations to better prepare for a variety of contingencies.

Strategic Foresight

Strategic foresight is a tool that provides a better understanding of the future and can be used to detect upcoming risks, opportunities, and trends. Since it helps the organization deal with uncertainty successfully, strategic foresight is now widely used in organizations, businesses, and administrations. Further, it is an integral part of global strategies and corporate cultures.

What is a Strategic Foresight System?

Richard A. Slaughter, an internationally recognized futurist, and the Director of Foresight International, Brisbane, gives this definition: Strategic foresight is the ability to create and sustain a variety of high-quality forward views and to apply emerging insights in organizationally useful ways; for example, to detect adverse conditions, guide policy, and shape strategy; to explore new markets, products, and services. Slaughter defines it as a process that attempts to broaden the boundaries of perception in four ways:

- By assessing the implications of present actions, decisions, etc. (consequent assessment).

- By detecting and avoiding problems before they occur (early warning and guidance).
- By considering the present implications of possible future events (pro-active strategy formulation).
- By envisioning aspects of desired futures (preparing scenarios).

Among the various reasons for implementing a strategic foresight system, I had shed my priority on one important goal: To efficiently and effectively grow our business.

SEWA needs accurate information to ensure its competitiveness and development. I know that relevant and timely information allows us to be proactive. With this knowledge, we can evaluate our strengths and weaknesses and improve our market position and brand power, amongst other things. Moreover, implementing a strategic foresight system will provide us with targeted information which will help SEWA improve its global strategy and drive business growth, as they had a more accurate view of the current and future business environment. With a strategic foresight system, we would be able to:

- Understand our business environment, economic context, new regulations, changing prices, etc.
- Anticipate change in the way of new trends, emerging opportunities, potential risks, etc.
- Take action by seizing opportunities and minimizing risk.
- Develop and grow by improving our short and mid-term business strategy and strengthening the competitiveness of our business, which thereby results in better overall performance.

After this meeting, I was assured that the team was primed to take SEWA Vision 2020 to the next level, and I was right. What started as a commitment to make SEWA one of the best authentic organizations in the world turned into a real-life success story. This is the story of an organization that discovered how to handle change successfully.





CREATING A MARKETING PLAN

Warren Bennis, University of Southern California professor and leadership expert, made a clever remark when he said, “Leaders must encourage their organizations to dance to forms of music yet to be heard.” I wrote this excerpt in a state of exhilaration—extreme ecstasy—because I had successfully overcome the two toughest stages of SEWA’s brand turnaround, i.e., ‘fight for survival’ and ‘passion to win.’ As significant as those stages were, they were only two pieces of the puzzle. Still, the big picture was far from reality.

Finding and integrating the missing pieces required extraordinary leadership skills. When everyone told me that a project was “too difficult, too complex, and too expensive,” I had a typical reply up my sleeve: “I’ll stay consistent with my vision. Driven by my 3 Ps philosophy: Be patient, be positive, and be persistent, I was able to pass these two challenging stages, and the tipping point may be just around the corner.”

My message was loud and clear: Not only was I aiming to survive but I also wanted the organization to thrive and excel. Hence, I did something unprecedented in SEWA’s history—I clenched my fist on marketing efforts. Marketing was an unfamiliar tune at SEWA. Did I strike the right chord? Or did I face the music? Stay tuned.

Mover and Shaker

Finalizing the system priorities and goals of SEWA's Vision 2020 brought some degree of respite. Nevertheless, I thought that however great my story was, only tangible results would make me a successful leader. Not surprisingly, I was being seen as a mover and shaker with an eye for tangible results—hard-nosed business results.

I believe that “action-speaks-louder-than-words”. I ordered my marketing executives to get the 8 Pillars of SEWA's Vision 2020 published in the form of a book as soon as possible. The work was urgent...and people needed to see it. Hence, I called for an ad-hoc brainstorming meeting at our *Knowledge Café*. I summoned the team to meet me in three minutes for a “stand-up” meeting. Since they all know how punctual I am, not a soul arrived late. I said, “Guys, roll up your sleeves. Get together and brainstorm some ideas to create the best cover page for the book.” After all, they were emotionally connected with the vision statement—their single biggest driver. Following the meeting, the book was published within a week.

Intangible to Tangible

Publishing the Vision 2020 book breathed new life into SEWA's intangible system priorities and aspirational “8 Ps” vision pillars, thereby turning them into tangible building blocks of the organizations' vision statement and officially ingrain them in our day-to-day working life. My top priority was to spread the message ‘in’ and ‘out’ of SEWA. On the other hand, the team wanted to organize a surprise launch for Vision 2020. Soon enough, they enthusiastically proposed the idea of a book-launch event. On top of their excitement, I was pleased to see them all sailing in the same boat. Although I approved their request immediately, I did ask them to keep it as low-key as possible within the organization before we shared it with the rest of the world.

The Launch

Shortly after publishing, they organized a celebration at our in-house training dome, SEWA A—SEWA Academy. The training rooms were decorated with roll-ups and banners of SEWA Vision 2020 pillars—The 8 Ps. With such colorful and positive décor, the academy somewhat resembled a mini-carnival. The marketing team was also in a festive mood, and their enthusiasm was contagious enough to get the rest of the organization curious and fascinated about the event. I was pleased to see the employees brimming with zest and zeal, and, as expected, most of the employees showed up at the event that day to shower their support and passion towards the vision.

The marketing team had requested that I do the honors of launching the Vision 2020 book, which was to be followed by a cake cutting ceremony. Although we tried to keep the celebration low-key, the local media companies somehow found out about the event and published an interesting news article about the vision launch. Soon, the Vision 2020 book became the talk of the town, and everyone wanted to get a sneak peek. From the top executives of multi-national organizations to aspiring leaders, everyone wanted to know about the new SEWA dream. We ran out of the bulk of our stock in about a months' time. Still, requests to read the book kept pouring in; indeed, I was pleased with its success and popularity.

The Right Time Has Come

The SEWA Vision 2020 book really struck a chord with the audience. I was thrilled to see its unbiased acceptance in the society and the immense interest it created. It felt as if the entire world wanted to know more about the SEWA Vision 2020, especially the 8 Ps. What a great feeling it was.

Now, I felt that the right time had come to write a marketing plan that would cover the 8 Ps and highlight the what, why, and how we run our business to regain our customer trust.

The section below describes some of the striking features of the SEWA Vision 2020 book, which laid the foundation to build upon our marketing plan.

1. The cover page

Have you ever heard the expression “Don’t judge a book by its cover?” Contrary to this popular belief, I believe that the cover page is crucial. I insisted that our SEWA Marketing & Branding cover page needed to be extremely attractive, using a dotted theme with an underlying meaning of “fun lies in connecting the dots.” The dots connected to create an imagery of an eye, which represented our 2020 vision. Moreover, to illustrate 2020, we used a bigger font type to make it stand out even more. Last but not least, the cover page was decorative, which supported the theme of the book.



Figure 3.1 SEWA Vision 2020 Cover Page

2. Vision 2020 Cover Page

The cover of the book describes what SEWA Vision 2020 covers, with some of the major points described below:

- The time period the plan covers.
- The writer's names.
- Contact information, such as website address and various social media handles.

3. Table of Contents

The table of contents is a necessary component of most books. It usually takes the form of a list located before the start of the written work and details the chapters and section titles and/or brief descriptions with their commencing page numbers. Positioned after the title page, it provides easy reference to important topics.

4. The Executive Summary

Our plan starts with 'The Executive Summary,' which appears first but was actually the last thing written. In just three pages, it condenses our entire Vision 2020. I am proud of my Marketing & Branding team. They have done a wonderful job because any outsider who doesn't know our business can understand the entire SEWA plan without anyone explaining it.

The executive summary was well-written and detailed the following information:

- The purpose of the vision.
- The SEWA organizational structure.
- Why, when, and how things will happen.
- A situational analysis.
- Which market segments to target most.
- Listed the goals/objectives.

- Indicated who is responsible for what (responsibilities and accountabilities).
- Setting the main milestones.

The above bullet points helped us lay out a well-elaborated executive summary. Next came the ‘Introduction’, which had to be interesting and engaging.

5. An Impressive Introduction

An impressive introduction can attract even the non-readers, but of course, not everyone is a voracious reader! However, we wanted most of our target audience to grab a copy of SEWA Vision 2020, and more importantly, to read it and not trash it. However, as we all know, this couldn’t merely be achieved through a colorful cover page and a fancy design depicting the theme of the plan. Rather, it’s the content that lies within matters, right? Our SEWA Vision 2020 clearly states the purpose and importance of the plan, and here I would like to acknowledge the great team who created the plan.

It is also worth mentioning that the SEWA Vision 2020 was created exclusively by a team of empowered women. In this way, SEWA nourishes and encourages empowering women and sees future leaders in them.

Of course, my gratitude also extends to Boutheina, Ohood, Rasha, and Syeda for their extraordinary efforts and contributions for compiling and developing the vision plan.

They knew the importance of time, and hence, they created a brief and crisp introduction encompassing the gist of the plan. In so doing, they demonstrated the importance of making a quick good impression to buy-in the readers.



Return To Reality

Déjà vu is a French word that means the feeling that you've been somewhere before, even when you haven't. I love practicing *Vuja dé*—the opposite, which means going to a place you've been many times but seeing it consciously with fresh eyes. If you are at your customer's place, you'll see the frustrations and frictions that your customers have learned to live with and adjusted to. As we continue to advance in the 21st century and pave the way forward with a futurist vision, I practice *Vuja dé*, I realized that there were some roadblocks to remove to smooth the brand transformation process. The pillars of SEWA Vision 2020 were strong enough to fight any barrier. However, a few challenges concerning reputation and brand image had to be tackled using a different approach—they needed the mindset of a marketing expert. The list below presents some of the most pressing challenges:

- SEWA still being viewed as a bad debt company.
- A negative image in society due to regular interruptions and black-outs.
- Lenders and vendors were unwilling to deal with the organization due to late payments for goods and services delivered.
- And, above all, SEWA never had written a marketing plan.

In short, SEWA was still managed as if it were stuck in the 1960s, in an era of impersonal transactions. Hence, it never believed in marketing or branding as a tool to build a strong brand.

I Have the Answers

In short, SEWA had lost its way and sought a new direction. To alleviate this worrisome situation and build long-term profitable growth, I painted a hopeful-yet-attainable picture of the future. In tackling the aforementioned issues, delivering returns at any cost, and working with only the best could help me secure the resources that I so urgently required to

help the company grow. This meant that we had to shift our focus from driving transactions to maximizing customer lifetime value; in turn, this necessitated activating a different set of muscles and reinventing the marketing department altogether.

My Stance on Marketing

It is worth mentioning a couple of important points. First, I am a marketing *linchpin* who is willing to do whatever it takes to delight his customers. Second, I have the unique ability to translate my customers' needs and wants into business objectives. I always begin my marketing strategy by asking, "What if...?" In an age of empowered consumers, marketing presents quite a challenge and many of the old-school marketing techniques are nowadays redundant, which I have already come to terms with, and it's time you accept it too! Well, this doesn't mean that you should allow yourself to be left feeling disenfranchised. You can try doing what I did.

In an attempt to simplify marketing, I found that the key was to ensure that every customer *touchpoint* exceeded the customer expectations. Therefore, it was vital to ensure that all customer touchpoints are positive from the initial phone-in call to the final smile. In so doing, I aimed for holistic, consistent, and personalized customer service. That meant that we had to provide excellent customer experience at every customer touchpoint. This was my approach, though I still wondered, *How can I make that happen?*

A portion of the job was already accomplished because I had successfully created the Vision 2020 for SEWA. That was only one piece of the puzzle. Now, all I required was a robust marketing plan to share the inspiring vision both internally and externally. Only when we believe in the 'inside' will it show up on the 'outside'. In next to no time, I whipped up a marketing plan to market the SEWA vision, thereby positioning SEWA among the most authentic organizations in the world. It is a journey of resilience.

Put simply, fundamental to marketing is considering the business in terms of customer needs and their satisfaction with value proposition. I summarize marketing this way: “Marketing is a kind of chemistry. Putting together the right mix of marketing methods can make or break a business depending on whether you get the mix right or wrong. Only by continuously changing and adapting your marketing mix will you be able to survive and progress in times of economic turmoil.”

In search of a Marketing & Branding Manager

It took me a year to find the right marketer who would understand the name of the game. Finally, I found her, she is Ms. Boutheina Manai, who used to work for me when I managed Sharjah International Airport Free Zone. A talented marketer, Ms. Manai had all the qualities that I was looking for, such as:

1. Awareness of the major marketing methods and techniques.
2. Effective communication and persuasion skills.
3. Excellent at leading, managing, directing, and inspiring the team.
4. Equipped with strategic leadership qualities.
5. Forward-thinking and open-minded, recognizing the constantly changing markets and responding accordingly.
6. Flexible attitude.
7. Innovative and creative.

The rapid advancement of technology serves to constantly reshape the landscape of today’s marketing world. In light of this, you’ll never know as much as you need to know. If any Chief Marketing Officer (CMO) showcases the above-mentioned attributes, he/she is certified to be a game changer and take charge.

I still remember my first interaction with Ms. Manai when I said, “Boutheina, you have come at the right time, in the right phase of our brand turnaround and brand positioning.” Interrupted by her smile, I continued, “We need to turn the marketing team around 360 degrees. We need to work hard from yesterday.”

“Yes, I am ready, Mr. Achiever. I knew you would say so, Mr. Pre-cras-tinator,” she replied with immense excitement. “We have to start from ground zero, all the way from the scratch. Let’s begin with conducting a situation analysis. Let’s challenge tomorrow.”

My eyes lit up with enthusiasm. She went on, “Moreover, this is in alignment with one of SEWA’s winning principles, to be precise, ‘Principle# 9: Facing the reality of where the organization is now.’ So, we have no excuses.” I was amazed to see that we shared the same wavelength.

“Great! Go ahead! Let’s-see-what-happens-when-we-think-outside-the-box and focus on all areas of the organization that touch our customers,” I replied, delighted with her enthusiasm.

“DD,” she said.

“What’s that?”

“Deal, done,” she reverted.

As she left the office, I told her, “Boutheina, I would like to remind you of John C. Maxwell’s quote mentioned in his book, *Thinking for a change*: “The right thought plus the right people in the right environment at the right time for the right reason = the right results.”

“Got it,” she replied.



Moving Ahead

We both knew that change wasn't always welcome. We spent the first few weeks talking with the rest of the marketing team, SEWA senior executives, and a handful of customers. We kept digging, and soon we came to a conclusion—to draft out our marketing plan. We wanted our marketing plan to be a detailed, written account, as well as a timetable of the objectives and methods to be used to achieve our marketing goals. The plan would be set out in a logical sequence and a series of activities that would lead to: (1) The setting of marketing objectives, and, (2) The formulation of plans for achieving them.

This was the missing piece here. A comprehensive marketing plan was the need of the hour. Hence, we went on to our marketing expedition with a situation analysis. I could see the beginning of the end of SEWA's bad image in the face of society.

Note the commonly-known expression, “A journey begins with a single step.” But what is the right first step? A couple of weeks after hiring her, Boutheina came to see me at the office. After greeting each other, she told me, “I had done my fast-track assessment of the organization. To assess the gap, the real work must start now by asking a few simple marketing questions, such as who are we? What do we stand for? Where are we now?”

I was impressed with her thought process. “Bravo. Let's get the ball rolling. Let's bring the entire team on this roller coaster ride,” I replied.

The team assembled in a jiffy. I was pleased to see my marketing team's authentic energy. I said, “Today is your day. It's your opportunity to open up. I want to hear you all. I am all ears. I need your answers, now. I have a few pressing questions that call for immediate action, and I believe if we could answer the questions, then by the end of 2016, we could earn wings and fly to the sky.”

I felt the questions needed to be answered in a calm environment.

Hence, I advised my team by telling them, “I need you to focus and be uninterrupted. So go, grab your coffee mugs and join me in the disruption-free zone. See you there!”

Disruption-Free Zone

The walls of SEWA’s disruption-free zone read: “if you can find the peace and clarity to accept where you are, then you will soon have the insight to get where you’d like to go.” Mobilizing a team isn’t a one-off activity—it doesn’t stop. You don’t simply send an inspiring email and then you’re done. To mobilize employees; that is, to move them from point A to point Z, one needs to get out of the office, listen to concerns, share ideas, and create joint solutions—week after week, month after month, and year after year.

Let’s look at how I mobilized my marketing team. First, I announced a workshop with the whole marketing team in our disruption free zone. As the name suggests, this is a quiet, peaceful, and noise-free zone. Cell phones and other potentially distracting equipment are prohibited. The zone aims to provide a distraction and disturbance-free space where employees can ‘zone in’ on any critical issues facing them.

After summoning the team to the disruption-free zone, I told them that “Christopher Columbus, the famous Italian explorer had stated that one can never cross the ocean unless he has the courage to lose sight of the shore. So let’s answer these questions and navigate our way to the future.”

To this, all of them yelled, “Yeah, we are all in. We are with you on the same boat.”

Proud of their enthusiasm. I asked the following questions:

- Where are we now?
- Where are we likely to be at a particular future time?

- What is to be achieved and by when?
- Which way is the “best”?
- How will we get there?

Debate and feedback

Obviously, the above questions opened doors for further debate and discussion. Answering the above questions wasn't as easy as the questions may sound, and hence it took us quite some time to arrive at the right answers. After finally receiving a satisfactory answer that we all agreed upon, at the end of the meeting, I said, “Thank you, folks, it was a good workshop. We learned more than what we all were expecting. Give yourself a pat on your back. Now we start sailing—mapping our strategy.”

At this point, I wanted to take small steps while seeing the end in sight—long-term profitable growth. I knew I couldn't jump into heavy-weight marketing activities unless I first had a well-written marketing plan; therefore, I decided to do some homework. First, I thought of collecting some data, so I asked my team to create a dashboard showing a cost-benefit analysis of the current marketing spend. This helped to get the team more involved, and they even managed to create one spreadsheet in only a week's time. With those insights, I set about creating SEWA's first-ever marketing plan.

The Mission Hunt

At this point, I had already chosen the best-fit Marketing & Branding manager, and together we tried to bridge the gap by analyzing the situation and answering the above-stated questions. One might say we were at the threshold of building an iconic SEWA brand, but what steps were to be taken next? I was upfront with the current reality of SEWA and knew that it needed a robust and compelling mission.

Because of my infatuation with marketing and branding, my personal library/study was replete with old and new books on the subject. I am always on the lookout for the next best thing in the industry and witnessing how rapidly the industry is evolving never fails to amaze me. For now, I sought to come up with a great mission statement for SEWA. I definitely believe in the saying “think-globally-act-perform-locally.”

Look Outside

A mission is essentially a company’s message and a cardinal element of any marketing plan. I wanted to have the best mission statement for SEWA that revolves around its cultural core values. Being a service-driven organization, I turned my attention towards some of the best mission statements of service-oriented and customer-driven organizations—*not* to duplicate what they did, but rather to benchmark for the right fit.

In those days, I was fascinated by the following statement from McDonald’s, which reads: “Our mission is to be the world’s best ‘quick service restaurant,’ which means opening and running great restaurants and providing exceptional service, cleanliness, and value, so that we can make every customer in every restaurant smile.”

Another interesting mission statement was from Google, which reads, “To organize the world’s information and make it universally accessible and useful.”

Delving Deeper

Although McDonalds’ and Google’s mission statements both made sense to me, a voice within echoed that both mission statements weren’t that enough to attain my dream mission. What’s more, both contained a very catchy and globe dream, yet I wanted something robust that would speak my mind and jive well with my personality, as well as resonate with SEWA’s character.

Next, I went back to my bookshelf and noticed a book titled, *The Samsung Way* by Jaeyong Song and Kyungmook Lee. I remembered reading the book in one of my long-haul flights to an international business event. Then, it suddenly struck me that the book had Samsung's mission statement in one of its pages. I grabbed the book and started sifting through it. After some moments of struggle, I found a mission statement that stated, "To devote our talent and technology to creating superior products and services that contribute to a better global society."

A Mission that Matters

Smile secures the topmost principle in our agenda. As a part of my rebranding effort and to breathe life to the organization, I wanted to establish a mission that matters—a deep-seated mission that is the source of our passion, inspiration, and aspiration.

In my loneliest, quietest moments, I formulated the following mission statement for SEWA: "To be the region's best utility organization by offering affordable, reliable, and accessible energy and water, and providing a world-class service so that we satisfy every customer."

SEWA's mission is distinctive, because it is a moral rather than a business goal. There is no mention of profit. This broad scope of our mission allows SEWA to move forward by steering with a compass rather than a speedometer but we need to say it loud and clear. If we keep it to ourself, it will remain a figment of the imagination.

We were keeping our staff up-to-date with our process. So we sent an email to all our staff with our fresh mission.

At first, the process was painful. Making marketing more relevant, and, more importantly, making employees fully understand how marketing may drive SEWA's top line as well as bottom line, led to endless debates. However, to build credibility as a marketing leader, I had to open up doors for such debates and discussions.

Soon enough, I realized that setting objectives was a major bottleneck. Few employees were simply clueless about it. Another big issue was marketing budget. SEWA marketing team had been adjusting prices almost daily to steer marketing activities to the right audience.



I turned to my book, *Successful Marketing Plan* which I have written seven years ago and I thought a sizeable amount of knowledge could be referred to from the book to build up our marketing plan and its many elements.

So SEWA marketing plan wasn't from a sideline player who has never really had skin in the game. I succeeded in harnessing the power of marketing, which I did in spite of the warnings from those who said it "couldn't be done that way."

I am sharing the 11 stages of SEWA's marketing plan with you. These are the cardinal elements of SEWA's marketing DNA. Unique and quintessentially tailor-made to suit our marketing needs and activities, ranging from building our iconic brand to creating compelling experiences for our customers to enabling the sales of products and services. These 11 stages are the step-wise approach I took in SEWA to achieve my marketing objectives. Here's the lowdown. This is how I incorporated the 11 stages of SEWA marketing plan.

One of the business philosophies I strongly believe in says, "Failing to plan is planning to fail." That timeless piece of business philosophy had helped us to succeed in the number of activities, including writing this marketing plan.

That's what you'll find in the following pages: the hands-on why, and the hands-on how, from someone who's succeeded by breathing it and doing it. Have a look at the visual representation below. Don't rush! Tiptoe towards each stage gradually.

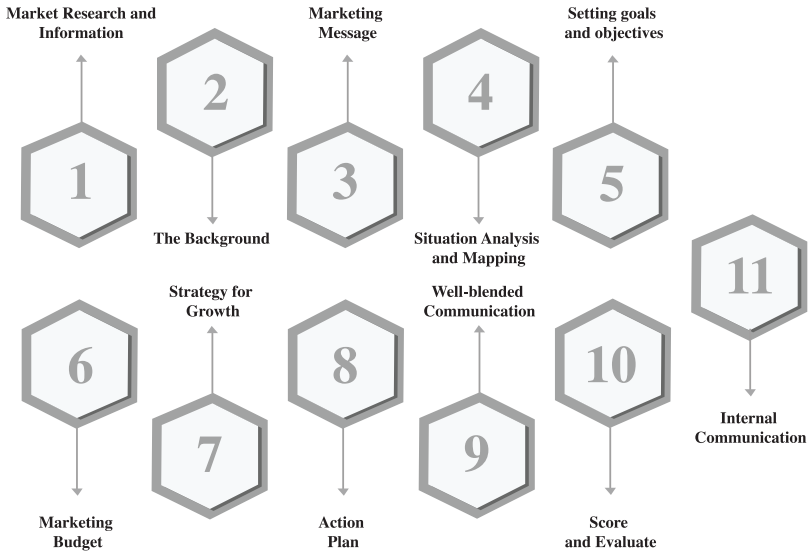


Figure 3.2 A 11 Stage SEWA Marketing Plan

1. Market Research & Information

A successful marketing plan starts with thorough market research. This involves gathering and assessing relevant data and other information. Such a plan is defined as a series of activities designed to identify customer needs and wants, and satisfy these while making a reasonable profit on our quality products or services. To construct such a plan, it is necessary to examine the best way to implement it, see what's out there, and ask our customers what they need, what their expectations are, and to engage with them. Our thorough market research made it possible to create a well thought-out marketing mix that would satisfy our customers and win loyalty.

Deep inside me, I knew that earning satisfied and loyal customers would be an unmet dream unless we 'perked up' SEWA's brand image. Marketing can be said to be a race without a finishing line, as shown in the market research we carried out right at the outset. I have distilled the most important information we gathered into the following list:

- Behavior: being the second UN home, Sharjah is host to almost 200 different nationalities living in peace and harmony. Imagine how difficult it is to understand the behavior of 200 nationalities!
- Demographics: age, income, employment.
- Psychographics: habits such as reading magazines or attending sporting or culture events.
- Residence: where did our market live? Which was the densest area?
- Social group: family size.
- Activities: what do they want to do?
- Motives or benefits: what are they looking for?
- Past Experience: their feelings.
- Planning frame: how long in advance do people plan ahead when paying their bills?

2. The Background

This section of the plan includes a description of SEWA's goals and system priorities, as well as a brief history of SEWA. This section includes facts on the following:

- SEWA products and services.
- Our main marketplace.
- Charges and pricing.
- Targeted market and customers.
- Mass media communications.

3. Situation Analysis and Mapping

Conducting a situation analysis clearly helped us identify our capabilities, the nature of our customers and the business environment, and the impact they may have on our organization.

It can also help in identifying strengths, weakness, opportunities, and threats to our organization. This analysis was eye-opening to what was really going on within our organization and helped us to determine the next steps we needed to take within the marketplace.

While conducting a situation analysis, we took into account SEWA's vision, mission, and cultural core values. To give us a headstart, we tweaked the process of a typical SWOT Analysis. Read on to gain insight into our unique process.

From SWOT to TOWS

To conjure up a quick marketing plan, I turned around the order of the SWOT analysis. Instead of starting with strengths, weaknesses, and moving down to opportunities and threats, I worked my way upside down, and started by first analyzing the competitive **T**hreats and **O**pportunities, and then drilling down to SEWA's **W**eaknesses and **S**trengths. At this time, I reminded myself to ask a few questions; namely, how do I...

- make the most of our strengths?
- circumvent our weaknesses?
- capitalize on our opportunities?
- manage our threats?

The following infographic summarizes the TOWS concept.

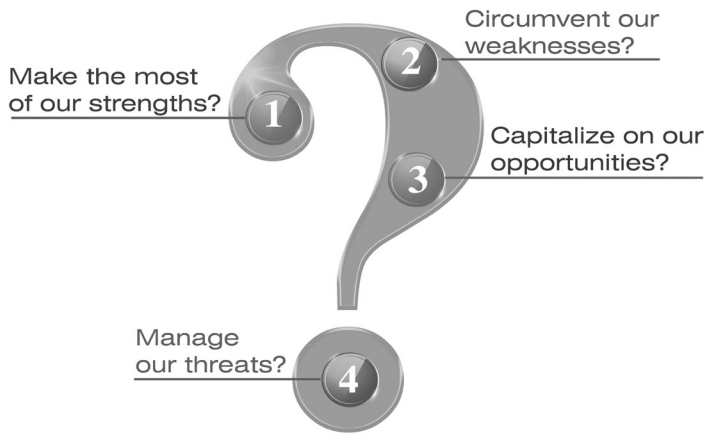


Figure 3.3 SEWA TOWS Analysis

This helped me to think about the options that I could pursue. I was amazed at the improvement of the value of the TWOS process. It helped me come up with a much clearer set of objectives.

PESTEL

There is no doubt that situation analysis and TWOS took me closer to mapping my marketing plan, however, I felt I needed to get off to a smooth start, and while in that state of mind, I remembered a commonly-used tool called PESTEL. In this exercise, I found out that TOWS alone wasn't enough, so I had to carry out 'PESTEL' analysis alongside it. In fact, if you are in a corporate turnaround expedition. You will often find yourself juggling between the two.

The term PESTEL refers to the domains it considers: **P**olitical, **E**conomic, **S**ocial, **T**echnological, **E**nvironmental, and **L**egal. PESTEL helped me to identify the factors in each of these six domains from SEWA's perspective. The beauty was that the special focus of PESTEL was to identify trends (such as economic trends, social attitudes, technological developments, etc.) for my marketing plan. Hence, PESTEL proved quite handy.

4. Marketing Message

Every Business sends a message in its marketing mix, such as:

- “Connecting People” [Nokia]
- “Think Different” [Apple]
- “The World’s Local Bank” [HSBC]
- “Invent” [HP]
- “Be the first to know” [CNN]
- “A crown of every achievements” [Rolex]

After successfully completing the TWOS process and answering the PESTEL questions, we moved on to creating our own marketing message.

Elements Worth Considering

At this point, I held a meeting with the SEWA Marketing & Branding team about the following elements of SEWA’s marketing message. We decided that our message could be lined up in the following order:

- **Message Content:** The unique selling proposition (USP), which is the benefit advantage and should be at the heart of our message.
- **Message Approach:** This was not about what we wanted to say, but how we wanted to say it.
- **Message style:** This is where we added our creative input. We looked at the signals we could use to get our target customer’s attention and interest.

Once the tone of the message was set appropriately, we moved on to ‘test-drive’ our marketing message. Asking the following questions helped us run the trial.

1. What were the intermediate and action objectives of the message and were they clear?

2. What reasons were we providing customers to change their behavior or attitudes? What was the benefit advantage?
3. Was the approach of the message effective in the given situation?
4. Was the style of the message attracting attention? Moreover, was it understandable and memorable?
5. Was the brand name mentioned?

From a Limited to Broad Focus

I wanted to create a *catchy* message; so, after conducting a deep analysis of SEWA's business priorities. We developed a compelling marketing message in the following acronym for SEWA:

Sustainable development through

Energy optimization,

Water rationalization, and

Advancing society and culture.

Spartan

Trust me, this is simply a box-ticking exercise; in a very real sense, these questions are milestones on the journey towards *capturing* the mass's mind. Aha! Now I caught your attention. Capturing the mass's mind is just the beginning of the game. If you want to stay in the game, you have to stay in the mass's mind, which is a far more difficult task! With the *shrinking memory span* of the customers and the distractions they are bombarded with, one needs to be a *Spartan* to win the game. (The Spartans were an ancient Greek community completely focused on military training and excellence. Given its military pre-eminence, the Spartans were recognized as the overall leaders of the combined Greek forces)

Say it 10 Times Over

Educate the customer. Say it 10 times. This philosophy revolves around the practice of expressing a simple message and repeating it over and over and over again, to the point that suspicions about the integrity of the product and its ability to perform as promised are replaced by a desire to buy!

Former CEO of GE A.G Lafley once mentioned that human beings “don’t want to stay focused.” On his role, “my job is to get them to focus their creativity around the focus; focus their productivity around the focus; focus their efficiency or effectiveness around the focus.”

When our energy is focused and concentrated in a single direction, like a laser beam, we have the power to cut through any kind of obstacle. Though this is a leadership philosophy, which I experimented and implemented in SEWA’s marketing effort, I found it fascinating how, if repeated, learning a simple message can cause a butterfly effect.

Whisperers

I felt that our marketing message was quite impactful, yet I wanted it to reach the whisperers. ‘Whisperers’ are people who launch and spread the word of mouth and make the message viral. These people are the experts who tell all their colleagues and friends about a new product or service they are knowledgeable about. You only need to ring a bell in their ears.

5. Setting Goals and Objectives

In turbulent times, you can’t afford to take your eye off the key goal. Organizations fail to execute the key goals when (1) there are too many goals, or (2) there are no defined goals. For this reason, I focused squarely on the primary and secondary objectives.

- i. Primary objectives, which are mainly referred to as ‘Financial Objectives,’ such as profits, sales revenues, and return on capital.

Financial goals are expressed as incremental revenue improvements and expected profits at the end of the year.

- ii. Secondary objectives, which are mainly referred to as ‘Branding Objectives’, such as improving the image of the organization and generating awareness about the services.

In fact, we needed to achieve both objectives: money and image.

6. Marketing Budget

Since we were dedicated to the success of our Marketing & Branding plan not to fail, money was needed to support the marketing process. Since our finances were considerably constrained, we had a cash-starved budget, which demanded that we out-think instead of out-spend. After all, we had no choice.

We then benchmarked with the best utility companies around the world to see how they managed and spent their marketing budgets and what lessons could be drawn and learned.

Finally, I decided to use a ‘smart’ marketing budget, which comprises two parts:

- 1) A fixed monthly amount to meet ongoing, monthly marketing expenses;
- 2) A contingency budget to help us meet unexpected marketing needs.

Am I Cost or Revenue?

I wrote the above question in the marketing meeting room to remind the team and challenge them to come up with an answer. My personal belief is that as long as that marketing delivers both financial returns and increases customer loyalty, it is considered an investment where you get both revenue and customer loyalty.

Achieve More with Less

Of course, we were trying to do more with less. How to magnify every marketing dollar, and how marketing dollars can be stretched and multiplied by following the out-of-the-box route called more with less. Keep reading to find out more.

But the real question was, “More of what?” Shouldn’t it be more revenue and fewer expenses on marketing activity? We had a tight budget, so I knew I had to spend it wisely. As the saying goes, “If you’ve got the will, you’ll find the way.” Hence, we resorted to *guerilla* marketing. Put simply, guerrilla marketing is about marketing without a large budget. It relies on time, energy, and imagination rather than a big marketing budget.

Guerrilla marketing also incorporates unusual approaches, such as street giveaways of products or graffiti walls. Creative use of stickers is another great guerrilla marketing tactic that can be very successful when implemented well.

By now, my super-active marketing and branding team had developed a great relationship with a number of leading print and online media houses. Hence, we received hundreds of free-of-charge publications both in print and online.

Do Less, But Bigger

The biggest splash is always made by throwing one big stone in the water, as opposed to throwing lots of small ones. At this point, my creative brain went full tilt into action and we began to use one of the most powerful weapons of thrifty marketing—vehicles covered with the SEWA brand message. We started with our own fleet of almost 1500 cars, trucks, and vehicles, which we then decorated with our marketing message and theme. After our efforts, I could see my message in the whole Sharjah city around the clock. Wow!

Secondly, we had the email identity of over 2 million vendors and suppliers that served as a robust database to distribute e-newsletters, personalized emails, and various other online marketing and promotional communications. We also created service stories that would have these customers bragging about the service they received; hence, they would become spokespersons for SEWA. They would tell others, which would have a knock-on effect, because we had generated enough interest about our brand for people to talk about.

Here's a story of a fan who later turned into a spokesperson—Stefaan Bazijn, CEO of P&I, Belgium's dynamic solution provider for all electrical projects, visited SEWA on April 19, 2018, to discuss a prospective business alliance. Accompanied by his team members, they happened to reach the headquarters a bit earlier than the appointment time. Upon meeting them, they greeted me and said, "Your Excellency, we are already your fan. We are so excited to see the images of your management business philosophies that we couldn't stop ourselves from taking a few photographs, even before we met you," which made me smile with pride and enthusiasm. They continued, "The SEWA business models are so universal that they could work wonders for any global company in any nook and cranny of the world."

Editorial and Advertorial

To make contact with the most appropriate media representatives and develop favorable coverage. I began by placing a focus on editorials and advertorials. *Editorials* are newsworthy stories that are usually brief articles written by editors that express a newspaper's or publishing house's own views and policies on a current issue. This usually comes free-of-charge.

On the other hand, an *advertorial* is an advertisement in the form of editorial content. Advertorials differ from traditional advertisements in that they are designed to look like the articles that appear in the publication. The tone of an advertorial is usually closer to that of a press release than an objective news story. Most advertorials are paid, though if you are

not charged, there is a hidden catch, as demonstrated by the following quote: “There’s no such thing that comes for free in this world, if it’s free, then YOU are the PRODUCT.”

Buzz marketing

I wanted to combine both the traditional and non-traditional media. What I mean by traditional is the extreme marketing tool, where you invest sufficiently in marketing dollars and non-traditional media. This is buzz marketing, which means spending the least marketing dollars by using the basic tools, such as word-of-mouth promotion. The best definition of the term buzz marketing can be found in Mark Hughes’s book *Buzz marketing*. Mark writes that buzz marketing captures the attention of consumers and the media to the point where talking about your brand or company becomes entertaining, fascinating, and newsworthy.

7. Strategy for Growth

The above-mentioned tools were quite useful in fighting for attention. In fact, they were powerful threads in my marketing pre-planning process. However, what was missing was a stronger, more integrated, overarching guidance/concept that would help me achieve the products of these tools. I needed a tool that would prevent my result from becoming a potpourri of disjointed, feeble initiatives. *Now, what can convince me? Perhaps another strategic move*, I said to myself. *No, SEWA needs not just a strategic move, but a sound strategic move. It’s asking whether we know our strategic goals and how we are going to accomplish them*, I reassured myself.

To speak candidly, the word strategy has become a *catchall* term used to mean whatever one wants it to mean. However, being a strategist, I know that any business must have a single, unified strategy, first, and then it must have the necessary parts. But what are those parts? This little question sent icicles down my spine.

I thought it was time to dig into my management books' stockpile—maybe I would find a hidden jewel there. That very day, I arrived home earlier than usual thanks to the unusual smooth roads (usually dotted by school buses and bumper-to-bumper SUVs). After my lunch, I headed straight to my library and took out a couple of books on strategy, business frameworks, business model planning, etc.

I screened through the table of contents microscopically in the hope of finding a gem. “*Here, you are!*” I shouted in excitement. Quite literally, I had found a diamond titled the *Hambrick and Fredrickson's Strategy Diamond*.

I wanted to test the credibility, or rather, the purity of the diamond. How did I do it? Well, whenever I am in doubt about a business model, a strategic framework, or any management concept, I prefer to refer to www.proventools.com, which is a one-stop hub for all the classic and latest resources one needs related to leadership and management.

Without much delay, I logged into the aforementioned website, and to my surprise, I found that the strategy diamond is used by global and contemporary organizations, such as IKEA and Starbucks. This confirmed that I had to give it a try as well.

Hambrick and Fredrickson's Strategy Diamond

Hambrick and Fredrickson presented a framework for strategy design, arguing that a strategy has five elements, providing answers to five questions:

1. Arenas: where will we be active?
2. Vehicles: how will we get there?
3. Differentiators: how will we win in the marketplace?
4. Staging: what will be our speed and sequence of moves?
5. Economic logic: how will we obtain our returns?

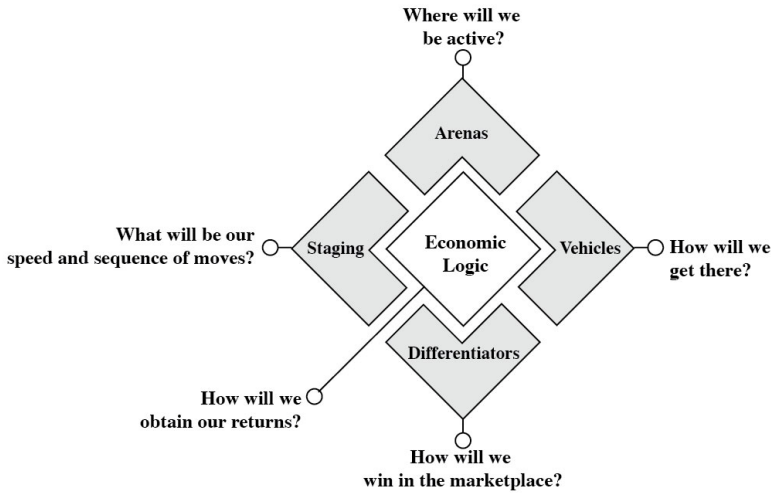


Figure 3.4 Hambrick and Fredrickson's Strategy Diamond

Once I extracted the most powerful central message of the above questions, several key criteria emerged that helped me test the quality of the proposed marketing strategy.

My strategy focused on six disciplines: (1) Simplicity, (2) Innovation, (3) Efficiency, (4) Customer, (5) Networking, and (6) Strategic Alliances.

Implementing the Plan via The Marketing Mix

In searching for ways to gain the increasingly important competitive edge, and armed with an understanding of SEWA's internal strengths and weaknesses, as well as the external opportunities and threats, combined with an overview of SEWA's marketing budget, I wrote down a few immediate "next steps" to be accomplished:

- Analyze the different needs of different groups of SEWA customers,
- Aim to put most of our efforts into the 20 percent of our customers, who provide 80 percent of profits.

However, to achieve the above, I employed the conventional 4 Ps of marketing.

The Time-honored “Four Ps of Marketing”

The strategy step completes the ‘*How we will do it*’ stage. The question was: How will we make the strategy a reality? After the target customers were identified, the marketing plan addressed them through the marketing mix, also known as the 4 Ps of marketing. Below is a brief explanation:

1. Product: What are we offering to our customers?

The product is the centerpiece of the marketing mix. The product is SEWA’s offer to the customers. We opened a commercial section to introduce global brands, genuine products, and ensure that there are no counterfeit or fake products in the electrical market. We adapted ecomagination principles as an important element in our projects. By adhering to these principles, we can ensure that our projects are environmentally- friendly.

2. Price: In a competitive environment, pricing is both critical and challenging. We established a standard and fixed price—no hidden charges—for our products and justification of pricing decisions, thus leading to transparency.

3. Place: Refers to the point of sale and the way in which we get our products and services to our customers by opening more than 10 happiness centers. We introduced smart online payment methods for our customer’s convenience.

4. Promotion: The way we plan to promote our products and services. Advertising, publicity, sales promotion, public relations strategies, media schedule, and so forth.

One of the most recent and notable promotions in SEWA was the introduction of an easy installment plan of up to three years for a service

connection charge with zero interest. Moreover, we started giving a 10% discount on service connection charges for new houses, villas, and flats. Also, in alignment with Sharjah city being recognized as a city of humanitarian welfare, we also offer a special 25% concession to people of determination (special needs).

Stop Please

Promotion, the fourth element in the marketing mix, is the most difficult one to describe. Why? The main reason is that, via promotion, we aim to create a favorable impression of our products/services in the minds of our consumers and actually make them take out their wallet and make a transaction in good faith and being fully satisfied with our services.

The Promotion umbrella encompasses a plethora of activities, such as advertising, catalogs, public relations, and personal selling. These categories branch off to TV, radio, print ads, billboards, customer loyalty programs, telemarketing, and door-to-door sales. You may also add up online marketing, social marketing, word-of-mouth, among many others.

Advertisement

Before proceeding further with the title of advertisement, I would like to share that my personal belief and advertising expertise do not build a brand alone. Though advertising cannot build a brand, it can tell people about an existing brand's ability to do a job well.

Of all the promotional activities mentioned earlier, advertising best suited SEWA's marketing landscape because it would help create a clear position in the minds of my customers. I knew it would hit the bull's eye! So, in the rest of this section, I will highlight a few more advertisement gimmicks. *Advertising* is a form of communication intended to persuade an audience (viewers, readers, or listeners) to purchase or take some action on certain products or services.

I strongly believe in advertising because it is the foremost pillar of promotional strategy. In an interview conducted by local media, I was quoted as stating, “The world is changing more rapidly than ever before! Companies that don’t have advertising strategies and wisdom are often left behind! Cheer up! The future is made by the present. Advertise now!”

8. Well Blended Communication

The media is how the message reaches the customer. There are two types of media platforms:

- **Traditional:** Newspapers, Magazines, Television, Radio, Outdoor/Direct mail, Websites, Text messages.
- **Nontraditional:** Trade Shows, Events, Sponsorship, Product Placements.

Furthermore, advertising falls into two types:

- **Digital Advertising:** e.g., Television, Music, Radio, Online, Product placements.
- **Physical Advertising:** Press, Mobile billboards, In-store advertising, Celebrity Branding.

Some Brands thrive without Advertising

The fact is that most of the great brands of today have thrived simply on buzz generated by word-of-mouth. For these companies, consumers’ experiences with their products or services have been more valuable in establishing their place in people’s hearts. In this age of information, it might seem strange that companies with virtually no advertising can manage to quietly make a name for themselves among a wide audience of dedicated fans.

The three remarkable examples I can recall are Disney Inc., Google Inc., and Krispy Kreme. All of these brands developed reputation and engagement before spending a single dollar on advertising. For example, Krispy Kreme has more than doubled its store locations since 1997 to an enthusiastic audience. At every grand opening of a new Krispy Kreme shop, hordes of cult followers line up outside well before the store opens. Stan Parker, senior vice-president of marketing said, “Some passionate Krispy Kreme customers might be disappointed if we did [advertise].”

Hence, sometimes my marketing philosophy revolves around the mantra, “No ads necessary.” However, SEWA needed to advertise effectively to form a firm foothold since we were targeting a mass market, not a niche market.

SEWA’s advertising objectives were set around five broad themes:

- *Awareness*: We aimed to boost the recognition of our brand name.
- *Knowledge*: We outlined what our products and services do through clear demarcations of each.
- *Liking*: Does our service/product quality meet our customers’ needs?
- *Preference*: Would the above meet our customers’ needs?
- *Conviction*: Finally, we wanted assurance that the customers would take positive action.

The Volkswagen Beetle Story

Do you remember the original Volkswagen Beetle? It wasn’t an immediate hit when it was first introduced to the public. In fact, it sold poorly until some brilliant advertising worked wonders for the brand. Owing to such an effective TV and print ad campaign, the Beetle was profitable in the United States for more than 15 years. The story of the original

Beetle and how remarkable advertising made it successful is a perfect illustration of the power of the TV-industrial complex.

Such examples strengthen my belief in advertising campaigns. One may argue that the impact of advertising is fading fast, which I partly agree with. I accept that ads aren't as effective as they used to be. But ads do work—they do attract attention and generate sales. SEWA catered to the *mass* market, since our organization lacked in targeted consumer segments. So, we were looking for ads as if we were *tornadoes*, swirling around a landscape of consumers and touching everyone in the same way and along the same touch points.

Being a storyteller and an avid reader, I reminded the team of the importance of finding the right time and opportunity to hit the mass target.

Amazon's "The Everything Store" campaign is a very recent example of genius mass marketing. On February 7, 2016, an average of 111.9 million people watched the live televised coverage of the Denver Broncos' 24-10 victory over the Carolina Panthers at Super Bowl 50, making it the third most-watched program in US television history. They would have also witnessed a world first—a Super Bowl advertisement by the online retailer Amazon, promoting its new voice-controlled home device called Echo.

Amazon was smart and agile enough to air its advert at prime time. They did this by judging the Television Rating Point (TRP) of the program, which gave them an index of the popular choice of the people and also the popularity of the particular channel.

Precision—The Fifth P

These 4Ps are the classic components of any marketing mix. However, I was fascinated with the "fifth P" introduced in Rick Kash and David Calhoun's book entitled *How Companies Win*. The authors state that the world around us has become much more precise, and hence, the new P is *Precision*; I couldn't agree more with their opinion. Thanks to the

tech-revolution, customers and consumers are increasingly impatient with inaccuracies, delays, and imprecision. Precision has become the *leitmotif* of their lives, and if we fail to match that precision, those failings will seem even more amplified.

I had decided to add up the precision as the fifth P in my marketing mix. Precision ensures that each of the first four Ps operate at their maximum efficiency and lowest cost. By being precise, we created more rigorous approaches that increased quality, reduced costs, and shrank cycle time.

Management and marketing books are full with more Ps, especially for service marketing. Since we are a service-driven organization, we needed to extend the five Ps list to 8 Ps:

1. People: Our employees have the right training.
2. Process: We offer a consistent service that keeps our customers informed.
3. Physical evidence: The appearance of our employees and premises can affect how customers see our service.

9. Action Plan

This stage comprised synthesizing our learning from the above fundamentals of SEWA marketing plan to kick-start the process. “Plan your work, and work your plan.” Who, what, where, why, and how? These are the five fundamental questions every marketer asks and uses. They form the backbone of our action plan. Answering these primal questions helped us to gather information and solve problems. Our typical action plan included the following:

- Times and places of specific promotions
- Trade shows to be attended
- Advertising campaigns to be launched

- Publicity releases to be distributed
- A budget for each type of promotion

Develop a 360-degree Marketing Communication

A 360-degree approach starts with the problem—the brand challenge—and then “finds the media and messages that best answers that problem.” This means bringing a brand to life using all possible contact points and depends on establishing a series of collaborative partnerships for the brand.

Recently, the 360 communications discipline has made a big promise: To deliver more cost-effective brand building through integrating the activities of all communications disciplines into a single brand voice. The central premise of 360 communications is that all brand contacts matter and should be considered holistically when spending marketing money.

Brand Voice

The outcome of all the marketing communication tools I mentioned above was that we discovered our brand voice. Just like in human beings, a brand voice is the unique way a brand communicates to everyone it interacts with. If I could describe SEWA’s brand voice in three words, I would use the following: reliable, efficient, and sustainable. This was a great milestone achieved. My team and I were head over heels! However, at this point, you might ask yourself, why does brand voice matter? Well, let me familiarize you with the risks of not having a consistent brand voice in the first place. Among others, scattered messaging, a confusing brand presence, lack of differentiation, and ultimately, missed business opportunities, are a few risks that can arise if you don’t have a consistent brand voice.

Hence, discovering, and eventually establishing, our consistent brand voice encouraged us to beat the odds and continue the journey.

10. Score and Evaluate

In our recommendations, we indicated how we would monitor and measure the steps to achieve our marketing goals. It is common knowledge that, without measurement, managers cannot identify (1) where their firm or products stand, and (2) whether the desired goals are being achieved.

Reflective Thinking

We knew that our plan was prepared cohesively with adequate resources and all the right skills. However, we were expecting to encounter surprises during the implementation process, such as, how the plan would be controlled and how the results would be measured.

We spent a few minutes at the beginning of our weekly marketing progress meetings in reflection. Each time we asked two questions:

- What did we learn this week?
- What should we share with the rest of the organization?

From time to time, we took a good look at our progress to see whether we were actually making progress. We asked ourselves, "Were we seeing a return for our investment? Was what we were doing getting us closer to our goals? Were we headed in a direction that helped us to fulfill our commitments, maintain our priorities, and realize our big dream?"

We kept track measures that would lead to the achievement of our goals, and recognized and rewarded people for meeting those measures. We also set up a regular cycle of follow-through by conducting regular, frequent meetings where team members held each other accountable for achieving the outcome.

11. Internal Communication

This was an important ingredient because internal marketing is the key to successful external marketing. Internal marketing can be defined as

promoting the organization and its products and services to its employees, as was the case in our high-contact business services. High-contact businesses are those in which there is considerable contact between the service provider and the customer, such as banks, insurance companies, airlines, supermarkets, and restaurant chains. Hence, you may say that internal marketing is important to all industries, but that it is extremely important to the service industry. Federal Express, IBM, and Emirates Airlines are great examples of this.

Will You Make a Successful Marketer?

I remember a long time ago when I read a book about marketing plans. I can't remember the book's title or who authored it, but I do remember the 5Cs of what makes a successful marketer, and I also remember how I can win to teach each employee. Here is a summary of the Five Cs:

1. **Customer:** The customer is truly a king or queen. Without customers, there is no business.
2. **Continuous:** Marketing must drive the business continuously.
3. **Co-ordination:** This particularly important for the sales department.
4. **Creative:** Marketing must continuously seek for new ways to maintain awareness and differentiate from the competition.
5. **Culture:** Must create a marketing culture throughout the organization.

Do It Before You Do It

I took the pre-final draft approval of my marketing plan to read more into SEWA's Happiness and Positivity Room. This space is an ideal place to relax and rejuvenate our tired minds. The lush green plants,

sun-lit windows, colorful interior, and cozy furnishings provide a serene environment where one can unwind and feel at home. Most of our “water-cooler conversations” happen here, and the room also has a billiard table that doubles up as a meeting desk.

As I was halfway through the draft and trying to figure out the integration of the marketing plan’s elements, I wondered how I could knit them together to generate the kind of synergy that makes $1+1=11$. It is not about a marketing plan alone, it’s about thinking outside the box—imagination. Albert Einstein once said, “I am enough of an artist to draw freely upon my imagination. Imagination is more important than knowledge. Knowledge is limited. Imagination encircles the world.” However true this may be, imagination cannot substitute knowledge. Though impressed by his quote, I agree with him only half-heartedly, and posit that knowledge is power if applied and shared. Imagination complements knowledge and does not compete with it.

I felt sliced into two halves, with one part telling me to move from “what ifs” to “what could be,” and to not be bogged down with doubts and apprehension. *Just trust your guts. Go ahead*, my inner voice would say. The other half stopped me by reminding me of a lovely quote by Stephen Amell, “You have to relax when you’re shooting an arrow. You can’t be tensed. And that just helps, in your day-to-day life.”

While still soaked up in my split personality, I called up Boutheina to join me in the room. Observing me completely engrossed in the pile of papers, she got anxious. Biting her nails, she said, “Are you skeptical about the plan?” I looked at her and in a hopeful voice, I said, “The concept is right, the facts are right, the plan is fool-proof, but, what if the majority of employees simply don’t buy in?” We needed to devise a way to capture the conscious and unconscious mind of almost 5000 employees before we roll out our marketing plan. Only then would *all* write history together.”

Everybody's in Marketing

Here, I must admit that some of the enthusiastic employees might be positive about the marketing plan while some others may be doubtful, and may expect more clarification and communication to engage them. A few might be in an act of “window shopping” (the activity of looking at goods displayed in shop windows, especially without intending to buy anything), and the energy vampires who are waiting just to kill the idea—even if the top management wanted it.

She replied, “Sir, you are the one who would give them hope, an engaging idea, and some kind of higher purpose rather than just coming to work for money.” Her comment made me ponder.

I was convinced that I had to get the dialogue going to the rest of the organization. However, I decided to adapt a unique approach of communication: The NLP (Neuro-linguistic Programming) method. This is the most powerful approach I've found for communications, change, and excellent performance.

There is a well-known saying in the NLP community: the conscious mind is the goal setter, and the unconscious mind is the goal getter. It is an attitude and a methodology of knowing how to achieve goals and get results.

The next step was to recruit experts in NLP, many of whom are located in Dubai and are internationally-accredited trainers. I did two things simultaneously: approving and sending the plan to everyone involved and ask HR to start conducting a crash course on NLP to support my decision.

Growing Pains

While sending the marketing plan to be shared by all, I had to take a tough decision of collecting customer's projects connection fees upfront to improve our cash flow. A very close friend came to me and informed that my decision had reached His Highness's attention, and he wasn't happy about it. Below is the conversation that followed next.

“Dear Rashid, His Highness may not be happy with your decision. Do you have any idea of the repercussion you may see later?” His heavy tone becoming more serious. He paused, cleared his throat, and continued. “I am afraid this must be one of your rushed decisions. Think about it, you are the blue-eyed boy of His Highness—you’ve well-earned that place in his heart, so don’t upset Him with a whimsical decision of yours.” He continued, saying that a good number of people were trying to beat me out, and that others considered me as someone who works beyond the limits of the government. “Aren’t you scared?” he then asked in a grumpy tone.

“Sure. Nearly everyone’s motivated by fear in some form,” I replied. I listened to him patiently, with a cat smile on my face. *What the hell had I gotten myself into?* I actually didn’t have much to say to him because I was too absorbed in my thoughts. I felt bad, and sensed victory slipping away. The authentic leader within me said, *Rashid, stay firm on your decision. Don’t back off. Go ahead.* On the other shoulder, the evil voice within me then muttered gingerly, *Well, nobody is perfect, right? You don’t want to upset His Highness and the community you serve, right? Stop. Don’t do it. Just take back your decision.*

This tug-of-war in mind continued for some time. Eventually, the authentic leader won. I stood by my decision because I could foresee the results. The bigger picture. The bigger battle!

Driven by my consciousness and true north, I rowed through the rough, albeit temporary waters. As Carl Jung asserts, “I am not what has happened to me, I am what I choose to become.” Even when questioned by His Highness himself for my highly criticized decision regarding the collection of a project connection fee, I stood by my vision to turn-around SEWA. He had mixed reactions towards me then, yet he approved my decision and supported me. Thank You, Your Highness.



God has always had something in store for me. Any tough or negative event has altered to positive outcomes; as they say, all well that's end well.

Coming Up with the Big Idea

I figured out this was the time to formulate a branding cycle with the basics of brand rebuilding to act as my aid in salvaging the tarnished image of SEWA.

Back to Basics

Now, before I introduce you to SEWA's branding cycle, here's a real-world explanation of branding. It's a well-known fact that branding is a *ubiquitous* aspect of any business. However, it is also one of the most misunderstood wedges of the marketing and branding strategy loop. It surprises me to see firms treating branding as a merely an advertising function, and it majorly upsets me when I read business write-ups that beat the drum of branding and virtually isolate it from the core business. Sadly, as many believe, branding is about designing a logo, adding a new color to an existing one, or making a sign or label to identify a company or product—in other words, extrinsic attributes.

I would argue that branding is not just about the management of organizations/products/services, or public image; rather, it is the key tool for creating and maintaining a competitive advantage in a customer's mind. To me, branding is essentially a customer's *perception* of my product or service; and, as we all know, dealing with perception is a challenging and delicate task. It's a collection of the experiences, emotions, feelings, and expectations one has over a product or an organization. Dealing with human perception is challenging as it can either work for you (brand asset) or against you (brand liability). There's no mid-way!

Narrowing Our Focus

Hence, I did not want to depend on dumb-luck and decided to create the branding cycle. However, I did some homework prior to creating

the cycle. Before going live, I wanted to evaluate, or rather, market-test my branding message to ensure it was relevant and timely. This helped me to discover my customers' *sweet spot* and become a part of their 'mental real' state. It's a great territory to land up in! Staying there is a different story.

Focusing Questions

I probed myself with a couple of questions. Some of which I had already asked at the beginning of my turnaround assignment.

- Why do I need to do this in the first place?
- Why do I need to re-brand SEWA or even create a brand image for SEWA?
- Where do I want SEWA to be and by when?
- Do I have the right leadership and culture within SEWA to undertake this challenge?
- How to build and sustain the lost reputation?

At the outset, the answers to the above questions aided me to make informed and appropriate decisions. I knew deep within that to succeed with this undertaking, a culture needed to be created from both the top-down and bottom-up.

It's a stated fact that internal buy-in is critical to the success of any branding strategy. In fact, success with my external customers will not meet expectations if my internal customers (SEWA employees) fail to jump onboard. Hence, my next step was to convince them to join hands with me in the rebranding endeavor.

I narrowed down my focus by first persuading my people. Did I win them over, or did I turn them off? You'll find out more about brand leadership in chapter 4. Keep reading.





BRAND LEADERSHIP

Defining our North Star

I knew firsthand that welcoming a diverse range of voices to the table will help us utilize our collective wisdom in solving problems together and building a relevant and resilient brand. As the saying goes, "Brands are built by humans, and brands are built for humans." In that light, I turned to find the truth that would shine through in SEWA's business decisions, product designs, and marketing programs.

My search started with three critical questions that I asked myself: (1) SEWA might be doing well, but was it really thriving? (2) Were my current marketing activities helping lay the foundation for continued growth? And, (3) Had I built a great brand that could withstand any adversity?

Answering the above questions may sound like completing a brand diagnostic exercise, but I was convinced that doing this activity would help us define our brand's North Star. Thinking about these questions—and discussing them with the marketing and branding team—would solve the conundrum of SEWA brand building. As a matter of fact, it would further sustain our brand relevance and cultural resonance over time.

Brand Audit

I believe that brand building starts and ends inside the company. Immediately, I advised my market research team to conduct a brand audit. I advised them to create a brand audit checklist that covered several critical areas, such as:

Brand Essence: We revisited our mission statement and our core cultural values. We asked, “Did everyone in SEWA describe the company principles, vision, mission, and all management philosophies similarly?”

Digital Presence: We audited our website and social media and asked ourselves, “Are our websites and other social media sites up to date? Are they competent enough and accurately reflect our brand?”

The purpose of the brand audit was to ascertain how our organization/business was performing in the eyes of our customers. Below, I have listed some of the benefits we gained after conducting a brand audit:

- Helped to determine the positioning of business/organization and plan corrective strategies.
- Empowered the discovery of strengths and weaknesses.
- Guided a more accurate alignment of offerings with the expectations of customers.
- Enabled understanding a range of perceptions (positive or negative) of the business.

In fact, performing a brand audit allowed us to take a step back and look at the overall picture. The previous chapter elucidated how we discovered our brand voice and our efforts in spreading our brand voice and employing well-blended communications. At this point, we knew it was the right moment to conduct a reality-check as to our brand voice efficacy.

Once we had gone through the brand auditing process, we were pleasantly surprised and learned that we had some work to do. Conducting a brand audit gave me enough information to craft out a branding roadmap to maintain and develop SEWA brand. I was determined to put the organization on a new path by resetting an insular branding element in SEWA. Conventional wisdom suggested that the logical place to start rebuilding the brand was by putting a fresh face on SEWA and its products. In fact, giving our image and message a public makeover was also the fastest way to get the attention of partners/investors and customers alike.

However, as I deeply believe in the old adage that charity begins at home, I recognized that if I didn't develop greatness among our employees, our employees were unlikely to deliver greatness to our customers. So, my starting point was cultivating a strong internal makeover. Only until my branding vision was accepted clearly internally, it would not be expressed clearly externally. Hence, the first step was to garner the internal buy-in; that is, to engage every employee who touches the brand in delivering a focused and unique customer experience.



Strong Purpose Brand

At this point, I wanted to instill a strong brand purpose, which would define the soul of the organization, engage our customers emotionally, solve problems, and earn the loyalty of our customers.

I then called for an immediate meeting with SEWA's marketing and branding team with only one item on the agenda—the SEWA Branding Cycle. Speaking sternly to accentuate the seriousness of the task at hand, I said, "I declare that from this day forward there will be a new SEWA. One that is bigger, better, faster, and cheaper. Customers need purpose, so we need to give them something to hold on to, something that goes beyond price points and packaging."

The Volvo brand is positioned on safety, while Bentley is associated with various aspirational jobs. Toyota has earned connotations on reliability. I want SEWA to be a purpose-driven brand people can believe in, evolve with, and be willing to fight for affordable, reliable, and accessible energy and water.”

Turn Down the Noise

“I want everyone to focus on the screen. Everyone needs to be onboard and take ownership of the SEWA branding cycle. Fall in love with it. And show this in everything you do. Everything!” As I write today, I feel I sounded a bit too strict that day.

I wanted to grab the marketing and branding team’s attention right from the start, so I included the SEWA branding cycle image in my first slide, as illustrated in the diagram below.

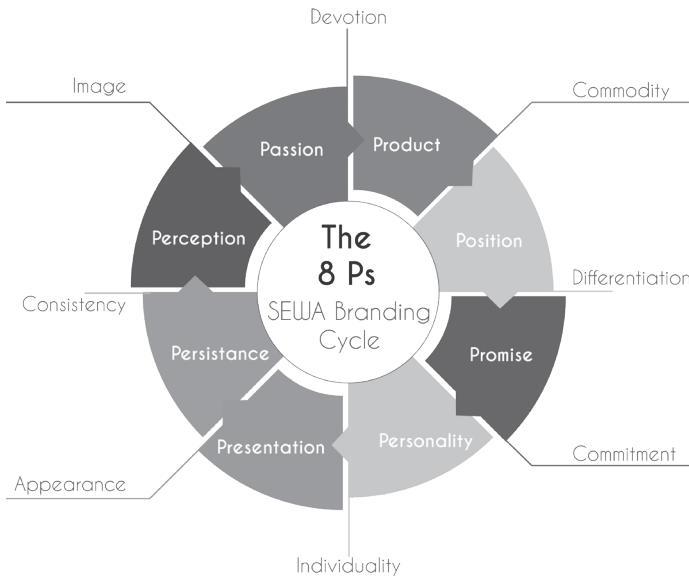


Figure 4.1 The 8 Ps- SEWA Branding Cycle

Having shown the branding cycle, a pin-drop silence fell over the room for some time. After a few moments of numbness, I could hear them

murmuring, “Wow, so colorful!” That signaled me to carry on. Then, I moved the pointer towards the screen and went on to explain the brilliant SEWA branding cycle to them.

I said, “The image is much more than the bright colors you see on the screen. Let’s scratch the surface and see what’s within.” They nodded in affirmation. I stood up and began elaborating on the cycle. Here’s an easy run-through for you:

1. Passion

Passion is the primary ingredient for building a brand and the first element and germane to any branding strategy. I suggested my team to ask themselves if they were extremely happy and excited about their branding assignment.” If we do not feel passionate about our brand, why should anyone else? It’s about loving what we do. All employees, especially frontline people representing the SEWA brand, need to have an infectious enthusiasm and a strong passion for the company to achieve the status of a passion brand.

Passion Brand

I started to sense that special feeling had captured many of the participants. Then, I said loudly, “Want to know more about it? My dream is to see the SEWA brand on a list featuring the top passion brands in the world.”

Then, there was a moment of silence.

I started to explain, “Put simply, a passion brand is not a brand that consumers purchase purely out of habit, it’s a brand they have an *emotional* connection with and want to be identified with by their peers. Further, it requires an extremely positive attitude toward a specific brand that leads to emotional attachment and influences relevant behavioral factors. If a consumer is passionate about a brand, he/she will engage in a much more emotional relationship with the brand and even *miss* the brand or feel loss when the brand is unavailable. It is contrary to strait-jacketed old-style top-down closed brand management.

“Can I move on?” I interrogated.

“Yes, Sir,” they replied.

2. Product

I changed the slide to the second P-Product. The slide had only one sentence written on it—a question: what is it we are trying to brand? We began brainstorming right there and the answers rolled out one by one. I was amazed by the level of knowledge the team had.

From SEWA’s perspective, we wanted to rebrand the entire organization. So, my question was: What is it that our brand will do differently that customers will side with it? What are our USPs (Unique Selling Points)? We figured out that SEWA’s USPs needed to be enhanced in its marketing communications plan as much as possible, and to use our USPs as a differentiator and lovemark.

Here, I requested each team member to write down 1 to 2 USPs. I was so happy to see the list the team generated. It contained a number of useful points, such as listening to customers, affordable, reliable, and accessible energy source, speed, and efficiency, 24/7 service centers. After contributing such productive ideas, I congratulated them by saying “Well done! I am proud of you all.”

3. Positioning

I reminded the team about the early days at SEWA. Our positioning journey started with repositioning (renewal). When I took over in 2014, SEWA was viewed as a *transactional* organization, selling electricity, water, and gas, and collecting payments for the same, with no customer focus at all. It was a customer service nightmare.

I repositioned SEWA as a living, transformational organization, which engages its community through conservation campaigns and environmental programs directed towards saving CO₂, combating climate change, and many other initiatives.

Positioning is about creating a unique position in the marketplace and defines where the product resides in consumer's mind. This bit is tricky and involves two essential elements:

1. Establishing a clear differential advantage in the minds of those people.
2. Engaging customers and becoming more personal (Know they know you need them).

You may say that product positioning is a word or a couple of words that come to mind when people hear the name of given brand. For example, Air Arabia is service while Porsche is performance. Some companies favor building multiple positioning. For instance, Audi is sophistication and progression, while Apple is simple and intuitive.

I wanted my customers to perceive SEWA as an efficient and sustainable utility that provides affordable, reliable, and accessible energy and water to all.

The 4Cs

By now, the marketing team had become engrossed and engaged in my presentation. To grease the wheels, I posed the following question: "Has anyone heard of the 4Cs of successful brand positioning?"

Some of the employees lifted their hands half-heartedly, whereas a few were gallant enough to murmur a word or two trying to attempt an answer. The rest of the employees ducked their heads in the laptops in front of them.

As I was expecting this response, to save time, I showed them the following infographic as a slide.

The four keys to successful positioning are as follows:

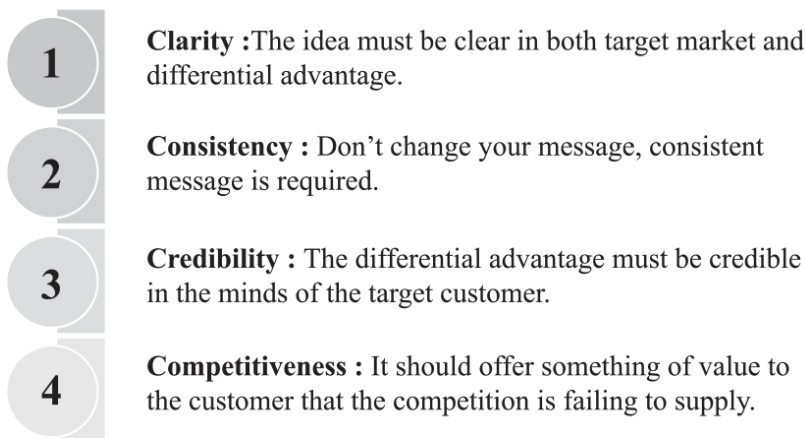
- 
- 1 **Clarity** :The idea must be clear in both target market and differential advantage.
 - 2 **Consistency** : Don't change your message, consistent message is required.
 - 3 **Credibility** : The differential advantage must be credible in the minds of the target customer.
 - 4 **Competitiveness** : It should offer something of value to the customer that the competition is failing to supply.

Figure 4.2 The 4 Cs of Positioning

I said, “Ladies and gentlemen, I feel the above list looks a little incomplete to me. Successful positioning requires an iconic character. If a brand fails to have an impactful identity, then it soon gets lost in oblivion. Hence, I added an extra element to the above list—Character. Yes, Character.”

“What is it all about?” They asked.

“Character is to go beyond unique and differentiation to show how they deliver. In short, transforming a brand into an icon. The character is the soul of the brand. It adds life and makes a brand a living and breathing self,” I explained.

The atmosphere in the room had transformed into a serene and serious state of affairs. Everyone sat at the edge of their chairs and became glued to the screen. To get the dialogue going, I moved towards a flip chart at the corner of the room, picked up a marker, and wrote in big bold letters ‘**PROMISE**’.

“Can anyone say why do we need to make a promise in our branding cycle?” I said with eloquence.

My market research officer said; “A brand promise is an extension of a company’s positioning. It’s the tangible benefits that make a product or service desirable.”

4. Promise

Here comes the best part. Customers are not buying Michelin tires, they’re buying safety; customers aren’t buying Disney tickets, they’re buying fun for the whole family. So, my question to the team was: “What’s the meaningful offer or the compelling promise of our brand?” The promise we make and keep is the backbone of our brand and the basis of our reputation. Not getting this right, we’ll miss the boat on our customers’ longer-term loyalty. Therefore, my advice is to “brand the buzz, not buzz the brand.”

Memorable branding is promising to deliver an experience that is so compelling and so alluring that our customers cannot ignore it. By promising the right experience, we become a groovy and irresistible brand.

For other brands, the connection can be so strong that they proudly create a cult or club to symbolize unity and loyalty. Harley Davidson is a good example of this. When I see Harley bikes roving around the streets of the UAE, I notice that most Harley Davidson buyers are over fifty, wealthy—with many being executives—and they consider buying such an expensive bike not for transportation but for recreation. The Harley, no doubt, became an American icon, but it has exploded into the international arena as a symbol of free-spiritedness and sharing a passion for the open road.

At this point, I paused abruptly.

I could see all of them gaping at me. I asked, “Can anyone in the room state our brand promise? Can anyone come up and write it on the flip chart for all of us?”

I could see some of the employees sifting through their daily journal/notebook searching for an answer in it. And the rest of the employees looked down at their laptops. I thought my question had put them in a soup. To coax some answers out of them, I smartly turned the question around by asking, “What makes SEWA desirable to the society at large?” This question brightened up their faces and everyone started to share their answers with their neighbors sitting next to them. This gave me hope that I had framed the question in a positive way.

I told the employees to write their answers on the notebooks at the table and then compare their answers with what I was writing on flip chart.

The paragraph below explains SEWA’s brand promise.

The SEWA Brand Promise

Our brand promise is an extension of SEWA’s mission and its value proposition. I wanted my customers to perceive SEWA as an efficient and sustainable service provider that believes in affordable, reliable, and accessible energy and water for all. However, you may be wondering what I really mean by all of this.

I then told my colleagues, “I am coming to the end of explaining the promise stage. We were quite clear with the promises that we made. But, as they say, a promise, of course, is good only if it’s kept. Our brand personality would help us live up to our promise.”

By now, the team had become hooked on the SEWA branding cycle’s presentation and appeared amused and convinced. I felt I was doing right things right. Though the session started off as a heavy dose of information, an important decision was taken, which thus left the team feeling highly inspired and motivated. However, I know that humans can have a short attention span. Science tells us that the maximum duration of a human mind concentration is forty-five minutes. Once we hit that threshold, any human mind can’t register further information/signals. In light of such knowledge, I was driven to announce a long

overdue coffee-break for 10 minutes. “We are running a race against the clock. Take a mini break and come back soon. The action is yet to begin.”

5. Personality

The team returned to the room in less than 10 minutes. I smiled and thanked them for their enthusiastic gesture. Once they had settled back into their places, I opened up the next slide—Personality.

This is about interacting more *authentically* with our customers. The moment that organizations lose their personality is when their employees become “people” rather than individuals. I wanted SEWA to become a brand with personality—one where customers put little or no emphasis on price due to other emotional benefits that the brand offers them. I decided to achieve this by connecting with our customers periodically, to see what their needs are, where the trend is going, and be first in line for them, is part of the game.

6. Presentation

At this point, I stood up and said, “Just can’t wait to explain the importance of the coming up P—Presentation.”

Give your product a cool and compelling name. I remember an excerpt from an article I read once: “Start with a great name and logo and then launch your compelling packaging and communications.” However, I also advised the team, “Logos are important because the human brain is wired to recognize icons. Yet, an eye-catching logo isn’t everything.” Primarily, consumer behavior and its dynamics needed to be understood. I warned the team by saying that, “We are all proud of our product/service inventions and excited to get them to market but if there’s little or no need for our product/service, never mind trying to turn it into a brand, it will fail!”

7. Persistence

“Guys, let’s keep going, we are close to close our branding cycle presentation. As they say, slow and steady wins the race. Be patient. Never give up. Consistency is the hallmark behavior of any brand, and is crucial to gaining clarity and confidence in the marketplace.” I advised the team. After all, every brand needs a *constant* make-over.

We must consider that, in designing a brand, people should recognize it, connect with it, and be willing to make it their own. Branding should be looked at as an opportunity, rather than a restriction. Feel free to play around. Consistency is the key!

Longer-term Perspective

We remained hopeful, optimistic, and confident about the future of our brand. There can be times when we just have to hang on to our own optimism, keep believing, and keep moving forward. Optimism gives us positive energy during the troubled times.

Brands cannot be built in a day/overnight. Building a strong brand is a long-term activity. It takes time—not weeks or months, but years—years of toil and sweat. Although it may take us 5 to 7 years, we understand the importance of time in building our reputation.

On the other hand, the second meaning of a longer-term perspective is that current success may not guarantee long-term success. Therefore, I suggested that SEWA brand would require longer-term activities to survive.

My presentation was going just as I had planned. In fact, the night before, I had rehearsed and timed it to perfection. Of course, I didn’t want to leave any stone unturned. I wanted to sound convincing enough to convince my people. You could say that I had done my homework well!

Till now, things had progressed as planned and everything was under control. According to my plan, it was the time to break for lunch. However, I felt a lunch break would fizz off or dissipate the positive energy

in the room. Hence, I thought of wrapping up the presentation at hand and then break for lunch.

However, before proceeding to the last phase of SEWA's branding cycle, I wanted the team to recap what they had learned so far.

"All right, get ready for an activity," I announced. Since most of them were not expecting an ad-hoc activity, I could see some jaws dropping. I said, "Who remembers what SEWA's principle # 8 states? My manager jumped off her chair and said, "That's easy. SEWA principle # 8 stands for using vibrant stories that motivate others to reach for a better future." "Perfect, well done." I praised her. "So, would you like to listen to an interesting story of Coca-Cola's persistence in the face of adversity?"

"Of course." They all responded.

One of the interesting examples I would like to share here is the story of Coca-Cola in Japan. Coca-Cola withstood losses in Japan for 15 years before building the market to become one of its most profitable today. The story of Coca-Cola's growth in Japan is one of innovation, new products, strong marketing, and resilience. From 1910 to the outbreak of World War II, nearly a million servings of Coca-Cola were sold in Japan. During World War II, Coca-Cola sales ceased and did not resume until after the war. However, between 1960 and 1970, sales more than doubled every year. How? The 1964 Tokyo Olympic Games offered the perfect opportunity to showcase the drink to both the Japanese market and global visitors. The Company and bottlers provided billboards, guide maps, and a robust marketing campaign.

8. Perception

I stopped for a moment and asked if anyone had any questions. So far, the answer was no; all of them had said the same thing—"It's a simple and enjoyable journey." I smiled and then carried on to explain my last P.

Finally, I concluded that great brands continually monitor brand perceptions to see that they're in alignment with the brand owner's aspirations and in sync with consumers' wants and needs. One needs to measure and track what is working and what is not. The magic mantra of becoming a memorable brand lies in keeping your brand promise by respecting the brand's DNA and utilizing emotional positioning as a strategy. It's this top-of-mind association that breeds brand success.

Understand our customer's perceptions and be in their new customer universe. Customer satisfaction is the name of the game.

What's Next?

I had ended my branding cycle explanation, yet the team was still engrossed in my explanation. They were all starry-eyed. The room was brimming with enthusiasm. I could clearly feel the positive vibes around me. I knew for sure I had nailed it! Not the hard way! I had hit a jackpot.

However, I knew that I have just shown the tip of the iceberg. There was a lot to achieve and much to actualize. The atmosphere in the room looked favorable and the team appeared convinced. I felt we have had enough discussion and a lunch break would do well.

I wrapped up the meeting by saying, "Once this branding cycle is put in place, it can be applied to our web presence, our content strategy, and our social media plan. And remember: it's a cycle, not a one-time activity. Always be ready to rinse and repeat so we can stay up-to-date as to who our customers are and how our brand can best serve them. Get our hands-on and minds-on into this cycle."

I continued, "That's enough food for thought for your mind, now it's time to feed our bodies. Let's break for an hour's lunch break. There's an appetizing buffet laid out for you. Let's reconvene after the break because I have much more exciting stuff to share with you."

I must admit that the successful establishment of the SEWA branding cycle did wonders. What followed next was even more impressive. We were able to erase the dusty and tarnished brand image of SEWA and were on its way to building a built-to-last organization.

The lunch hour quickly evaporated. The lunch got over and we assembled back in the room. The employees looked refreshed and spirited. I told them to be seated.

I cleared my throat and said in a cheerful tone, “This may sound like a Cinderella-kind-of-transformation. That’s not a bad thing though! However, this isn’t a fairy tale. We will have our own share of gruesome days, albeit the outcome will be splendid. Now, I will shift gears towards brand management. Don’t panic, we will do it brick-by-brick.”

I continued by saying, “Building a strong brand that has global presence requires adapting the brand management mindset which consists of numerous key points. At SEWA, we will zero in on a few priority essentials.”



The New Normal

“Ladies and gentlemen, we’re in an era where it’s less and less about brands trying to shout at the consumer. Rather, it’s more and more about trying to ensure that the brand is authentic to the consumer. Today, it’s not about B2B or B2C—the marketing and branding world has converged to “B2Me”—that’s the ‘New Normal’. In this world, if consumers don’t like a brand, they shout about it. They can slam it down in a nanosecond,” I said eloquently, though I could see that my statement had caused some raised eyebrows and curious eyes.

The marketing communications officer raised her hand, “Sir, please explain what do you mean by B2Me. We haven’t heard this terminology before.”

I took a deep breath and said in a husky voice, “B2Me is the deep, authentic, and appropriately *personal* connection that consumers now expect brands to make with them. It goes far beyond the immediate transaction of buying a product or service. B2Me is about personalization, listening, and learning about individual consumers—both offline and online—to create a holistic approach that enhances their lives.”

I continued, “We must navigate this ‘new normal’ of the marketing era brilliantly by 2020, and this can be achieved by using a safety net.”

“A safety net!” All of them exclaimed.

“Yes, that’s right. To ensure the success of our 8 Ps of the branding cycle and to build a ‘living’ brand that is more agile and responsive, I have formulated the following principles of SEWA Brand Management—that’s my safety net. Please pay your full attention.”

I then proceeded to open up another PowerPoint presentation on SEWA Brand management.

The first slide included my favorite definition of brand management—“Brand management includes managing the tangible and intangible characteristics of a brand. It is a series of techniques used to increase the perceived value of a product or service. Effective brand management builds loyal customers through positive brand association and has a positive effect on your bottom line.”

I asked my digital brand officer to read the definition aloud.

The next slide included the list of nine brand management imperatives. I gave enough time for all to read them before then moving to explain them one by one. The following are the imperatives:

Imperative # 1: Love your Customers

Loving our customers means winning their loyalty by giving them great value and touching their emotions and spirit. The great Harvard Marketing

professor Theodore Levitt always used to tell his students, “People don’t want to buy a quarter-inch drill. They want a quarter-inch hole.”

Imperative # 2: SEWA brand can be the driving force for the entire business

Clearly established vision, mission, and values statements that drive the whole organization, and branding decisions. They express their beliefs in everything we say and do.

We clearly have a sense of belonging, and of participating in something worthwhile. When employees feel they are working for a good company, they give good service.

Imperative # 3: A Promise Customers want and believe in

People are emotionally attached to brands that fill unmet or unaddressed wants and needs consistently and without fail. These types of brands deliver great products, excel in product design, production, and packaging, and provide excellent service both before and after the sale.

I turned to the team and said, “I need to have your heart, your mind, your ears, and your soul for the upcoming slide. It’s about brand identity. We all know the importance of identity for individuals and organizations. The Cambridge business dictionary states that brand identity is a set of ideas and features that a company wants people to connect in their minds with its products or brand.”

Imperative # 4: Create a strong, memorable brand identity

Because each great brand puts forth a brand identity that’s simple, strong, memorable, and presented without variation on every product, in every market, through every communication, and at every consumer touch point.

“Are you ready for another story?” I questioned. All of them then responded in a chorus-like tone, “Gladly.” I then moved to a new slide with only one word written on it—Swoosh.

“What does swoosh stand for?” I enquired. One of the team members exclaimed, “I know, I know, it means to keep quiet. Silence—Shh. And then he sat down with fingers on his lips. His action made me laugh aloud. I said, “That’s a great attempt.”

I continued, “Swoosh is a swirling or rustling sound or movement. But Swoosh is also the logo of American athletic shoe and clothing manufacturer Nike. Today, it has become one of the most recognizable brand logos in the world, and the most profitable, having a worth of \$29.6 billion alone in 2017.

Nike is another very successful brand that doesn’t have to gloat about its product, though it can boast confidently about what it does for its customers and how it makes them feel. The Swoosh—just do it! Campaign had a rippling effect on many the world over. People used this phrase as inspiration to do what they’ve always wanted to do: fulfill their lifelong dream, get married, lose weight, etc.. And every time they think of what pushed them to this limit, they’ll think of Nike. That’s powerful! For certain products, there are intrinsic or intangible values that translate into benefits, where one’s lifestyle is positively affected, and as a result, these products often become emotional and powerful brands.”

“Wow, that was a great story. Thank you, sir. In the spirit of Nike, let’s just do it.” Kumar, my head of design uttered with enthusiasm.

Imperative # 5: A Single, consistently-presented brand message

Many brand experts say it takes 5-7 years to build a brand. Confidence and trust grow slowly. Consistency doesn’t mean that a brand should stay still since strong brands *evolve* over time in three different ways:

1. Visually-Shell

The design has gone through 8 reworks over the past 100 years.

Color first appeared with the construction of Shell's first service stations in California. Not only did red and yellow help Shell stand out, but they also were, and still are, the colors of Spain, where many early Californian settlers were born. Perhaps by displaying Spanish colors, it was hoped an emotional bond would be created.

An alternative idea about the Shell colors was that Mr. Graham, the Scottish director, suggested using red and yellow as they form the basis for the Royal Standard of Scotland. The logo has become so recognizable that it often appears without the brand name.

2. Product development: Mercedes Benz

It is widely known that Mercedes-Benz cars are some of the best cars in the world, standing as symbols of flawless quality and cutting-edge engineering. Product development has been an intricate part of Mercedes Benz' processes in creating synergies, accelerating innovation, and improving quality.

By the 1980s, the world had already become concerned with the effects of CO2 emissions and overall car pollution, with Mercedes – Benz were among the first to comply with such regulations. By the early 1990s, their diesel car range had completely switched to four-valve intake/exhaust systems and carburetors were dropped in favor of fuel injection systems.

After marking a new era in mechanical supercharging technology, Mercedes went on to cross new borders through the release of new engineering concepts and ground-breaking designs.

3. Fundamental promise: Volvo

Volvo has always been about safety: prevention, protection, and security. Volvo has also developed commitments to the environment and its role as a corporate citizen. Volvo is a brand for life.

Imperative #6: The SEWA Brand is built through everything that we do or say

It's an experience that positively reinforces the brand message and promise at every single point of consumer encounter. It is not just what we say that creates perceptions, but far more importantly, it is about what we do. Communications can play a role, but people trust their experiences much more.

Let me take you to the brand world for a moment bear with me.

Know your “Why”

Your “why” is the foundation of your brand messaging and must resonate with your customer segment in a fundamental way. Let's take two examples of well-known, loved, and cherished brands—Apple and Starbucks. They both have plenty of competitors, but they also stand tall amongst their competitors. Hence, the gist is thus: when you know your customers so well that you know what matters most to them, you will be close to knowing your “why.” Got it?

“Does anyone remember the first slide that I showed at the beginning of the presentation?” I interrogated with a smirk on my face.

Rasha, a newly appointed, talented Marketing & Branding executive stood up and said, “Yes, I remember. It was—love your customers.”

“Bravo Rasha!” I complimented her. “Give her a big hand,” I announced.

The room filled with echoes of clapping sound.

I continued, “So, Rasha, do remember what was imperative #7?” She responded in a nano-second, “Something that you love. It's sustainability.”

Imperative # 7: Sustainability

I love the subject of sustainability so much so that it is no wonder I have written four books about the subject. I love the joke mentioned by

His Excellency Zain ul Abideen Rasheed, the former State foreign minister of Singapore, when he said “sustainability is the second name of Rashid.” Well, that’s really nice of him. To me, sustainability is not just about greening the environment. For a complete sustainability problem to be solved, all three pillars of sustainability must be sustainable; i.e., social, environmental, and economic.

Sustainability in Action

SEWA had accomplished great heights in the arena of Sustainability. By now, SEWA had begun to infuse sustainable initiatives and endeavors in most of its projects. Amongst other achievements and accomplishments, the most noteworthy is SEWA becoming the first utility in the region to build a fully solar-powered electric car charging stations. This is definitely a giant leap towards sustainability. And the cherry on the cake was the Social Sustainability through Innovation Award presented to me by the Indian Human Welfare Organization in 2017.

I keep reminding people around me that sustainability as a business practice will increase brand value and guarantee a long life for the business, only if we balance all the three pillars of sustainability. As a matter of fact, even during tough financial crises, consumers prefer sustainable and ethical buying, which, in turn, influences the green purchase behaviors of consumers.

Imperative # 8: Adaptability to Changing Times

In spite of the changes in the competitive arena, economic conditions, consumer interests, or market trends, we stay relevant to consumer needs, interests, and tastes. We keep challenging tomorrow by repeatedly asking ourselves the following questions:

- How do we currently think about our brand?
- How does the SEWA Marketing & Branding team currently think about our brand?

- What do we currently say about our brand in marketing communications?
- What do consumers and other stakeholders currently think of us?
- How would we like consumers and other stakeholders to think and feel about our brand?

Imperative # 9: Focused-based leadership

We are focused, passionate, persistent, and optimistic, always looking for a brighter future. We have discipline, persistence, and long-term commitments to our brand. Repetition may be boring, but it builds brands, and brands build value. A future focus is essential, not only in thinking of the market and the brand as it is but also as it could be. A brand is an intangible collection of perceptions, therefore, it is important that the language used is clear and precise.

For example, when people see the McDonald's 'Golden Arches', there can be many different reactions. A small child might jump with delight, whereas a manager of the company may reflect on their career success.

Another great example of focused-based leadership is Huawei. The recent marketing campaign, which was launched early in February 2016 at the international airports of Barcelona and London, is testimony to this focus. One of the pictures used in this campaign was a portrait of a Wagania man fishing in the Congo River. In that photo, it is clear that the fisherman needs to maintain a sharp focus to avoid being swept away himself. That's the power of focus! This reminds me of a well-known saying: Jack of all trades, master of none! This attitude won't take you far.

The Emotional Storytelling

A great result of our branding cycle was SEWA's Emotional Journey. We all know that, in the branding world, an emotional journey or story is a visualization that maps and illustrates a customer's emotional

experience through the experience of interacting with an organization. An anonymous quote rings bells here: “Big brands need to invest now in storytelling and emotional marketing because, in the human brain, particularly in its decision-making capacity in particular, emotion beats reason.”

I am proud to mention here that the brand turnaround of SEWA became the talk of the town. We swarmed all over the social media platforms, we grabbed newspaper headlines, went on air on multiple occasions, and even my mailbox flooded with invitations of being the keynote speaker in global events and international platforms. This was definitely what we were expecting and aimed for. However, best was when event companies started using my name as bait to attract audience and media coverage to their events.

Eye-catching Headlines

As they say, good news travels fast. I say, good news travels faster than light. The SEWA marketing plan turned out to be brilliant and was highly touted in the society. In turn, this resulted in generating eye-catching headlines at the local media. Though we were basking in the glory and enjoying the limelight and media attention, the pressure to pull off consistent successful results with our current marketing plan increased. Clearly, our Vision 2020 had become the talk of the town. Appreciated and endeared by the community at large.





A BALANCED VIEW OF RESULTS

Where I Am Today

By now, SEWA Vision 2020 had become quite popularized. SEWA was brimming with a passion to win, but the truly tangible results were far from real. I secretly wished that SEWA could become a place that would gravitate employees from anywhere on the planet, who would do *meaningful* work and help shape the destiny of the organization. Also, I wanted to quantify results and see whether we were on the right track or not. More had to be done.

Isn't ISO Enough?

June 1st, 2016 was an exciting day. SEWA became certified for four ISO standards at the same time: Quality Management System ISO 9001, Environment Management System ISO 140001, Occupational Health & Safety Management System (OH&S) ISO 180001, and Energy Management System ISO 50001. You may ask why this news is so exclusive and what made it breaking news. Well, this news made headlines because we were the *first* and the only utility in the entire Arab World that met the requirements of ISO 50001 – Energy Management System. And to commemorate this, Mr. Paul Fox, the UK Consular General of

the UAE, came down to present us with the certificates. I swelled with pride because we did it in under a year—a record time. Becoming the first utility in the Arab world to have Energy Management certification is no joke! I thought I had cracked the secret behind SEWA’s success.

My oft-quoted quote had come to life: “A leader doesn’t build a business, a leader builds an organization that builds a business.” Things were getting rosier, but there weren’t any remarkable results. My central question was, *Isn’t ISO enough?* I questioned myself and found that the question was my answer. Despite my best intentions to translate the vision into simple, actionable steps, and build tomorrow today, my managers found it difficult to focus their efforts far beyond business-as-usual thinking. SEWA had a clearly defined mission: “To be the region’s best utility organization by offering affordable, reliable, and accessible energy and water, and providing a world-class service so that we satisfy every customer at every touchpoint.” We had initiated many of the popular improvement programs: total quality management, managing by objectives, and process reengineering. But these efforts had not been effective; every time we promoted a new program, people in each division would sit back and ask, “How is that supposed to fit in with the six other things we’re supposed to be doing?”

I wanted to understand what had to be done differently to achieve dramatic improvements in overall organizational effectiveness. Now was the time to *focus-test* my strategy. This very thought took me back to the Sharjah Charity International days, my first voluntary non-government assignment as a Director General.

Back-to-the-Past-Strategy

Almost two decades ago, I decided to introduce the Balanced Scorecard system in Sharjah Charity International. Back then, this was a *novel* idea; however, over the past 20 years, the Balanced Scorecard has emerged as a leading tool for achieving strategic alignment and successful strategy execution. It is now used in nearly 50% of large organizations throughout

North America and Europe, in addition to roughly 500 companies in the Arabian Gulf countries. The Balanced Scorecard is increasingly being adopted throughout the rest of the world and has enabled organizations to implement strategy reliably and rapidly with sustainable results by creating strategy-focused organizations. A recent global study by Bain & Co. listed the balanced scorecard in fifth place in a review of the most widely-used management tools around the world, which also included closely-related strategic planning tools and frameworks. The balanced scorecard translates mission and vision statements into a comprehensive set of objectives and performance measures that can be quantified and appraised. The balanced scorecard has also been selected by the editors of Harvard Business Review as one of the most influential business ideas of the past 75 years.

Below are two classic examples of a balanced scorecard doing wonders for the global organizations. I have extracted two case studies from my collection of white papers related to balanced scorecard implementation. Apple was selected for their implementation of BSC for the long-term perspective and VW used BSC to help them bring about a turnaround in the organization.

Apple Needed BSC to Adjust Long-Term Performance

Apple Computers developed a balanced scorecard to focus senior management on a strategy that would expand discussions beyond gross margin, return on equity, and market share. A small steering committee, which was intimately familiar with the deliberations and strategic thinking of Apple's Executive Management Team, focused on measurement categories within each of the four perspectives and to select multiple measurements within each category. For the financial perspective, Apple emphasized shareholder value; for the customer perspective, market share and customer satisfaction; for the internal process perspective, core competencies; and, finally, for the innovation and improvement perspective, employee attitudes.

Volkswagen needed BSC to accomplish a turnaround

A new management team at VW Brazil developed and deployed a strategy map and balanced scorecard to accomplish a turnaround and cultural change after eight consecutive years of financial losses and market share declines. The team used the strategy map to align financial and project resources to the strategy and to motivate its more than 20,000 employees by communicating the strategy in multiple ways and installing reward and recognition programs. It also established new programs to align the extensive networks of suppliers and dealers to the strategy.

Why did SEWA need BSC?

SEWA Vision 2020 was time-bound. We had a well-articulated strategic vision, and now was the time for proficient strategy implementation. SEWA's vision should get translated into clearer objectives and further permeate down to daily actions. Owing to my earlier experience, I was heavily leaned on to start using a management tool—the one that popped up in my mind was a proven global tool—the Balanced Scorecard (BSC).

The balanced scorecard is a strategy performance management tool that is globally used by mega-corps to align employees' day-to-day work with organization strategy, and by measuring and monitoring progress towards strategic targets. We began building a vision-driven balanced scorecard.

Let me briefly describe this management tool for you and show you how it enabled me to strategize my thinking to use it as an important strategy tool for my turnaround branding strategy.

What is the Balanced Scorecard all about?

Let me describe briefly what the BSC is all about: *A Balanced Scorecard* is an integrated set of performance measures that gives top managers a fast *but* comprehensive view of the business. Further, this framework

focuses on shareholders and customers, as well as the internal and organizational learning requirements of a business, which creates a system of linked objectives, measures, targets, and projects, which *collectively* describe the strategy of an organization and how that strategy can be achieved. It also provides a framework that not only provides performance measurements but helps planners identify what should be done and measured and enables executives to truly execute their strategies.

Why Now?

I wanted to link SEWA's long-term strategy—Vision 2020—with its short-term actions and transform SEWA's vision from an attractive document into the marching orders for the organization on a daily basis. A balanced scorecard was the clear-cut framework that would not only provide performance measurements but also help me and my managers identify what should be done and measured. I knew this would enable me to truly execute my strategies. What more did I need?

Moreover, the need of the hour was to empower and motivate SEWA personnel to work for *mutual* goals by allowing them to examine first-hand the organization's vision, strategy, financial, and operational targets at any time. The scorecard would enable employees at all levels of SEWA to identify their individual responsibilities and targets to facilitate understanding strategy in an everyday operational sense.

At that critical time, I felt this legendary management tool would be a **MUST** for us in the way of achieving:

- Have a balanced view of business performance from a Customer Satisfaction Culture to Business Results Awareness.
- Ensure SEWA benefits from uniting the entire organization around an integrated system that sets goals that allow SEWA to get ahead of its competition, measure the progress made, and reward and motivate everybody involved.

- Improve decision making and problem-solving process.
- Keep SEWA looking and moving forward instead of backward.
- Deliver value to our shareholder (the Government of Sharjah) and other stakeholders.

You may be asking yourself: how does the Balanced Scorecard work?

Well, the answer is that this tool provides managers with a more balanced view and a more comprehensive view with an equal emphasis on outcome measures (*the financial measures*), which tell us how well the company is doing now (*current indicators*), as well as how it might do in the future (*leading indicators*).

My hope was that BSC would help SEWA to focus on four main areas: Financial, customer, internal business process, and learning and growth. The four perspectives are illustrated in the diagram below:

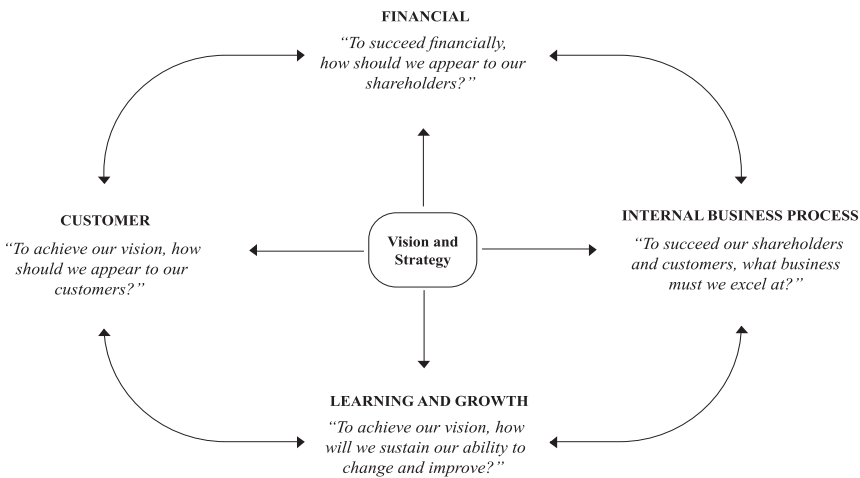


Figure 5.1 The Balanced Scorecard

Moreover, the balanced scorecard provides answers to the four basic questions stated below:

1. To achieve our vision how should we appear to our customers?
(Customer perspective)
2. To succeed our shareholders and customers, what business must we excel in? (Internal perspective)
3. To achieve our vision, how will we sustain our ability to change and improve? (Innovation and learning perspective)
4. To succeed financially, how should we appear to our shareholders?
(Financial perspective)

I was positive about implementing the BSC because the scorecard would allow SEWA to track financial results while monitoring progress in terms of building the capabilities it needed for growth. This was exactly the need of the hour. In fact, I thought that the BSC had evolved considerably since the time Kaplan and Norton first introduced the concept back in 1992. So, why not go a step further and tweak it a bit to optimize its outcome.

And so I did. Not surprisingly, I discovered the scorecard's value as the cornerstone of a new strategic management system. In addition, I found out that the balanced scorecard can address a serious deficiency in SEWA's traditional management systems: the inability to link SEWA's long-term strategy with its short-term financial goals. And that was the immediate need of the hour. SEWA Vision 2020 was in place. The marketing and branding around it was in full swing. But as they say time flies!

The Vision 2020 had to be linked with the Beyond 2020 vision. The rest of the chapter explains how BSC worked for us. Though there were definite setbacks, bottlenecks, and fumbles, whatever you call them, we still managed to iron out the wrinkles that came our way.



It's Both a Management and Measurement System

The balanced scorecard is a management system (not only a measurement) that enables organizations to clarify their vision and strategy and translate them into action. It provides feedback around both the internal business processes and external outcomes in order to continuously improve strategic performance and results.

Developing a Corporate-level Balanced Scorecard

In the following paragraphs, I will share my insights, experiences, and ideas on this comprehensive management approach, as well as provide knowledge as to how we implemented a corporate-level BSC smoothly and efficiently in SEWA to close the breach between strategy formulation and execution. In so doing, I will focus on the *practical* rather than the *theoretical* approach to the balanced scorecard's implementation process in SEWA.

My aim is to describe and explain how SEWA has managed to achieve a phenomenal track record by implementing the balanced scorecard. In light of SEWA's achievements, so that you can replicate the successes and avoid the missteps which were a part of our success story.

My story with BSC is one of my greatest success stories during my brand turnaround journey. A story of passion and commitment, I'll let the facts speak for themselves.

Read on!

What You Measure Is What You Get

The journey started with a knotty question: "Why is there such a persistent gap between ambition and performance?" *It doesn't have to be like this*, I reconciled myself. A part of the problem was that activities were carried out largely in isolation. This partition of responsibilities resulted in a gulf between SEWA's strategy and its employees.

Moreover, I was wholly dissatisfied with SEWA's monthly performance report, which was generated by the finance and accounts department, because it *only* looked at the financial perspective by asking questions, such as: How much money does SEWA need to make to survive? How much cash did we have to pay our suppliers and bankers?

To a certain extent, they were right. Our financial position was critical. Cash flow and timely and accurate funding data, etc., were the critical bottom-line kind of results that SEWA must deliver to *survive* in today's fast-changing, high-pressure, socially-driven environment.

Cash, Cash, Cash

Cash is king. But I still wanted to see other *non-financial* perspectives that would reinforce and drive SEWA's strategy forward, such as customer satisfaction, employee morale, internal learning and growth, speed, efficiency, and innovation. We needed a whole new approach—and we needed it fast. Very fast!

In short, measures of success needed to go beyond the traditional financial results. I needed a new way of thinking that draws upon logic, imagination, intuition, and systematic reasoning to explore the possibilities of what could be and to create desired outcome that benefits the customer.



Dealing with Demands

Almost everyone complains about not having enough time to deal with all the demands placed on them. I was one of them. While drafting up paragraphs, I would be simultaneously grappling with a number of difficult situations. On one hand, His Highness was expecting me to work wonders overnight and transform SEWA to meet his expectations; on the other hand, the customers wanted me to magic up the most

convenient and customer-centric experience for them. I also couldn't forget my internal customers—my employees—who presented another world of challenges, moral satisfaction, engagement, and so on. Though I had found myself caught in this trap, as I always say, there are no magic bullets, instant cures, or easy shortcuts to success. So, I knew I had to carefully set boundaries and priorities to achieve more.

Turn To Almighty

A well-known anonymous quote states, “Just because you don't see a way doesn't mean God doesn't have a way.” In turbulent times, I derive strength from this statement. During this time, these positive words came to my rescue and infused a degree of sanity in my current state of affairs. I braced myself for anything *unknown* that would come my way and would keep reminding myself of, “You'll Never Walk Alone,” the show tune from the 1945 Rodgers and Hammerstein musical *Carousel*. Humming this tune in my mind gave me a sense of comfort and solace and led me to create a movement for BSC.

Start a Movement

I once had a business idea that became the basis for a movement. Ultimately, it created that ripple effect. I started small by sharing my idea. I first showed people how it worked, and then, the key was to find the first followers. One of the most exciting examples was the SEWA Vision 2020 roadmap. I shared the idea with my marketing team and convinced them to believe in me by showing them how the strategy would roll out. Voila! Soon they became my first followers.

Movements generally start with one audacious leader taking a risk, experimenting with something, and showing its effect. Then, it's all about finding those first followers. This creates an infectious wave of energy that spreads like wildfire.

Where to start?

To rise to the challenge, I chased myself to answer the *when- where-how-why* kind of questions that occupied my *laborious* mind. At this critical stage of the brand turnaround, the right moment arrived, which instilled both self-confidence and a sense of direction with a go-getter mindset. As eager as a sprinter on the starting line, I decided to call my financial controller into my office to discuss my strategic decision on using BSC.

The Big Day Arrived

“I’ve got to ask you some questions,” I said.

“With pleasure, sir, go ahead,” He answered with a smile.

“Look. Do you think that cash flow is the only leading factor we can use to measure our success at SEWA?”

He shook his head and said, “Tough question, sir, I don’t know. We are at a critical moment. We need money to survive—a lot of money. We are surviving on razor-thin margins.”

Moments of silence then prevailed.

Let me bring some clarity to the question with some more questions. Bear with me. “I know business is a game and making money is central to winning that game. I know we are doing our best to keep our heads above water.” I looked into his eyes and continued. “I don’t disregard the traditional need for financial data, mainly the balance sheet. The big question is this: Is this enough?” I asked.

“Probably not.” He then paused in thought before asking, “What are you up to, sir?”

“Well, your current emphasis on financial issues leads to an unbalanced situation with regard to other perspectives, such as customer

satisfaction, innovation, etc. I really want to develop meaningful performance measures, especially outcome measures that help align people with the results that matter. A rigorous and proven tool that I have used before, which helps to build organizational transformation and change management into our planning process, is the balanced scorecard.” After an expectedly long pause, he then asked.

“The Balanced Scorecard! What is that? Oh my God, another project,” He exclaimed.

I paused before explaining:

“The balanced scorecard is a management and measurement tool, it has been in the business news for so many years. The tool permits managers to see their company more clearly—from many perspectives—and hence, to make wiser decisions for the long-term. In short, the balanced scorecard is for leaders and managers who understand that they need more than financial measures alone to find the true drivers of success and strategize their resources.”

“Sir, it is going to be a tremendous challenge for everyone in here. Don’t you agree?”

“Yes, indeed. I do agree with you. This is a new and challenging project. We need to work together to make it a success story.”

“Sir, how about our 15 guiding principles—the SEWA Way, aren’t they enough?”

I took a deep breath and said, “In short, our 15 guiding principles are our lighthouse in navigating through these turbulent times and creating a built-to-last business. Plus, the principles contain the KPIs and KSFs, which are part of BSC; yet, I was looking for a system to link our business strategy to concrete qualitative and quantitative performance measures in order to deliver peak performance at all times, and navigate towards a more successful future.” I clarified.

“I believe in you because this tool has been ‘tried, tested, and trusted’ by you. This very thing endows us with a level of comfort and confidence, which thereby assures us that you won’t let us down in this endeavor. God has so much in store for you,” he said confidently.

“Are you with me on this challenging project?” I asked.

He nodded in support and gave me a confirming smile. “You bet I am. I appreciate your talking to me, Sir.”

“Thanks. That’s exactly what I was hoping you’d say.” I continued.

“I’ll do whatever I can to help you implement this project successfully. I promise I will be an active team player in this project. He replied enthusiastically.

I looked over to him and said, “This is going to be a cool project.” He smiled and affirmed, “Yes, cool.”

He walked out of the office. I was pumped up because I wasn’t expecting the meeting with my financial controller to be that smooth. My hopes were high.

The next few hours disappeared quickly. I still didn’t have a written strategy map or a master plan—only a mental map. What a challenge that was!

The truth was that we needed to come up with a master plan immediately. To do this, we needed commitment and long working hours and a little bit of luck. The commitment and long hours we supplied. Luck had come our way... How?

Making it Official

There is no doubt that overhauling the organization’s measurement management system would not be an easy task. I wanted to hear the feedback from as many employees as I could. After conducting research,

I found that most employees were either suspicious or they didn't like the idea. The perception among employees was fast becoming negative as individuals wondered, "Is this change beneficial to me? Do I really trust that the leadership did adequate research on the implications of BSC, or was it an impulsive decision?"

As anticipated, there was an *uproar* from the majority of employees. Resentment, friction, and annoyance everywhere. I realized the underlying problem here was a lack of proper communication management. Without clearly communicating the benefits of the BSC, there is little hope that I would succeed in getting immediate acceptance or broad support.

Sharing the News

My central question was, *how can I get people moving?* Resistance to change is normal, and my role is to help coach employees through the process. I subsequently rolled out a mass email containing an executive summary of BSC, which communicated to the whole organization that SEWA would henceforth use the BSC and its philosophy to manage the business.

A Conversation Starter

I was able to give the employees something to talk about. Do you remember Bonnie Raitt's song, "Let's give 'em something to talk about?" I ignited interest in them.

The email also explained why we needed it at this critical time. I had to list as many reasons as I could as to why BSC needed to be a part of my branding turnaround journey. Here's why:

1. The BSC gives managers a way of ensuring that all levels of the organization understand the long-term strategy, and that both departmental and individual objectives are aligned with it.

2. The BSC translates a company's vision and strategy into reality by enabling its management to track key financial and non-financial performance measures.
3. The BSC minimizes information overload by limiting the number of measures used.
4. The BSC cascaded and communicated down throughout the organization so each and every employee knows exactly what they need to contribute to achieving our objectives.
5. The BSC aids organizations to concentrate on all the performance objectives that are critical to the attainment of its business strategy.
6. The BSC had been identified by Harvard Business Review as one of the seminal ideas of the past seventy-five years because it is a comprehensive system for strategic performance management.
7. The BSC popularity has increased in the business world – the framework has been embraced by a global community of enthusiastic proponents.
8. The BSC drives the organization to achieve its strategic goals.

So what happened? The email had given a level of comfort to some employees; yet, the majority of employees were still rather circumspect, though very few were totally against the idea.

Change-friendly leadership

Change cannot be achieved through an email, slogan, or announcement. Effective change requires the active and mindful participation of the people affected by the change. Experience taught me that humanness, approachability, and friendliness are necessary elements of making change successful.

I knew that building on our timeless principles, cultural core values,

and effectively engaging employees' hearts, heads, and hope would enable me to create lasting change in our organization.

I must accommodate employees' feelings—feelings that involve trust, confidence, and passion. Leading in an environment of change and transition is undoubtedly a challenge. Employees are unsure about the future, and because they feel insecure, they need comfort and confident direction, not a fire-fighting officer.

Passion to Win

For these reasons, I believe that the balanced scorecard has its place and plays an important role in our brand image building.

My point was loud and clear. I wanted to face the reality (SEWA Principle # 9) and create a culture of continuous improvement (SEWA Principle # 13) that could be met by working together (SEWA Principle # 15).

Then, a small group of employees remained who were clueless about BSC. I felt sandwiched!

In the midst of this challenge, and while I was thinking about where to start and what changes to implement, I remembered my late father's statement: "Rashid makes an immediate impression on you. He is good at speculating where his business is heading, proficient at judging long-term trends, and is highly change-oriented. He also gets along with his employees and is always out there working with them. He is brilliant at creating a climate of innovation where people can invent and be innovative, have fun, and excel at whatever they do." I remembered this inspirational statement at the right moment. My father's statement inspired me to face the challenge. I had to think long and hard. In fact, this was a *watershed* moment for me.

The Tough Decision

I needed to take a tough decision. It was my time to implement the seventh principle of The SEWA Way (i.e., "Make tough decisions.") So,

what did I do? I did what Theodore Roosevelt believed in, “Do what you can with what you have and where you are.” And I added to that: “Never wait.”

A couple of weeks later, I made the decision to take the initiative and become a *leading edge leader* to improve our work to achieve breakthrough performance, thus becoming one of the leading authentic organizations in the Middle East, which sustains the capacity to change, improve, and be able to take risks and do innovative things. But which priorities should be my first—generating cash flow, improving system efficiency, or delighting customers?

Seeking the Answer

As they say, “Managers are people who do things right while leaders are people who do the right things.” I did indeed concentrate on these tasks. For days and nights I worked hard to address the four questions that cutting-edge leaders ask to assess their performance:

1. Where is the business going?
2. How do we get there?
3. What do we need to do well?
4. How do we measure how well we are doing?

Asking these *right* questions is a great place to start. One of my first priorities was to have the right answer for these questions. I needed more than just financial data to monitor the business to lead the organization towards its strategic objectives. It is not enough, either, to have discussions on where our business should be heading—we needed more than that—we needed a *balanced* view of business performance from a “Customer Satisfaction Culture” to “Business Results Awareness”. Further, we needed to align both the customer journey and the organization journey.

Starting a Process of Change

I can't tell you exactly when I decided to implement BSC, nor do I remember a formal announcement day. However, I do know that it was a difficult decision for me. I was convinced by Stewart D. Friedman findings from his research on "the total leadership process." The process rests on three principles:

- Be real: Act with authenticity by clarifying what's important.
- Be whole: Act with integrity by respecting the whole person.
- Be innovative: Act with creativity by experimenting with how things get done.

Challenges!

I always believe that "success is to be measured not so much by the position that one has reached in life, as by the obstacles which he has overcome while trying to succeed."

Although the balanced scorecard concept is well known and appears deceptively simple, as I mentioned earlier, I initially found it difficult to design and implement in SEWA due to the following challenges and management barriers:

1) The Vision Barrier

- The vision not being shared by everyone in SEWA as it was a vision shared, not a shared vision. Actually, they never had a written one, which resulted in a lack of strategic direction.
- Business objectives were built around financial targets and goals that bore little relation to a long-term strategic vision.

2) The Strategy Barrier

- Strategy was another challenge because it only concerned the employees at the top of the SEWA hierarchy and was never shared

with the rest of the organization; it was kept a top secret. That is why it was not properly understood by those who were responsible for implementing it.

- Management systems were designed for operational control and very little time was spent on strategy.
- Personal goals and objectives, incentives, and competencies were not linked to strategy.
- The worst was that they didn't have a complete or integrated strategy

3) The Operational Barrier

- The budgeting process was separated from strategic planning.
- Lack of “like-minded” and highly-skilled people.
- Big debts of over \$ 4 billion.
- Lack of financial resources.
- Manual collection of data.
- Budget numbers mismatched.

4) HR Barrier

I can summarize this barrier in two words: *overstaffed* and *under-skilled*.

• • • •

I have a dream!

I always loved the following quote:

“The Winner Never Quits – and
The Quitter Never Wins!”

“I’m a Dreamer. Now I Close My Eyes and I’m Dreaming Right Where I Belong,” is the title of Janice Robinson’s song from 1994/1995. The title couldn’t be truer for any of today’s organizational leaders. Think about it: As a leader, there is a time when you have a clear vision, a dream. But as time progresses, perhaps you have met defeat, been discouraged, been criticized. Perhaps you have given up your desire, or your determination to dream. Don’t let it happen to you. I would encourage you to rejoin the ranks of the daring dreamers. Because I’ve been one such daring dreamer.

I’ve put my mind, my heart, and my gut into that journey every day over the last couple of years or more. I’ve also been lucky enough to be a part of SEWA Brand Turnaround. It’s my success story.

Victor Hugo’s famous quote, “He who every morning plans the transaction of the day, follows out that plan, carries a thread that will guide him through the maze of the most busy life. But where no plan is laid, where the disposal of time is surrendered merely to chance of incidence, chaos will soon reign.” This timeless piece of business philosophy has helped me succeed in numerous workplace activities, including BSC. Therefore, I started asking myself how we could best design, integrate, and communicate the balanced scorecard at SEWA. How to start? Where to start? How to overcome the obstacles? How to get my top management buy-in? How do we achieve real alignment to measure goals and strategies? How to make SEWA a strategy-focused organization that achieves breakthrough performance?

I often stayed awake at nights thinking of how to benefit from this highly effective organizational measurement tool and achieve sustainable productivity and performance improvement to cope with the fast-changing business environment. Answering these questions was paramount to the development of a balanced scorecard for our organization—but how?

The Leading Role

As Harvey Mackay says, “A goal is just a dream with a deadline.” It’s about leadership. Leadership is about change and making things happen.

Leaders make dreams come true. They challenge the time, the place, and themselves. As you know, visionary leaders follow an inner sense of direction and lead from the inside out, as exemplified by Mahatma Gandhi, who once said, “I must first be the change I want to see in my world.” Thus, leadership is the key to success and concerns much more than giving orders or being in charge. Be a visionary strategic thinker, believe passionately in what you do and act like a professional aiming for true excellence.

To lead is to influence, and to influence is to change people’s internal worlds. It is about taking people from where they are now to where they need to be. The best visionaries who are successful base their leadership on an inspirational, positive picture of the future, as well as a clear sense of direction as to how to get there. If you really want to change people’s behavior significantly and involve them at the deepest level, you need to change people’s picture of their roles and goals. Bearing this in mind, give meaning to your plans and inspire them to be better than they already are and help them identify with what Lincoln called “the angels of their better nature.”

After all, you can’t do something new and exciting if you force yourself to stay in the same old rut. Or, as Edward De Bono observed in *New Think*, “You cannot dig a hole in a different place by digging the same hole deeper.” Don’t just work harder at the same old thing. Make a change. Everything changes so fast today that the key factor has not become what you’ve learned, but how fast you can learn something new. In short, be a change-friendly leader.

Change-Friendly Leadership Model

The above paragraph was dedicated to the benefits of change; i.e., the benefits of *making* the change and *being* the change. One fine evening, lying on my bed, I pondered how to initiate the change in SEWA. In so doing, I started to question my own thoughts. “What on earth possessed me to launch into this wildly ambitious project of SEWA’s turnaround on my first day on the job?” Sometimes the conviction is

born of a conversation. My thoughts went to my collection of *Sound-view Executive Book Summaries*. Maybe I'll find my answer there, I comforted myself.

I have an annual subscription with them and I am entitled to receive professional summaries of all the latest business books by renowned authors. Though I love reading books, the summaries are a great time-saver too.

The conviction and commitment to bring that change made me get up of my bed and run towards my bookshelf. Co-incidentally, I chanced upon the summary of a book titled, *Change-Friendly leadership* by Dr. Rodger Dean Duncan. I opened the package and took out the CD since I always prefer listening to the CD first. Pressing play, I then sat with my *Gahwa* (Arabic coffee). The book taught me many great lessons and shed some light on managing change in an organization.

The Model

The author shared an interesting model called “The change-friendly leadership model,” which comprises **Four Ts: Think-Friendly, Talk-Friendly, Trust-Friendly, and Team-Friendly**. I have illustrated the essentials in my words here.

- **Think Friendly:** This is about seeing the world through a fresh lens. You may call it “Sound Thinking,” which raises the right questions and elicits reasonable answers. The think-friendly protocol calls for adapting the FIND-IT approach, which stands for **F**ocus, **I**nquire, **N**otice, **D**iscern, **I**ntegrate, and **T**ranslate. To illustrate, this model requires us to **f**ocus on a situation, respectfully **i**nquire about the situation for the purpose of discovering new possibilities, mindfully **n**otice the details of the situation, carefully **d**iscern what’s going on in the situation by distinguishing between facts and assumptions, **i**ntegrate what we have noticed and discerned, and finally, **t**ranslate it all in a way that leads us to productive outcomes.

- **Talk-Friendly:** This requires honesty and clarity, which means putting your best voice forward and having a true dialogue. Talk-friendly leaders understand the difference between implicit and explicit conversation. They strike a true balance between implicit (unspoken but essential) and explicit (clean-cut and obvious) communication.
- **Trust-Friendly:** This protocol requires building built-to-last trust. In turn, change-friendly leaders are able to get things done faster and at a lower cost. Mutual purpose and mutual respect culminates in mutual trust. A change-friendly leader should steer clear of brow-beating his people from doing things his way and move away from a command-and-control approach to one of collaboration.
- **Team-Friendly:** Magic happens when we put both the team and the work into teamwork. The right environment is crucial to bringing out effective teamwork. The change-friendly leader has to ensure that the team is a *real* team—not just a team in name only—with a compelling purpose, and individually and collectively open to skillful coaching on teamwork issues.

Self-Affirmation

The above thoughts gave me the motivation to move on to the next steps. Now, I needed to answer the question: “How to get there from here?” As I needed to attract positive, vibrant thoughts, I decided to practice self-affirmation. But does this practice really work? Self-affirmations were first popularized in the 1920s, and, since that time, coaches and self-help gurus have sung their praises around the world. Research by Carnegie Mellon reveals that self-affirmations can protect against the damaging effects of stress on problem-solving performance.

Personally, I feel that self-affirmation works wonders. I have practiced it before in various crossroads of life, and it has reaped enormous benefits. Initially, it may seem a bit zany to play with your conscious mind, but with time, it gets easier to create a *mental* picture of your thoughts.

Self-affirmation helped me to restructure the dynamics of my brain so that I truly began to think that nothing is impossible. I verbally affirmed myself by saying, “Yes, I can do it.” This rewired my brain and pushed me to form new clusters of positive thoughts. As I always say, “Delivering more for less is, without question, going to be the mantra for most of the industries in the coming five years—and perhaps beyond. The more savings we make through innovative ideas, creative solutions, and collaborative procurement, the greater resources we will have.”

Thought-Speech-Action

I was following the sequence of thought-speech-action. The upbeat thoughts inspired me to positive self-talk. Now was the time for action. So, to turn my positive thoughts and speech into reality, I needed change makers and change agents who could streamline my thinking process and fit into the bigger picture. I said to myself, *How can I transform my good intentions into great performance?* The answer lay in my beloved philosophy, which dictates:

The right thoughts plus the right people,

In the right environment at the right time for the right reason, serving the right customers, gets the right results.

Baby-Steps

I was so confident. Things were in my favor and were clear enough to go ahead. Yet, I held myself back from taking any quick decisions as I wanted to slow down and take baby-steps. I didn’t want my emotions to lead my decisions at this critical stage, and neither did I want to be a one-man-army, thereupon I decided to congregate a *can-do* team. At this point, you may be asking yourself, *how was this team different from other teams in SEWA?*

Creating the Can-do team

The way a team works as a whole determines its success. You may have the greatest bunch of individual stars, but if they don't work together, they will fail. A phenomenal team is made up of best of the best. To be honest, finding my personal supergroup of rock stars wasn't too tedious. To build a powerful tribe, I needed to align the team closely around a common goal. Therefore, I needed leaders who could drive the culture, core operations, and customer experiences, and unleash the full potential of our brand. My nine champions, whom you met in the first chapter, helped me out to assemble this effective and energized team.

I simply needed to find the teammates who were ready to try to do things differently. Since I needed the top seniors to work with me to run SEWA, in October 2014, I created a leadership team, which was renamed overnight as "The can-do team," which comprised seven members, including myself.

To move forward in our objectives, I asked my new team five fundamental five questions:

1. Why do we exist? (Purpose)
2. What are we trying to achieve? (Goals)
3. How are we going to achieve? (Plans)
4. How can I contribute? (Roles and responsibilities)
5. What's in it for me? (Rewards)

I wanted to engage the team with hope, pride, and give them a higher purpose than just living a "pay-cheque to pay-cheque days" life. Moreover, I wanted to build a team where employees have the trust and confidence to ask for forgiveness if things go wrong, not for permission before they do anything. I wanted to capture their hearts and minds and mobilize them to work. My journey to mobilize my team began.

How? I deeply believe that inspiration is a leader's biggest weapon; therefore, I ensured that I inspired my can-do teams' hearts, heads, and know-how, which I will explain in greater depth in the following paragraphs.

Heart: An inspiring vision

I reminded them of our aspiring Vision 2020 and beyond. I painted an image of how satisfying it would feel to do as remarkably good as we did during our "passion to win" days. I again reminded my team that they were creating history and making a difference to society. By doing this, I ensured that my story-telling was both inspiring and attainable.

Head: Rational/believable evidence

I knew there would be naysayers, to which some may disagree. To counter them and to ensure that they also signed up, I gathered a credible body of evidence demonstrating that implementing a fool-proof BSC was achievable and attainable.

How-to: Personal relevance for my team

I made sure my story answered a number of prevalent questions on the collective mind of my team: "What's in it for me?" "How does this affect me?" and "What do I need to do?" I showed the team how to be successful in the implementation of the project and invited them to act by telling them, "I need your ideas and views for how to make the best and the most successful BSC implementation ever in SEWA's history."

Eliminate Barriers to Achievement

So, indeed our strategies *cannot* work without overcoming the four barriers: vision, strategy, operations, and HR by introducing six guiding rules.

1. The commitment of the people putting them into practice.
2. Involving everyone associated with the organization.
3. Continuously evaluating and improving everything we do.
4. Preventing problems, not waiting for them to occur.
5. Being proactive, not reactive.
6. Starting by doing things differently rather than doing existing things better.

Possibility Room

To eliminate and overcome the above-mentioned barriers, I assembled the team in our “possibility room” and ran them through quick talks and discussions. In this room, we go beyond the low hanging fruit that SEWA has already identified by starting at the grassroots level. Most suitably, we discuss the 10 fundamental truths about leadership, to which the reader may probe, “What does a BSC execution have to do with leadership truths?” What may sound counterintuitive at first makes lots of sense when you take a second look. The truths are revealed below:

The 10 Fundamental Truths

I believe in this enlightening proverb: “in teaching others, we teach ourselves.” Hence, I handpicked the star employees and shared leadership experts James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner’s *The 10 fundamental truths about leadership* which also happen to be the tenets of effective leadership. I have summarized them below:

Truth # 1: You make a difference

Before you can lead others, you have to lead yourself and believe that you have a positive impact on others. Leadership begins when you believe you can make a difference.

Truth # 2: Credibility is the foundation of leadership

Leadership begins with you and your belief in yourself. Leadership continues only if other people also believe in you. Only credible leaders earn commitment, and only commitment builds and regenerates great organizations and communities.

Truth # 3: Values drive commitment

Your ultimate success in business and in life depends on how well you know yourself, what you value, and why you value it. A clear set of personal values and beliefs is a critical controller in that guidance system.

Truth # 4: Focusing on the future sets leaders apart

You should know where you're going and have a sense of direction. You have to be forward-looking and should develop the capacity to envision the future, which requires you to spend more time in the future.

Truth # 5: You can't do it alone

Leaders alone don't make anything great; rather, leadership is a shared responsibility. You need others and they need you. To build and sustain that sense of oneness, exemplary leaders are sensitive to the needs of others. They ask questions and they listen. Further, they provide support, develop skills, and enable others to be even better than they already are.

Truth # 6: Trust rules

Trust rules your ability to get things done and rules your team's cohesiveness, as well as your organization's innovativeness and performance. Further, trust rules your brand image, and moreover, just about everything you do.

Truth # 7: Challenge is the crucible for greatness

Sometimes leaders have to shake things up, while other times they just

have to grab hold of the adversity that surrounds them. Whether a challenge comes from outside or the inside, leaders make things happen. Leadership and challenge are simply inseparable.

Truth # 8: You either lead by example or you don't lead at all

People believe what you do over what you say. As journalist and author Alan Deutschman writes in his book *Walk the Talk*, "Leaders have only two tools at their disposal: what they say and how they act. What they say might be interesting, but how they act is always crucial."

Truth # 9: The best leaders are best learners

We have to have a passion for learning in order to become the best leaders we can be. Not only do we have to be able to learn, but we have to learn *how* to learn. This alone is what makes us first-rate learners.

Truth # 10: Leadership is an affair of the heart

Leaders put their hearts in businesses and their businesses in their hearts. They show they care by paying attention to people, sharing success stories, and making people feel important and special.

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Explain the Game

When I announced my *can-do* team members, I made a rather loud statement that there were going to be major changes in the managerial culture of our business. I had made the decision to implement BSC, and now I had to make that decision pay off. I remember writing a business equation on the billboard which was very well received by the employees and is stated below:

Change + employees involvement and commitment + good execution = Continuous improvement + business excellence + profit

You see, successful implementation of the BSC provides a thought-provoking challenge to any management. So often I was asked by senior management: How can we keep going and never give up halfway through the project? How can we make the scorecard work effectively in practice? Most of them knew “why”, at least in general terms, but they did not know “how”. My time was now filled with meetings with my direct reports, and I knew I had to have all these people thinking as one cohesive unit. If I could not do that, my entire strategy for turning around SEWA would fail. Therefore, I kept challenging our team by asking them some very simple questions:

- What makes an organization successful?
- What does a customer consider as ‘value’?
- Why not change the way we work?
- Why do we work the way we do?

Being a story-teller and knowing the power of successful stories, I wanted to tell the team some of my successful BSC stories. At the same time, we encouraged SEWA HR to start with crash courses of tools and techniques to help shape and refine the team.

In addition, I always reminded my team that this was no overnight thing or a quick fix. I told them that this was like keeping a campfire going—left on its own, it would die down. So, someone has to keep adding wood and twigs, while others need to fan the flames to ensure it stays bright. Strong, involved, effective, and strategy driven, this team has been an important contributor to our success. Yet, we wanted to reach our goal as early as possible.

Avoiding the Pitfalls

Fast? Yes. Furious? Not at all. In the raging excitement, it seemed logical that, to succeed, we had to consider the pitfalls. Years of

research have shown that around 70% of scorecard implementations fail to deliver their objectives! In fact, most attempts to implement scorecards fall-flat, and even those organizations spearheaded by leaders with good intentions fail miserably. Why? The answer will completely change your view. Did you know that the most common causes of BSC implementation failures are poor organizational processes, not poor scorecard design? This disconnect between the organizational processes and BSC design spells trouble. So, what does it take to bridge this exceptionally wide gap?

Years ago, I happened to read Robert Kaplan and David Norton's *The Strategy-Focused Organization*. The book was the result of extensive research and study. Considerable in size, the book calls for the reader's undeterred attention and elaborately defines the major pitfalls to be avoided while implementing a BSC.

A Feedforward Meeting

I wanted my team to be cautionary about the pitfalls and steer away from any traps. Hence, I called for a feedforward meeting. A feedforward meeting is a management term mostly used in coaching sessions. These meetings involve giving information to forward someone to the next level. I conducted a feedforward meeting to inform my team of the future pitfalls to avoid and provide them with possible actions to move ahead in achieving the SEWA BSC objectives and/or improving future performance.

I invited the team into my small executive huddle room. The room has a round table with no chairs around, and clear, glass walls overseeing the coastline of the Sharjah city creek. There is a smartboard with an advanced video conferencing system installed in the room; hence, I usually use the room for quick and serious meetings. The team understood that the topic of discussion would be grim, which explained why most of them carried their mugs of black coffee to perk them up.

Right at the beginning of the meeting, I stated, “We need to play safe. SEWA BSC is foolproof, however, price-mark the most common snags that can entrap you. Keep an eye out for them, unless they engulf you like quicksand.”

Even before waiting for their reaction, I picked up the smart board stylo and wrote the following bullet points on it.

1. Lack of Senior Management Commitment

This tops the chart. The senior executive team needs to have real “skin in the game.” No commitment means no involvement, and ultimately, no success.

2. Too Few Individuals Involved

Of course, trying to build a scorecard with too many people can also prove fatal. The intensive interactions suggest that group sizes be kept to a number at which active discussion from all participants can occur and achieving consensus is a realistic goal.

3. Keeping the Scorecard at the Top

The opposite error of not involving the senior executive team is to involve only the senior executives’ team. For the scorecard to be effective, it must eventually be shared with everyone in the organization.

4. Too Long a Development Process; Treating the Balanced Scorecard as Onetime Event

Some failures have occurred when a project team allows the “best to be the enemy of the good”. The team, believing in the “big-bang” theory of organizational change, feels it has only one chance to launch the scorecard, so it wants to produce the perfect scorecard.

5. Treating the Balanced Scorecard as a systems Project

Some of the most expensive failures have occurred when companies implemented their balanced scorecard as a systems project rather than as a management project.

6. Hiring Inexperienced consultants

Using inexperienced consultants or consultants who deliver their favorite methodology under the cover of the balanced scorecard is almost surely a recipe for failure. Be careful. Very careful! *Hire resultants, not consultants!*

7. Introducing the Balanced Scorecard Only for Compensation

Scorecards used to introduce non-financial indicators into a compensation plan do not capture how the non-financial measures lead to improved customer and financial performance.

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I created a “war cabinet” of senior leaders with the clout to bulldoze through the roadblocks and keep the BSC project moving. Oftentimes, things didn’t work out as easily as expected, and tension would often arise, but it was worth worthy!

I Made it Work

Through teamwork and the can-do attitude of a number of people, we created good plans using the *latest* thinking tools, along with my CRITRAL thinking techniques to improve the thinking and creativity of all the people involved with the project. This allowed *everyone* to be part of the solution and gather the best ideas. It was exciting work, which I loved being a part of, and ultimately, the plan worked. Our plan was so detailed that it managed to answer all of the following essential questions.

- Who will do what? Who does it involve?
- What are we going to do?
- When does it start? When does it end?

- Where will it take place? How will it take place?
- Why must we do it?
- What will happen if we do not do it?

The exercise of answering the above questions helped us to list down the strategic objectives, performance measures, and targets. Targets put *teeth* into a strategy by imposing criteria that the organization must achieve. In short, we initiated a strategy mapping process.

Creation of a Strategy Map

Strategy maps are communication tools used to tell a story of how value is created for the organization. They show a logical, step-by-step connection between strategic objectives in the form of a cause-and-effect chain. There is a famous quote among business leaders: “The challenge is not to have the ‘best strategy’ but an effective strategy that can be implemented successfully.” Once the organization is set around its strategy, then, and only then, can you begin building and implementing your strategy successfully. In our case, this was the balanced scorecard system.

Translating the Vision

What matters the most is the implementation. Finally, I used a combination of my leadership skills, CRITRAL thinking, and teamwork to develop a roadmap to creating a successful step-by-step method for implementing the balanced scorecard in our organization. The winning team members were committed to *continuously* communicating a comprehensive picture to all members of the organization, and *not* just the top management, but by everyone. Our team theme went from “want to” to “can do”... from “good” to “great,” from “long-term” to “sustainable” results. Now, the central question was how can we achieve this?

A Recap

Here's a recap of the meeting where we found the answer to the question posed above: The can-do team had high spirits about SEWA's BSC and were eagerly awaiting for the next-big-decision day. I prefer my big-decision-days to be usually Sundays, and meetings should start at 7:30 a.m. sharp. That sets the right mood for the week ahead.

Soon enough, the day had arrived. As per my directives, my executive secretary had booked the biggest meeting room here, "The Sultan Hall." I was expecting a huge audience because, apart from my can-do team, I had also invited my managers from various departments to participate in the first round of the meet. It was crucial that they knew they were genuinely listened to and had their ideas considered. I saw BSC as the responsibility of everyone, not the province of my specialized *Can-do* team. I didn't want to work in a silo; I wanted my managers to feel a part of the mission and not separated from it! Moreso, I knew that if the rest of SEWA was excluded from my current mission, the implications could be severe—reduced support from the managers, which could derail my SEWA BSC before it kicks off.

Imagine this—it was 7:27 a.m. by my watch when I entered the hall. Indeed, the room was jam-packed. All the chairs were occupied. I greeted the crowd with enthusiasm and began the meeting by saying, "Thanks for joining in. This is an important day for all of us and probably one that would be remembered in the history of SEWA. For the first time ever, SEWA will have its own BSC. We have gathered today to discuss the perspectives of the SEWA BSC." I paused for some time.

"But rather than telling you all what to do, I would present the SEWA BSC's idea, let you shape it up, and share the success."

My IT Manager broke the silence. "BSC is a great idea. We can begin by listing down the universal four perspectives of it."

My marketing manager then interrupted, "Well, where do you see marketing fitting into the performance management game?"

Before anyone could answer that, my finance advisor said aloud, “It all starts with setting clear goals and KPIs. Letting the outcome speak for itself.”

My chief knowledge Officer jumped in with excitement, “I completely agree with the finance advisor here. As we aspire to be a continuous innovative learning organization, I think we should start with learning and development perspective first.”

Then, I stood up to speak to the group. “Well, you all are correct, in one way or another, but to know which perspective should be started first, we first need to follow a magical management tool. It’s called the 80/20 principle.”

The 80/20 Principle

In 1897, Italian economist Vilfredo Pareto discovered the 80/20 principle. The underlying pattern of his principle asserts that there is an inbuilt imbalance between causes and results, inputs and outputs, and efforts and rewards. The 80/20 relationship provides a good benchmark for this imbalance. A typical pattern will indicate that 80 percent of outputs result from 20 percent of inputs. Also, eighty percent of consequences flow from 20 percent of causes, while 80 percent of results/rewards come from 20 percent of efforts. In business, many examples of the 80/20 principle have been validated: 20 percent of products usually account for usually 80 percent of sales; so do 20 percent of customers. That’s fascinating!

This philosophy enticed me because I wanted to both multiply SEWA’s profitability and effectiveness while raising quality and trimming costs.

I wanted my team to give this philosophy a try before we jumped into concluding the SEWA BSC. The principle helped us make real-time decisions both smarter and faster.

Read on to see what we churned out of 80/20 principle.

The 5 perspectives of the Balanced Scorecard

Most of the times the BSC focuses on four perspectives: financial, customer, internal business processes, and learning and growth. My “Can do” team decided to knot in the knowledge-centric thread in the organization. The team decided to add HR as the fifth perspective and expanded the “Internal business processes” perspective by renaming it “Process improvement and business simplification.”

The team wanted to focus on the five perspectives to build the scorecard to enable everyone in our organization to see the organization more clearly from a range of perspectives, make wiser long-term decisions, and translate its vision and strategy into implementation. The SEWA story embodies the 5 perspectives of BSC. Let’s look at them more closely so you can start using them right away.

1. Financial perspective
2. Customer perspective
3. Process improvement and Business simplification
4. Learning and growth perspective
5. Human resources perspective

After that, the team identified performance measures, or leading indicators, for each perspective. We created the best diagram I have ever seen for the perspectives, which we modified to suit our culture and current situations. See the info graph on the next page.

Why a Graphical Presentation?

The integration of these five perspectives into one graphical appealing picture, because most people are visual. Images, graphs, and infographics attract their attention. This has resulted in engaging more people in participating to see the numbers on the dashboard.

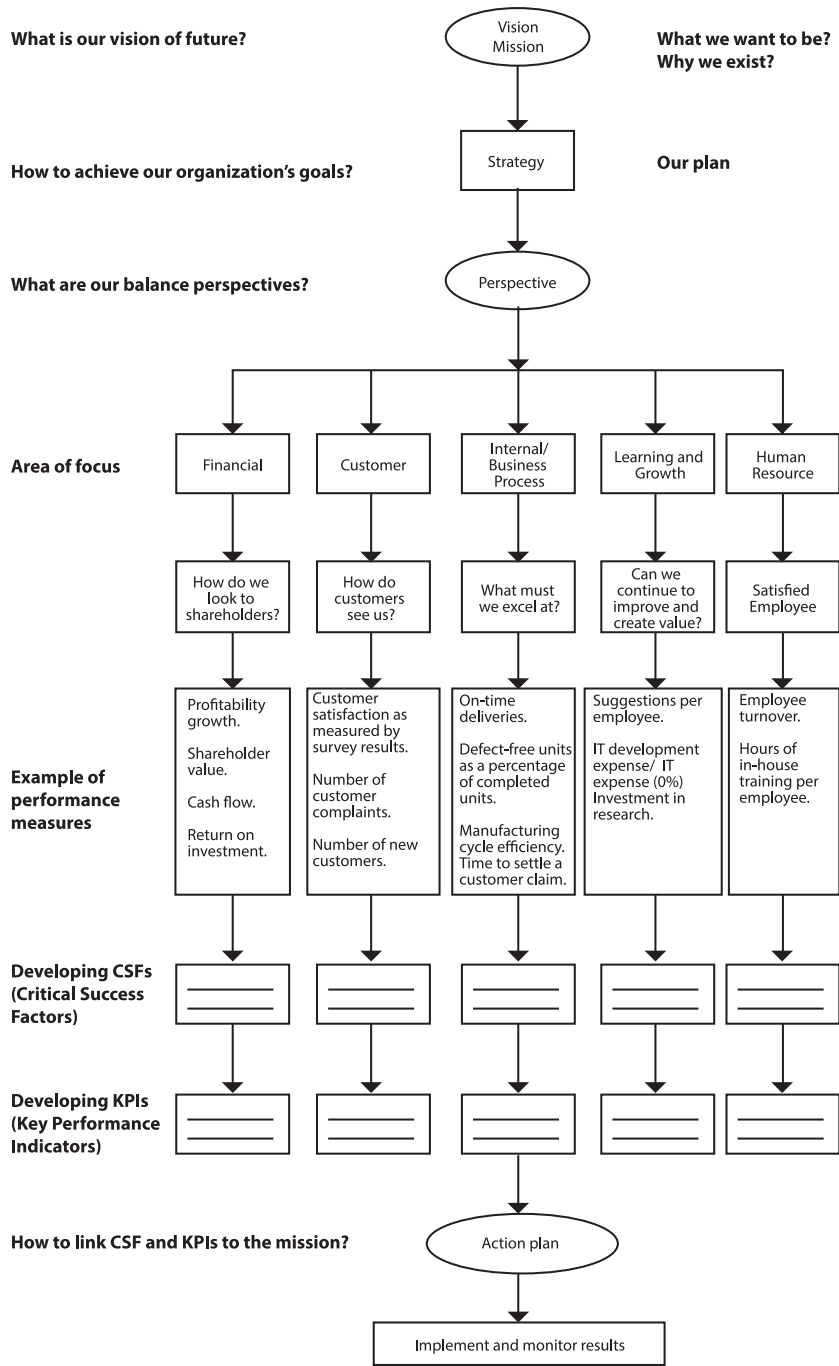


Figure 4.2 Building the SEWA Balanced Scorecard

Cognitive Mapping

Cognitive maps can be defined as mental images and concepts that are built to visualize and assimilate information. That allows the mind's eye to visualize images in order to reduce cognitive load as well as enhance recall and learning of information. It also helped us identify the individual goals of departments and merge them together to create our 2020 strategic plan. I was pleased that the cognitive mapping process was helpful and insightful and the resulting map was accurate and complete.

Benefits of the Balanced Scorecard

They say, “Nobody cares how hard you tried; only results count.” This adage is very much like one of my personal philosophies, in which I state that “people tend to forget the high tides of the turbulent water once they start sailing in calm seas.” Perhaps very unfair, but it's human nature. Hence, I prepared myself for the big question: *Was the Balanced Scorecard worth implementing?* The answer is yes.

We have achieved *spectacular* results. There are clear benefits from doing it right. Our monthly reviews of our performance versus scorecard targets have become an integral part of how we manage the business around here. Our team was so active and committed to the success of the project that we have experienced very beneficial and measurable results in a very short period of time (less than a year).

The following are some of the *general* benefits of the implementation we have been experiencing so far:

1. Better teamwork at the top and middle management.
2. Better communication throughout the organization.
3. Better self-management at the bottom.
4. Better alignment translated into better results.

5. Better organization and strategic planning.
6. Better reporting mechanisms (who's doing What, When, How, and is it really working properly?).

The Big Result?

The balanced scorecard allowed our managers to:

- (1) Look at the business from five important perspectives (Financial, Customer, Process improvement and Business simplification, Learning and growth, Human Resources) and
- (2) Minimize information overload by limiting the number of measures used.

Let's have a close look at some of the big results of implementation of the BSC:

1. Financial Perspective (How do we look to shareholders?)

By all means, this perspective is very important to us, which is why it ranked at the top of the list. The three most important achievements in this perspective were:

- Increased income / cash flow to 20% in less than a year, breaking a new record for SEWA.
- Saved 47% of management operational expenses. (Another new record)
- Using the international financial reporting standards (IFRS) so that our organization accounts are understandable and comparable across international boundaries.

Soon, a great news arrived just at the time when I needed some motivation. Of course, this was just the beginning, but greatness comes only through *dogged* effort, and by doing many small things well.

Rationalizing & Cost-Cutting Award

Ideas Arabia, in collaboration with Dubai Quality Group, hosted its 12th Annual International Conference in Dubai in 2017. The aim of this conference was to bring the latest developments in the Suggestion & Reward scheme to the Middle East, and how implementing this will benefit organizations and create a platform for people in this region to share their best practices.

Ideas Arabia also organized the Ideas Arabia Competition, which recognizes the best ideas implemented by organizations throughout the calendar year. This competition sought to recognize employees and organizations for their outstanding ideas. Most deservedly, SEWA was the winner of the Ideas Arabia 2017 award for Rationalizing & Cost Cutting.

Do you want to know the secret to cost-cutting? Sure. Who doesn't like \$\$\$!

This is the Way

This is what worked for us. You may try the same approach in your organization or life. I am sure that this will guarantee success. You can thank me later! Just remember three things:

- 1. Right approach:** Make more significant and sustainable savings by focusing on doing more with less and doing things differently.
- 2. Right ideas:** Look at the largest components of business costs with the greatest potential for savings; namely, property, IT, staff costs, and tax charges, and apply the 80/20 Pareto principle there.
- 3. Right behaviors:** Set up an office of cost control to embed new capabilities.

I never believed in the traditional methods of cost cutting, such as reducing headcount and support functions; they are quick-fix solutions, and thus, prove futile in improving profit margins and delivering

long-term savings. The above approach helped me to stop costs creeping back in by dealing with costs' root causes. This strategic approach made SEWA more resilient as tough times continued and more robust as recovery began to result in winning awards.

2. Customer Perspective (How do customers see us?)

This perspective refers us to the realization of the importance of customer focus.

- Satisfied Customers—the customer complaint statistics reported by a government agency showed that SEWA had the best customer service record in the government of Sharjah in 2016.
- Sewa happiness index shows a high satisfaction level. (above 80%).
- Creating SEWA's customer-centric Model, which you will enjoy reading about in chapter 9.

3. Process improvement and business simplification Perspective (What must we excel at?)

This perspective is in alignment with my tenth principle of The SEWA Way: *Using, Developing, and Implementing Winning KPIs*. It refers to the processes, decisions, and actions that were critical to achieving the SEWA mission—"To deliver affordable electricity, natural gas, and water to Sharjah customers reliably, cleanly, and safely." The metrics, which were based on this perspective, allowed the SEWA managers to know how well their business was running and diagnose the loop-holes. This wouldn't have been possible if I had not introduced KPIs and KSFs from the early stage of my turnaround.

Earlier in this book, I wrote about KPIs and how it enabled me to take charge of "out of business" situations at SEWA. Undoubtedly, introducing KPIs and KSFs reaped enormous benefits and improved our internal

business process; yet, with BSC, the results were much more. I have listed the most significant ones below:

- Continuous improvement at all managerial levels.
- Achieved lean processes.
- Demonstrated the highest level of quality excellence.
- Provided a fast, real-time overview of our activity through dynamic, readily available reports and graphs.
- Reduced non-valued added work.
- Overcame “hidden” traps in the decision-making process.
- Reduced complexity, errors, duplication, and simplified activities.

4. Learning and growth Perspective (Can we continue to improve and create value?)

This perspective is in alignment with my second principle of *The SEWA Way: Teaching & Learning*. Typically, it incorporates employee coaching, mentoring, and training. It’s vital for a knowledge-worker organization like SEWA, where people are the main resource. The rapid proliferation of technology has urged the SEWA knowledge workers to be in continuous learning mode. This intrigued me in my efforts to preserve/sustain knowledge and turn SEWA into a continuous and innovative learning organization, as I will explain further.

Learning and growth had great results and showed immediate benefits. Below are the results:

- Effectively created solutions to organizational problems.
- Minimized quality problems.

- Provided a fact-based platform for making the right decisions fast.
- Better follow-up in keeping the projects on track by adjusting people, schedules, and work to meet the project objectives.
- Created an atmosphere for collaborative knowledge sharing culture from the top.

5. Human Resources perspective

- Satisfied employees. Moral went up. Satisfaction level reached 85% from nearly 50%.
- Optimized employee performance and the annual appraisal system.
- Less employee turnover.

While I have listed the results here, I am proud to share that we received the prestigious GCC Best employer brand award by the Employer Branding Institute on October 5th, 2016. We were selected by host of jury, which consisted of global senior leaders, researchers, and academicians, including some prominent names, such as Professor Tom Hilton, Global Chairman, Asia Pacific HRM Congress, Mr. Jack Jones, Global Chairman, World HRD Congress, Mr. Jonathan Peters, Global Chairman, Stars of the Industry Group, Dr R L Bhatia, Founder, World CSR Day and World Sustainability, and many more.

The GCC Best employer brand award is the image of our organization as a “great place to work for.” This award is for employers who:

- Create a culture of contribution and innovation at Work.
- Believe in consistent improvement in HR Policy by measuring organizational health and inculcating values that help to achieve the vision.

- Are social and equal opportunity employers.
- Develop and nurture future leaders.

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Sounds easy? Well, it isn't, but the extreme happiness at the successful completion of the BSC project is worth all of the hard work!

There has been a great journey! I never imagined that SEWA and the people in it would be able to achieve so much. What a journey! It was worth every minute. I thank Almighty for the wonderful people who were committed to me during those challenging times.

From this experience, an important lesson learned was that, despite being great in technology, processes, and everything else, the real game changer is the people—the only difference is people. Although you can have the best people onboard, you still won't achieve the same results if the alignment of culture, values, and management mindset are not at the same level. Though a simple recipe, finding the right balance of ingredients is key.

Extra Value

The beauty of implementing the BSC helped us to focus on critical management processes, departmental and individual goal-setting, business planning, capital allocations, strategic initiatives, and feedback.

In my efforts to comprehensively measure how SEWA was progressing towards the achievement of its strategic goals, many mistakes were made from which important lessons could be learned. Nothing ever goes as smoothly as you hope it will! However, we always managed to remove the hurdles by believing in a primary principle: a successful Balanced Scorecard program starts with the recognition that it is not a metrics project but rather a change process. I have captured this

very change experience in another book titled, *The SEWA Performance Management System*. The book encompasses my narrative of how I mobilized strategic changes in SEWA and how I had to think smarter (because I had more opportunities to fail safe!) my worn-out state of mind until I scaled up SEWA.

I would like to conclude this chapter with a great quote by Zig Ziglar, “What you get by achieving your goals is not as important as what you become by achieving your goals.”





FOSTERING CREATIVITY AND INNOVATION

SEWA did scale up and started to show a well-rounded and balanced performance. I kept shooting the darts, and eventually, I think I hit the bull's eye. Unlike traditional methods of tracking the *financial health* of a business, the balanced scorecard gave us a full picture as to whether SEWA was meeting its objectives. On the surface, it may seem that a company is doing well financially, but if you scratch the upper layer, you may find that customer satisfaction is down, employee training is inadequate, or that the processes are outdated.

However, in this shaky and dubious era, where customers, who are fast becoming active *prosumers*, change their preferences as frequently as their Whatsapp status; hence, I felt it necessary to keep up with the pace of change. Up until now, I had put most of my eggs in the BSC basket, while we had also successfully implemented BSC at SEWA. I was happy for it to have taken me this far.

In SEWA's case, I was literally in the middle of the turnaround, still grappling to find a firm anchoring ground. It seemed almost as if we had hit a barrier reef. Alongside successful BSC implementation, I also had to harness the organization's creativity and innovation capabilities. It's a very different basket. What's in it?

Did I manage to paddle my way towards fostering creativity and innovation to revive the SEWA brand? Let's find out.

To be successful in today's fast-paced, customer-centric business environment, your organization's innovation performance is a crucial determinant of its competitiveness and progress. Moreover, innovation is important to help address global challenges such as climate change and sustainable development. Much of the rise in living standards is due to innovation, which has been the case since the Industrial Revolution.

Before proceeding further, let's explore the oceanic importance of both creativity and innovation.

What is Creativity?

In recent decades, creativity has attracted as much attention and importance as the news of the first humans on the surface of the moon. Is creativity something that happened to humans for the first time? No. Wasn't the world creative before? Yes, definitely. Then, why have we only just realized the importance of being creative? Employers seek for creative individuals, companies boast of 'bedding' creativity at the heart of its business models, schools forcibly try to infuse creativity among students, and even the Global Agenda have synced creativity as its top priority.

Creativity is the act of turning new and imaginative ideas into reality. It is characterized by the ability to perceive the world in new ways, as well as having the ability to do something unpredictable, original, and unique in the attempt to create something truly unique. This created item can be anything—it may be *intangible* (such as an idea, a scientific theory, a musical composition, or a joke!) or a *physical* object (such as an invention, a literary work, or a painting). Creativity involves two processes: Thinking and producing. If you have ideas but don't act on them, you may be *imaginative*, but not creative in the truest sense of the word.

According to Robert Sternberg, creativity is the production of “something original and worthwhile”. One of the best definitions I have heard is the definition given by Rollo May, who described creativity as: “The process of bringing something new into being. Creativity requires passion and commitment. It brings to our awareness what was previously hidden and points to new life.”

What is Innovation?

Innovation is the act of implementing something new. Put simply, it can be defined as “creativity into reality”. It is a process that transforms unique, creative ideas into new realities that may also turn into greater benefits, depending on their impact on the business organization, government, and society.

A common misconception is that innovation is generally considered as a twenty-something budding solo-preneur starting-up a business and introducing a new product. However, innovation is neither restricted to a start-up nor to a product; rather, we can innovate our customer services, partnership, business model, marketing method, and many other facets of our organization. Innovation can be done in many things, in many ways, and by everyone. So, stop restricting yourself and let your ideas come into reality. The world is always looking for creative and innovative people. Welcome to the era of the new global knowledge economy.

What is the Difference between Creativity and Innovation?

In my presentations and workshops, I am frequently questioned about the difference between creativity and innovation. People sometimes get confused between creativity and innovation, and I don’t blame them. Hundreds of articles and books, with more appearing every year, explain how to pursue creativity and innovation; for example, I often see advice that states “look for blue oceans”, “try the four lenses of innovation”, “follow the innovator’s prescription,” or “develop a new disruptive you”—it can be quite brain-melting!

Let's start with a very simple definition of both, which can differentiate it easily.

Creativity is the capability of thinking up something new and *Innovation* is executing the creative ideas or implementing something new. Bearing this basic difference in mind, we can further differentiate it well with an example: suppose you are in a meeting and you come up with a new idea—that's creativity; (the ability of your mind to think and create some new ideas) but it is not an innovation until it gets implemented.

Creativity is an *imaginative* process, whereas innovation is a *productive* process; further, creativity is generating some unique ideas conversely, whereas innovation may be introducing something better into the market. There is no risk in creativity because it is a virtual process, whereas there is always risk in innovation because it is a reality.

Creativity is not Innovation

One fine morning I was in the midst of a meeting with my top senior management when an email notification popped up. To my amazement, the *Harvard Business Review* had sent a newly published article that totally justified and threw light upon my above-mentioned philosophy “Creativity is not Innovation.”

Harvard surveyed thousands of executives in Fortune 500 companies to rate their companies' innovation skills on a scale of one to 10—one being poor and 10 world class. The survey participants overwhelmingly believed that their companies were better at generating ideas (average score of six) than they are at commercializing them (average score of one). So, which is more effective—moving your (already good) creativity score from six to eight or lifting your (very poor) execution score from one to three?

Ideas will only get you so far. Consider companies that struggled even after a competitor entered the market and made the great idea transparent

to all. Did Xerox stumble because nobody there noticed that Canon had introduced personal copiers? Did Kodak fall behind because they were blind to the rise of digital photography? Did Sears suffer a decline and have to shut down because they had no awareness of Walmart's new every-day, low-price discount retailing format? In every case, the ideas were there. And yes, in this era of disruption, the mother of disruption stories is the BlackBerry story. What's the reason behind the extraordinary rise and spectacular fall of BlackBerry?

It was the follow-through that was lacking. In fact, their research found that innovation initiatives face their toughest resistance *after* they show hints of success, begin to consume significant resources, and clash with the existing organization at multiple levels; that is, long after the idea generation stage.

Managers seem to be enamored with the Big Idea Hunt for three reasons. First, coming up with an idea does not create tension within the core business. Second, ideation is fascinating, whereas execution is long, drawn out, and boring. Third, companies think they are good at execution. While they are generally good at execution in their core businesses, the capabilities making that possible are poisonous for innovation.

The SEWA managers were no different. I could see that they focused too much on coming up with the big idea, but little or no effort was given to bring/execute it to reality. In brief, the idea fizzled out and never came to fruition. Thomas Edison, the greatest innovator of all time puts it well: "Innovation is 1% inspiration and 99% perspiration."

So, I scratched my head to find answers to the barriers to execution in SEWA and how can we overcome them. The most obvious reason was that *ideation* was romantic/fascinating, while *execution* was boring, dragging, and "not cool." We needed to view innovation, not as the product of luck or extraordinary vision but rather the result of a deliberate search process.

Mobilize to Maximize

At this critical stage of brand turnaround, we were ready to receive innovative ideas and suggestions as much as we could to improve our services and accomplish our vision. In principle, I needed to mobilize my managers to maximize the organization's creative genius.

I decided to send an email to all my managers, inviting them for a brainstorming session in the knowledge hub that would churn out the best ideas that would bring us closer to our vision.

The big day arrived. The employees arrived brimming with enthusiasm and a superlative degree of positivity. I greeted them one by one, to which they reciprocated with their biggest smile ever. To set the mood of the room, I wrote a question on the flip chart in front of me:

“What is the one improvement that would enable us to realize our revenue and profit growth goals?”

Everyone gasped.

“Write your answer on the sticky notes lying on your table. You have 10 minutes to think.” I said to the group.

The room filled with energy and everyone quickly wrote down their ideas.

Here are some of the responses that deserve a mention:

My marketing manager wrote: “We must have an innovation edge.” The excellence department manager wrote down: “We must tap into the creative potential of each employee.”

Well, honestly, the answers did not convince me. The team failed to understand what kept their boss awake at night. I thought of giving them a clue.

My second question stopped the group dead in its tracks: “What is the top priority of SEWA, as seen by your chairman—by me?”

To this, most people dropped their pens, which signaled that we weren't getting anywhere—we were just beating around the bush. We had reached a dead-end!

Alas! I disbanded the team. I comforted myself by saying, "I'll have to proceed with the issue alone. Don't lose hope. Don't give up." I needed to find an answer to the questions, now. We were running out of time anyway. Then, finding the *right* answer was my utmost priority.

I knew I had to give it some deep thought; the first step towards attaining a deeper level of thinking lies in eliminating distractions. So, I picked up my phone and instructed my executive secretary to cancel my next meeting to ensure that I wouldn't be disturbed. This helped me to create the right environment to promote deep thinking. Next, I looked for a peaceful and comfortable spot where I could let my thoughts unfold freely. I chose my "Majālis" (An Arabic term meaning "a place of sitting", used in the context of "council"). SEWA has a grand "Majālis" tastefully decorated with soft background music playing all the time. I chose this place because the well-lit open space would provide enough room for new thoughts to pour into my mind.

My motto was to look for something that would introduce entirely new viewpoints to my perspective. Slowly and gradually, my mind overflowed with an abundance of ideas, giving me the motivation to strive for greatness and excellence. The best idea that popped up during my deep-thinking process was actually engaging the customers themselves, especially the frustrated ones. Bingo! That's the ultimate answer. As Bill Gates says, "Your most unhappy customers are your greatest source of learning." Since then, this quote has never been truer.

Suddenly, I recalled the genius idea of Howard Schultz, founder and former executive chairman of the Starbucks Corporation. He launched the "My Starbucks Idea" project in 2008 to increase the company's customer focus. Like Shultz, I also wanted to engage with my customers and build longer-lasting relationships with them.

Sitting in my Majālis, I could empathize with Howard Schultz and very well understand his frustrations. Almost ten years later, I was going through the same agony and uneasiness. I smiled and murmured within, *Certainly, “My Starbucks Idea” must have borne out of Howard Schultz’s deep thinking.*

If the “My Starbucks Idea” concept is new to you, or if you have heard little about it, the synopsis below is an interesting case study posted on the Harvard Business School (HBS) official website on October 31, 2015.

The Starbucks Story

The benefit of crowdsourcing ideas is manifold. I really value this management practice and I always refer the *Starbucks case study* to my managers and subordinates in this context. This case study also deserves a mention here. In 2007, Starbucks was a US \$10 billion company serving 50 million customers a week with some 10,500 stores in the United States and more than 4,500 stores internationally. However, in the process of the company’s rapid expansion, the management gradually ceased to live up to the ultimate Starbucks experience. It also had to contend with the low-cost coffee that its competitors provided, thereby losing its loyal customer base. Then, CEO Howard Schultz pointed out that, “Starbucks stores no longer have the soul of the past.”

In 2008, in an attempt to *revitalize* the Starbucks customer experience, CEO Howard Schultz launched the *MyStarbucksIdea.com* website with the following words, “Welcome to MyStarbucksIdea.com. This is your invitation to help transform the future of Starbucks with your ideas and build upon our history of co-creating the Starbucks Experience together....So, pull up a comfortable chair and participate in My Starbucks Idea. We are here, we are engaged, and we are taking it seriously.”

Ideally, this was the platform where everyone was invited to help *co-shape* the future of Starbucks with their ideas. You must be wondering

what the result was. In the first year alone, more than 65,000 ideas and 658,000 votes were cast, and in late 2009, the company announced that 50 distinct ideas drawn from the site had been approved.

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Launching MySewaidea.com

Hence, I decided to get on the bandwagon too. Who said that history doesn't repeat itself! I decided to create a similar domain—*MySewaidea.com*—with the mission to obliterate all customer dissatisfactions and wow them by engaging with them at the deeper level.

Happy and relieved, I left the Majālis and came back to my office. I called upon my executive secretary and asked her to send an email to our existing customers, announcing the launch of MySewaidea.com. A transcript of that e-mail is provided below:

Dear valued SEWA Customers,

I feel your pain and frustration due to the low level of service we have been providing you, which never met your basic expectations, and to listen to your bitter complaints directly to serve you much better. To exceed your expectations, we opened ten 24/7 customer happiness centers, which provide round-the-clock access where you can register your complaints or grievances. I regret that the happiness centers have prevented our maintenance technical team from ensuring proper maintenance to prevent the failure of the machines. As a result, I have launched *sewaidea.com* so you can communicate with me digitally.

My idea is to invite the outside world to shape the future of SEWA together. At *MySewaidea.com*, you can post your ideas

and see how SEWA puts those ideas to work. Upon entering the website, you will be asked a simple question: “How can we make your SEWA experience better?”

We look forward to assisting you with excellent customer service.

Your partner in success,
Dr. Rashid Alleem
SEWA Chairman



New Capital of Growth

Internally, I was beginning to sense that if I had wanted different results, I had to conduct business differently—what a genius idea. The users/customers were invited to drop in their queries, ideas, or feedback of any kind by filling out a simple form. We believe in feedback as it keeps us engaged and tells us about our progress, while it also serves as a vehicle for motivation.

SEWA was becoming increasingly aware that ideas were the “new capital of growth.” Since ideas were to be found everywhere, especially among the company’s customers, I was keen to connect with them, and subsequently, develop the ones most attractive to the company’s future growth.

The Excellence Department manager heads a team who look into the ideas submitted and present me with on-time reports and updates, and they are empowered to handle each submission (query, idea or feedback) promptly and effectively. It is all about customer experience for me as it builds up the brand value immediately, while the customer-organization interaction is the locus of value co-creation.

SEWA Friends

As expected, there was not much participation in the beginning, but this didn't dampen my spirit and I refused to give up. To start with, I began inviting people who were really engaged with my office. I called this group "SEWA Friends" and rewarded them with certificates of gratitude, which worked wonders in keeping up their engagement. Well, this was a genuine gesture from my end which served a dual purpose; it not only helped me to acquire new friends (partners) but it also aided the retention of old friends (partners).

Here's what followed next. I had awarded one of the local supermarket chains a "Thank You" certificate. He felt good about it and hung it in the main store, where it was visible to thousands of shoppers. This resulted in engaging a much larger audience. Indeed. This was a giant leap forward.

Being positive, patient, and persistent, we won the game, over time. We also witnessed and experienced more customer engagement, and that was a great sign of success, especially with so many innovative and creative ideas.

I am Creative

After the successful implementation of mysewaidea.com, I wanted to hear the voices of my 5000+ employees, the vast majority of them waiting for the right moment to contribute their ideas.

We were following a reverse math of Edison's theory; here, it was 99% inspiration and 1% perspiration. The "I am creative" section in the Excellence Department had hundreds of ideas pitching in from all over the employees, every month, yet only a handful of them would see the light of the day. Undoubtedly, my employees had quite a challenge ahead of them.

To add to the above, employees' enthusiasm about sharing their ideas began to dwindle, while the wealth of ideas submitted in the beginning

began to gradually shrink, or rather, took a nosedive. This was the last thing I had expected. I didn't want the enthusiasm to fizzle out, so I came up with a back-up plan.

To maintain momentum, I mandated a part of my employees' annual performance management system to contribute a minimum of two ideas per employee each year, which included idea generation and execution.

Innovative or Not?

"To be or not to be, that is the question," reads Shakespeare's famous soliloquy from Hamlet. I felt like having a similar conversation with myself. Being a modern day Hamlet, I interrogated myself, *To innovate or not to innovate?* Admittedly, SEWA was not an innovation novice because we had recognized the need for innovation and we had charted out a basic innovation strategy. We had undergone innovation training and we also had some basic tools at hand! So, were we primed for innovation? The ultimate truth is that innovation may not witness "quick wins," but success will come along the way. However, in our case, we needed immediate results.

Innovation Team

The first step was to build an innovation team. I asked my executive office personnel to send across an email inviting employees to self-nominate themselves to be part of the innovation team. Expecting a massive response, I received just that. Overnight, we received a flood of emails from SEWA innovation enthusiasts. I was quite excited about this positive episode. To tap into the momentum of the time, the very next day I invited the interested employees to meet me at the SEWA Auditorium on the ground floor of our head office. There, I demarcated the employees into two groups: hard worker/innovators and those "team members." I also thought of a few critical questions, such as:

1. Describe your unique self.

2. What do you know about innovation and creativity?
3. How do you see yourself as an innovator?
4. Why is innovation so important?
5. How do you encourage innovation at SEWA?
6. How are you adapting your work to changes at SEWA?

Creative vs. Structural Employees

The above questions helped me to determine exactly what I was looking for. Now was the time to filter further and “slice and dice” the hard worker/innovator into a creative or structural employee. I created a set of tricky questions that would elucidate both their imaginative and rational bent of mind. The following questions came to mind:

1. If you were the chairman for one day, what would you change in SEWA to make it a better place?
2. What suffers more breakdowns: our products, our processes, or our people? How can we fix this?
3. What can we offer *for free* that no one else does?
4. If we could hire five more people, what unconventional skills would they have and why?
5. What excites you?
6. What would you uniquely bring to our culture?
7. If you had one month and a \$50,000 budget to tackle any project, what would it be?
8. There is a project called the “tree of life.” Where do you see yourself fitting in?

The entire drill was thrilling and had instilled energy and willingness in the team. I could see their eyes filled with anticipation of what would come next. This validated that I was doing right things at the right time!

Pitching the above questions also helped me segregate my innovator's bunch into two categories: creative and structural. *Creative minds* are the blue-sky thinkers, not constrained by preconceptions or notions in the quest for completely novel ideas. These thinkers don't stop to check and filter their ideas. On the other hand, employees with a structural bent of thinking are more prone to analyze, avoid risks, and seek logic in any grain of thought. However, both types complement each other well.



Now, I felt the team was primed for “McKinsey’s 8 Essentials of Innovation,” which are my favorite for multiple reasons. They are digestible nuggets of wisdom—on-point and appropriate for both amateur and savvy innovators and fit the need of the hour of team creation. Also, the knowledge/information is 100% reliable, having been distilled from hundreds of research projects and case studies conducted by McKinsey’s professionals.

Here I was, standing at the center-stage in the auditorium and soaking up the enthusiasm that was floating in the air.

I started my speech by stating; “There’s a view in the corporate world that if you buy a whole lot of bean bags and spread them around the offices, everyone will suddenly become more creative.” I continued, “But I believe that rather than trying to make everyone more creative, we need to recognize that creativity is a relatively unique quality. Creative minds need to be nurtured differently. Hence, today, I am convinced that the time has come to share *McKinsey’s 8 Essentials of Innovation* with you.”

I announced that I would quickly run through a presentation that would instill in them the basics of innovation.

I could see wide-open eyes and ear-to-ear smiles.

I began my presentation by showing eight slides, which elaborated on the eight essentials, followed by a question. Read on to find out the eight pillars. Grab a notepad and try to answer the questions as well.

1. **Aspire:** Do we regard innovation-led growth as critical, and do we have cascaded targets that reflect this?
2. **Choose:** Do you invest in a coherent, time-balanced, and risk-balanced portfolio, or initiatives with sufficient resources to win?
3. **Discover:** Do we have differentiated business, market, and technology insight that translate into winning value proportions?
4. **Evolve:** Do we create more business models that provide defensible and scalable profit sources?
5. **Accelerate:** Do we beat the competition by developing and launching innovations quickly and effectively?
6. **Scale:** Do we launch innovations at the right scale in the relevant markets and segments?
7. **Extend:** Do we win by creating and capitalizing on external networks?
8. **Mobilize:** Are our people motivated, rewarded, and organized to innovate repeatedly?

“I don’t demand any immediate answer to the above questions. The answers need time and lots of consideration. Now, we will have a quick group discussion,” I explained to the team.

I was completely blown away by the response I received from the team. At this stage of the brand turnaround, fostering creativity and

innovation was key to achieving the desired results. Now was the time to embark on the next level of the idea suggestion system.



Idea Management System

Ideas are nothing but thought bubbles unless they are structured and channeled correctly. To harness an idea, it is paramount that it gets the right notice, and this cannot be achieved unless we have a fantastic idea management system. An idea management system is a structured process for soliciting ideas from employees, and then capturing those ideas and evaluating them in order to determine which ideas have the greatest potential to add value to the organization. By now, you must have figured out my passion to capitalize on potential ideas. That being said, getting in sync with the ‘big bang’ ideas takes effort. What I did next will *not* surprise you!

Innovation Promotion System

Let me give you a brief history of the Innovation Promotion System (IPS). In a friendly discussion with Professor Mohammad Arif—my PhD advisor and professor for Sustainability and Process Management during my years at Salford University, Manchester, UK, where the idea and the concept of the IPS were born. Most great ideas remain dormant because people don’t have the courage, resources, time or money at their disposal to take action. Innovation sits in a lonely place because few people have the courage to dream big and come up with radically different ideas. For those who do take action, most of them are unprepared and take the plunge without weighing the pros and cons of it, eventually draining out their valuable time and energy.

Professor Arif recommended that I write a book on Idea Management Systems and summarize my thesis in an audio and visual aid (DVD) which could act as a source of reference and inspiration for individuals and organizations who are keen on practicing and improving their own Idea Management Systems. I said to myself, *why not do both?* The

DVD came first because it was easy to put things together there in it. Initially, I had a few hundred copies done. Soon enough, I ran out of all of them. I realized people loved it. I received positive feedback about how valuable and handy the DVD was. Excited as I was, I ordered more copies.

Meanwhile, I had already started penning down my thoughts on the initial draft of the book. This book is unique because it revolves around the broader concepts of innovation, which is arguably the need of the hour, isn't it?

The good news is that you don't have to wait till I finish authoring the book as I have shared some of the wisdom of IPS here. Briefly, IPS consists of five elemental fundamental principles, which also serve as stages to master the innovation promotion system. I have listed them here sequentially: *Idea Generation*, *Idea Submission*, *Idea Evaluation*, *Idea Rewarding*, and *Idea Implementation*.

Now let us move on to understand the key stages of IPS.

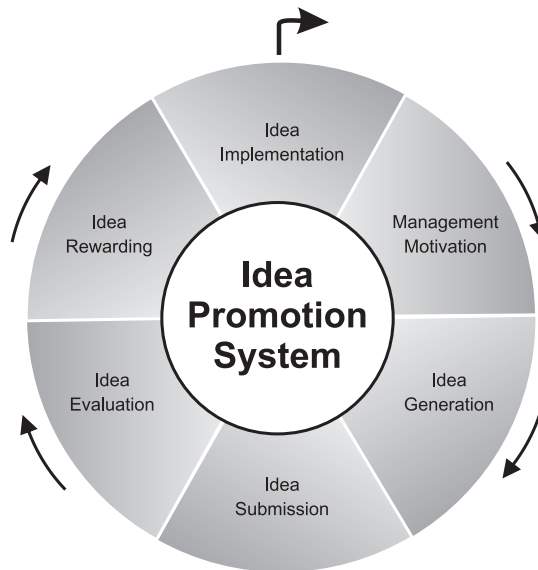


Figure 6.1 Idea Promotion System

Stage # 1: Management Motivation

Motivation is paramount to attracting suggestions and keeping people interested. People often do things that top management personnel approve of. Such individuals also want to trust the management in terms of being fairly treated and recognized for the idea. In some companies where suggestion systems are successful, you will find that the CEO personally discusses and mentions it in the briefing. The CEO, or someone very high up in the organization, is usually present during the award ceremonies and events that are used to promote suggestion systems.

Stage # 2: Idea Generation

This part of the process deals with providing staff the motivation to look at innovative ideas and come forward with some proposals. The idea generation part of the suggestion systems should be able to provide participants some sort of structure for their ideas and help them think of ways to implement them effectively. It should also help them to analyze the benefits and compare it to existing practices.

Stage # 3: Idea Submission

This part of the system is the interface—either IT- or paper-based—that people need to navigate in order to submit their ideas. The interface should be easy to use and should provide easy access to all the areas needed for submission. The submission portal also needs to have an effective tracking system.

Stage # 4: Idea Evaluation

The rubric for evaluation should also be clearly defined. The evaluation system should simply be an accept/reject system. It should give participants the impression that their ideas are treated fairly, while also providing positive feedback that is constructive, thus providing an opportunity to resubmit the suggestions after revision.

Stage # 5: Idea Rewarding

The reward for the idea being accepted does not need to be financial; for example, the reward could simply be recognition—whatever it is, it should be publicized company-wide so that employees are encouraged to participate more. Although some organizations use a proportion of

the benefit, it doesn't have to be that—it could be gifts, or perhaps additional annual leave.

Stage # 6: Idea Implementation

Idea implementation should be well publicized within the organization and the benefits monitored and audited. The implementation process should also look at lessons learned from things that were considered and ignored while proposing the idea. The implementation should be discussed in team meetings to improve the quality of ideas for the future.

Does that sound like a happy ending? Yes, if our organizations were fairylands, but the reality is far from it. What happens when employee motivation seems to trickle down?

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Idea Campaign

Obviously, motivation fizzles off with time. This is natural and inevitable. I have faced this situation in my corporate life. So, my advice to you is not to panic and stay calm. Focus on a particular area or case in point. An ideas campaign, for instance, is a focused event designed to solicit ideas that solve specific business needs. Here's a secret: just because you build and run idea campaigns doesn't mean you'll find good ideas. The goal should be to be as crisp as possible with a topic, so the employees can focus their creativity on tackling this one issue.

Narrowing our focus and constructing a well thought-out and structured ideas campaign will yield great success.

At SEWA, I organized regular ideas campaigns. Every month we hold monthly "let's get together" meetings, where myself and the senior team, in addition to a large number of employees, attend the gathering to recognize the achievers and celebrate success. At these meeting, recognizing the "Idea generators" and the "Idea of the month" were my agenda priorities.

At SEWA, the creativity and innovation spirit was chiming well within employees, which resulted in sound and sonorous ideas. Most of the employee's ideas were viable and feasible, so they were implemented as soon as possible, which boosted the employees' motivation and genuinely inspired them to contribute more.

This was rewarding for my team and I, though I must confess that it was hard to segregate the good ideas from the not-good-enough ones. However, thanks to a great tool, this tedious task was a cake-walk.

How did we decide on the most promising idea? There's no silver-bullet answer to that question as an idea could result in a continuous incremental improvement or a revolutionary big-bang solution. To fire-test the ideas, I adopted a brand-new tool that I discovered in an insightful article by Centre for Creative Leadership (CCL) organization, which taught me about using the POINT tool for evaluating ideas.

POINT Tool—Idea to Evaluate

The POINT tool helps to evaluate ideas starting with the positive. We can testify that this simple tool has helped to unstick conversations, so give it a try.

- **Pros** – what's good, positive, and praiseworthy about the idea we should keep? (Always do this first)
- **Opportunities** – what might be good in the future? List the future possibilities of what this might lead to if it becomes a reality.
- **Issues** – What's not right yet? List the shortcomings, limitations, or weaknesses of the idea—
- begin with the solution-focused “How to...?”

New thinking to overcome the issues. Generate ideas to overcome the issues, starting with the most important.

The tool helped in evaluating and initially accepting ideas. The employees were happy since they started weighing their ideas before nominating theory, but what happens next to those ideas? Do they get implemented right away? The answer is no.

This led us to employ another new tool called NUF. Do you want to find out about NUF?

NUF—New, Useful, Feasible

We used the NUF when we wanted to quickly check that a chosen idea was likely to be effective and work in practice. In short, we used it when we wanted to identify what to work on: being more creative, developing the idea, or getting something that we would be able to implement in near future.

A solution to a problem was assessed and scored with the simple three-part “Nuf test.” We just scored it from 0 to 10 on each of “New,” “Useful,” and “Feasible” categories.

New: never been tried before

A solution is not creative unless it is new. When we used the word new here, we were not looking to get into philosophical arguments about original thought, but we did mean something substantially different from the previous attempts.

Useful: solves the problem

It is good to have a creative new solution—and it is even better if it solves the problem! The question here was “How does it solve the problem completely?” A completely useful solution solves the problem and does not create any new ones.

Feasible: can be implemented in practice

Once we had a novel solution that solved the problem, the final question was “Could it be put into practice?” If it is excessively expensive to implement and difficult to use, then it would not be a very feasible solution.

SEWA Management Best Practices

SEWA houses employees from distinctive ethnicities; hence, our ideas were both evolutionary and revolutionary. One of the outcomes of the ideas campaigns was that it helped me churn out ideas that were worth millions of dollars. Some ideas also fetched awards for SEWA, and they were such unique and breakthrough nuggets of wisdom that I proudly mentioned them in many international platforms. In addition, I decided to document them in my future book called, *SEWA Management Best Practices*. The book is still in the making process. Scheduled to be published in mid-2020, I'm certain that it's going to be a "cover-to-cover" read.



To London

I had to stop writing my turnaround journey in this section of the chapter because I had to catch up with my 41st board of trustees meeting with His Highness, the ruler of Sharjah and the chairman of the board of trustees of Sharjah University. My 'a-ha' moment came when on my way back to UAE from that meeting in London when I chanced upon a library in Heathrow airport.

Well, being a bookworm, I was hooked on a little book titled, *Being Agile in Business* by Belinda Waldock. Replete with agile methodologies and concepts, I picked it up, and I am glad I did because it inspired me to implement agile innovation in SEWA.

What is Agile Innovation?

Agile innovation is a revolutionary approach to accelerating success, inspiring engagement, and igniting creativity. Agile innovation addresses the three critical drivers of innovation success: accelerating the innovation process, reducing the risks inherent in innovation, and engaging the entire organization and the broader ecosystem in the innovation

effort. Being agile means anticipating likely change and addressing it deftly, all the while keeping your business on course and your customers satisfied.

I had realized that SEWA needed to embrace agile innovation to unplug innovation bottle-necks. I won't be ashamed to accept that SEWA cringed at the very sound of innovation. This explains why I made innovation find a special place in my SEWA 15 principles, as well as in the SEWA Success Model and SEWA's core values.

The Kodak Case Study

In the 20th century, Kodak was truly one of the world's powerhouses. It was ranked as one of the four most valuable brands in the world in 1996, just behind Disney, Coca-Cola, and McDonald's. It was also known as "America's storyteller," and its advertising delivered powerfully memorable messages. The "Kodak moment" even became a pop-culture catchphrase.

But 2012 had not gotten off to a great start for Eastman Kodak. The company was on the brink of filing for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection. It had lost \$30 billion in the market value in the fourteen short years since its profits peaked in 1999. I kept wondering what went wrong! What lessons can we take from Kodak's struggles? The cause of Kodak's stunning fall has been attributed to claims that Kodak was too slow enter the digital photography boom, and that it failed to make quality digital-age products. Poor strategic planning, lack of foresight, and inept product development and design have all been claimed as contributing factors.

There is no doubt that digital photography eroded Kodak's high-profit. Still, I feel that the *business model* was the primary cause. One fatal flaw of Kodak's efforts was that they primarily focused on photography. They slipped into their comfort zone and failed to see the *disruptive* innovation that was coming their way. They failed to diversify and innovate.

The lesson I learned from the above is to do just the opposite of what Kodak did! SEWA has had a similar fate too. Most of the time, we were comfort-centered. We try to continue doing what we know how to do.

21st Century Agile Innovation

If I were to thrive in this 21st-century, I had to compel my people to *subscribe* to the innovation game. Ironically, at SEWA, I observed that everybody talked about innovation, but nobody did much about it. Of course, that's not quite right.

It was one early spring morning in 2017 that I called for a meeting with my managers and their core team and said, "Several path-breaking thinkers have come up with better ways to design new products. Thanks to the ever-advancing technology! However, the world is yet to witness a revolutionary breakthrough that has also stood the test of time. So, where does the problem lie? It's within us, very much embedded in our organizational processes and day-to-day mundane chores. One key element of the poor results of the economy-wide picture of innovation is that there is no generally agreed upon set of processes for systematically creating innovations that generate better, cheaper, faster, lighter, more convenient, and more personalized products and services for customers. When traditional methodologies don't work, the solution is to involve consumers, suppliers, and the organization in an agile and collaborative drive towards new value creation."

I further continued by saying, "Jettison the idea of 'Slow and steady wins the race.' We are living in an age of hyperactive competition and nonstop innovation. New technologies are changing our world overnight. If there's one thing that gives CEOs (or other like-minded people) sleepless nights, it is how to win the battle of innovation. Today, companies (big, small, entrepreneurial start-ups, etc.) that place innovation at the heart of their experiences, processes, and business models win. To stay in the game, we have to resort to an agile approach towards innovation; that is, an ideal way that will enable them to gain momentum and alacrity."

I saw some managers' faces light up with excitement. Moving towards the whiteboard, I picked up my marker pen and said, "To achieve sustainable success, both today and in the future, we must take advantage of change—whether planned or unexpected—without ever letting it sideline our organization. This means embracing a new core competency: Agility." Then, I proceeded to explain the agile principles in simple terms. Below, I have cited the four principles of agile innovation for the team:

1. **Cultivate a culture of experimentation** - Lead courageously, encourage ideas, and embrace failures as opportunities to learn. Create a culture where tools such as six-sigma and lean management co-exist with an innovative, free-spirited approach.
2. **Think simple, be nimble** - To avoid pitfalls, set clear and transparent objectives. An efficient approach and rapid decision-making are the hallmarks of an agile company, as well as having an enterprising mindset that is open to change.
3. **Team up the b(right) people** - There is no one-size-fits-all model for collaboration. I believe that aligning expectations and setting rules of engagement makes the entire process easier, faster, and more efficient. Like any relationship, open communication is the key.
4. **Adapt or modify (as necessary)!** – Avoiding rigidity is crucial. Set parameters, but do not obsess about perfection. Open-mindedness, rapid prototyping, and incremental improvement are the bedrock of agile innovation.

Innovation Bug

The meeting was excellent. The managers and other SEWA employees left the room with the *innovation bug* in them. One thing to keep in mind is that re-inventing the wheel is not creativity. Instead of trying to find a quick fix, if they were to spend time finding out what the problem

was, they would discover the solution. In other words, if we ask the right questions, we get the right answers. A book written back in the 1950s but still relevant today is James Webb-Young's "A Technique for Producing Ideas." Although the book doesn't gift you bright and glamorous ideas, it does help you to arrive at an original and relevant solution to your problem. In my view, innovation is creating something new or improvising upon something that adds value to both the organization and the wider society.

The Challenge ahead: Overcoming the valley of death

In spite of infusing *agile* ways of innovation into SEWA's temperament, I concluded that I couldn't simply put the organization on a long-term growth curve by embarking on the innovation wagon. To avoid getting entrapped in the "valley of death;" that is, the gap between ideation and commercialization or the gap between the lab and marketplace. I wanted to propel SEWA into a *healthy* future. I realized the need to familiarize SEWA with the concept of social responsibility, informing and sensitizing the employees, and providing tools and methodologies to incorporate CSR into their management. Now was the time to turn the crank on SEWA's innovation efforts being turned to profitable, scalable, and implementable outcomes and results?

Smart Meter for Water

The Water Management Device (WMD) is a pre-paid remote communicating electronic water control valve. Over 10 million WMDs were installed in different parts of the world to control the supply and billing of water. Although the prepaid system is yet to reach the UAE, the SEWA water department has introduced it to control the flow of water to government buildings, which also formed a part of our own conservation efforts to reduce water consumption to 30%. After installing and testing, it showed superb results. It can control both the time when the

flow is allowed and the number of flows to the building, while it can also prove that there is an internal unseen leak in any building.

The SEWA water department installed a WMD in all government buildings to allow water only during office hours. They also set a maximum flow to these buildings in case it developed any leaks. This really was an *interruptive* innovation happening at the right time.

After the successful implementation of SEWA smart meters in many government authorities, we decided to put our eyes on high-consumption accounts—heavy energy suckers. Since their electricity and water demands were so high, they perched high on our list. It is worth mentioning here that our SEWA smart meters were a winner in most companies' books because these companies stepped forward and asked to join hands with us in implementing SEWA smart meters in their premises.

Divergence and Convergence

Hence, you see, for SEWA, the sky has never been the limit! Did we use a leading-edge, avant-garde technique or technology to do all of the above? Not at all. We applied the very old-school and generic but fool-proof tactic of brainstorming, which, when combined, leads to fruitful ideation. Ever heard of divergence and convergence? Here's how it helped us; now, divergence and convergence have quite different thinking methods. However, we were able to tap into the “focal point” of both of these methods. We began with the *Divergence* approach, which means that we explored and found new things by suspending judgments and deliberately opening ourselves up to new and even immature ideas. This was a process of *freewheeling*, or the churning out of ideas. We typically applied two effective and progressive methods of Divergence; namely:

1. Imaginary Brainstorming - This process is akin to classic brainstorming, albeit with a slight twist/surprise. We proposed imaginary

replacements to the problem at hand, and then brainstormed on imaginary problems. Ultimately, we analyzed all of the ideas (real, imaginary, and combined) and pushed forward with those that were the most interesting.

2. Attribute listing - This is a great technique that ensures all possible aspects of a problem have been examined and explored. Attribute listing is breaking a problem down into smaller and smaller bits and seeing what you discover at each granular level.

The above techniques enabled the SEWA innovation team to think “outside the box”—the outcomes were bizarre, yet purposeful. It was quite evident that the employees with an artistically-gifted mind excelled at this exercise.

Next, we moved on to *Convergence*. This was in stark contrast to divergence. By being convergent, we sought conclusion by narrowing down the concepts by piggybacking the identical ideas. Finally, we tapered down to seeking an answer, and thus, closure on the idea or problem at hand. Finally, a decision was made on the attractiveness and feasibility of the idea.

To reach a convergent point, the innovation team applied two fascinating techniques:

1. Force-field Analysis - This was used to weigh the “yin and yang” (pros and cons) of the idea. This was basically used to explore how people may oppose or support an idea.

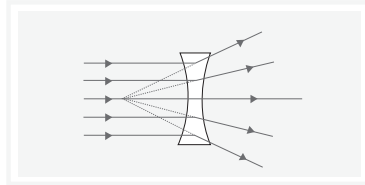
2. PINC Filter - We used the PINC (**P**ositives, **I**ntriguing, **N**egatives, **C**oncerning) filter when we had created a number of ideas and we wanted to select those to carry forward to the next stage of development.

Divergence and Convergence

When we are exploring and making decisions, we use two generic processes: **Divergence and Convergence**, that have quite different thinking methods.

Divergence

branch out from a common point into different directions



Convergence

come together from different directions: merge into one

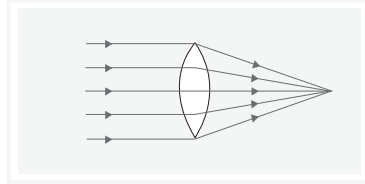


Figure 6.2 Divergence and Convergence





COLLABORATION & CO-CREATION

It Can't Be Done Alone

Our vision-driven Balanced Scorecard (BSC) aided SEWA's ability to monitor its progress towards the achievements of its key strategies and *cascade* it down to overall operational objectives. Creativity and innovation kept us abreast with the ever-evolving customer temperament and market needs/demographics. However, ensuring that our vision 2020 progressed steadily, we maintained both employee and community engagement by winning the innovation ball game. Though we were faring well, we knew that SEWA's brand turnaround couldn't be achieved single-handedly.

What should be done next?

A thought dawned upon me as if a ladder had dropped from heaven! As the next strategic power-play, I decided to join hands with A-class corporations and notable institutions to gain a firm foothold in my quest to become a Masterbrand.

Relationships and Teamwork (Th)at Work

In the last chapter, you witnessed that harnessing the creativity of employees was the epicenter of my focus. Now, we needed to build new

engagement platforms, particularly with the suppliers and vendors. This would transform more than just the bottom lines. I must confess that creativity and innovation had become mainstream by now in SEWA, but we needed to collaborate with global expertise. The idea seemed quite far-fetched, owing to the fact that SEWA was like a college drop-out student—a flunkee, who was in the bad books of all his professors. The “broke” and “out-of-business” image of SEWA was still lingering at the regional and international level. Hence, the mega corps did not want to associate themselves with us. It was a serious challenge!

Before I begin to narrate how I overcame this challenge, let me explain what building new engagement platforms meant to me. To me, it’s all about dialogue, access, risk, and transparency—the D.A.R.T Model. I knew that SEWA had become a great innovative organization by now, but for it to grow to the next level, I believed I had to get some early game-changing wins. The D.A.R.T model helped me achieve just that. Don’t panic! I will explain the model later in this chapter.

We are all familiar with the term collaboration. Simply put, it’s about working hand-in-hand, especially in a joint genius effort. And co-creation—doing the above in a creative manner—also known as collaborative creation, which demands we smile at new ideas, welcome new norms, embrace new ways of seeing the world and, sometimes quite courageously, take comfort in the road less traveled.

At this point, you can imagine SEWA as a floating island in search of an anchor. To achieve brand harmonization and build SEWA’s position in the regional and global marketplace, I tuned to co-creation.

But what is it?

It is a management practice/a form of economic strategy that brings different parties together, such as customers, managers, employees, and stakeholders, to produce a mutually-valued outcome.

During the global financial crisis between 2007-2008, which later turned into a recession and depression in some countries, I analyzed the

co-creation trends and predicted that companies will adapt co-creation practices to boost innovation and competitiveness. Today, 10 years on, this prediction is turning into a reality.

Co-creation drives the growth engine. Co-creation skills are an important capability for companies, requiring agile processes, quick test-and-learn cycles, and a deep understanding of customers. Co-creation is employed in companies the likes of Starbucks (My Starbucks Idea co-creation platform), Lego, Coca-Cola, P&G (Connect + Develop co-creation platform,), etc.

Co-creation - Let's Build it Together

As I mentioned earlier at the beginning of this book, during the melt-down of 2008-2009, I was leading four big organizations owned by the government of Sharjah. It is no question that the year was the year of financial scarcity and access to liquid market was very difficult and we had very tight budgets to run the business. I was looking for a management philosophy where we could get more for less. Hence, I put my bets on the proven philosophy of co-creation.



The idea of co-creation sparked off when I saw SEWA employees trying their hands in open innovation to improve the customer service and brand image. Co-creation is a form of open innovation: ideas are shared rather than kept to oneself. I felt that co-creation could help us tackle the following:

- Get a fresh perspective on our business.
- Get in touch with key trends and business drivers.
- Unlock the world outside and bring it inside.
- Connect and bond with partners, customers, consumers.

- Identify good stuff out there.
- Develop breakthrough new idea.
- Reduce risks.
- Bring excitement to the floor.

Although some companies write off co-creation as a marketing gimmick, I sank my teeth into it. In fact, my SEWA Principle—#14, *Grow together with our suppliers and partners for mutual benefits*—revolves around the fundamentals of co-creation. However, this principle would be like an *unused* gym membership unless I listed the guiding principles of co-creation. Hence, I jotted them down to allow our partners, suppliers, and customers get more involved and engaged with us. The following principles helped us to interweave customer inspiration and feedback into our service development. Despite the ordeal, I sweated it out, and finally I designed the co-creation principles. For SEWA, this was rather like breathing in renewable energy to achieve peak performance.

SEWA's 4 Guiding Principles of Co-Creation

Every company has its unique culture. After giving a lot of thought about what tools and techniques would sustain co-creation, I was able to create SEWA's 4 guiding principles of co-creation, as illustrated in the template below.

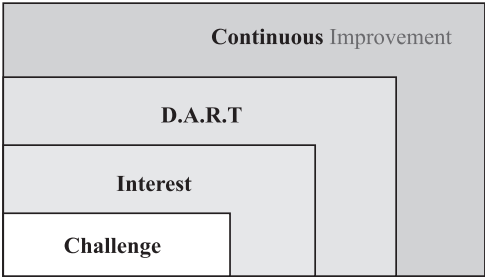


Figure 7.1 The 4 Guiding Principles of Co-creation

1. Challenge - *What is it from me?*

First is to dive deep within yourself to analyze the co-creators' contribution. What value could be added? What benefit could you give? It's about listening to your gut and figuring out your potential to jointly create. It's about what you want most.

The Grow Model

This principle is based on the GROW model, which was created by Sir John Whitmore and his colleagues in the 1980s. I have tried to summarize the model below (If you prefer to go deeper, you can refer Sir Whitmore's book coaching for performance.)

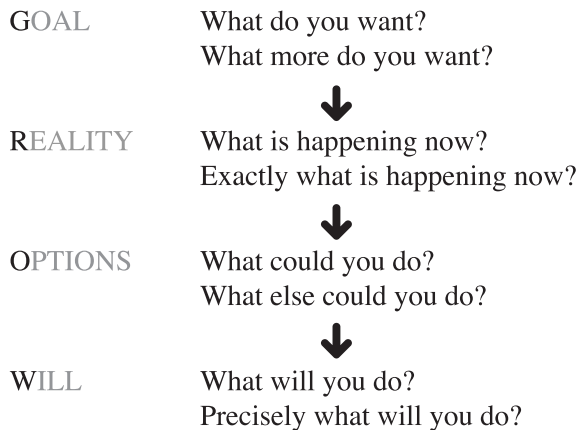


Figure 7.2 The Grow Model

2. Interest - *What is it for me?*

This is about developing a sense of a valued contribution, opinions treated equally, and mutual agreement towards a shared goal. There should always be something in it for the contributors. Also, co-ownership of the ideas is mandate. It's about figuring out the motives that drives you and others to co-create. This starts with asking how relevant and attractive the outcome would be. In other words, it's about attracting people's interest or attention.

3. D.A.R.T was a radically different approach to re-igniting any organization’s growth and innovation capabilities. It opens up new frontiers of value-creation via co-creation and comprises four basic building blocks: **D**ialogue, **A**ccess, **R**isk, and **T**ransparency. And you can combine them in different ways.

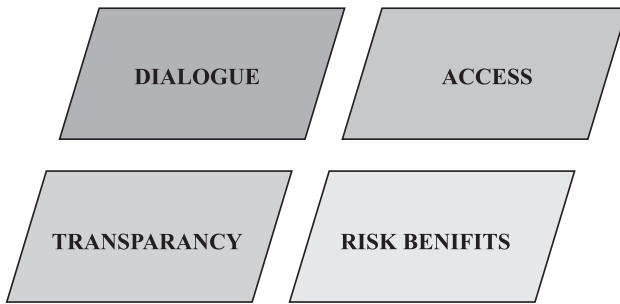


Figure 7.3 The D.A.R.T Model

Dialogue - Interaction and engagement on both sides means dialogue. It’s not just listening to customers; it implies shared communication, shared learning, and joint problem solving, which helps to create the building blocks of loyalty. This interface is embedded on the website, which provides a suite of interactive, quick-open access to SEWA’s information, resources, events, initiatives, and latest news.

Access - An integral part of our corporate governance is transparency and accessibility. *Communicate with SEWA Chairman* Interface is one such platform to strike up a dialogue with us. We see ourselves as an authentic, global organization receiving feedback about optimizing the use of energy and how to work for a better tomorrow with the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Risk - When consumers/business partners actively co-create, they also insist that organizations inform them fully about the risks (personal or societal) associated with products and services. They demand Risk Assessment.

While writing this page, we were discussing the prospects of ISO 31000-Risk Management Certification for SEWA. Among other threats, I was most concerned about cyber-attacks. Being a huge utility company, we had our consumers' confidential credentials at our fingertips; hence, a tiny slack from our part could incur huge chaos. Well, managing risk is not plain sailing! It splits into two phases:

1. Risk Analysis (*when the risks are first identified*) and,
2. Risk management (*the ongoing actions taken to deal with them*).

Running alongside the above are the ongoing recording and updating of the risks in the Risk Log. (I have devoted a fully-fledged chapter on Risk management in my upcoming book, "Simplifying Project Management and mitigating Risk."

Four Eyes Principle

I abbreviated R.I.S.K as **R**educing **I**nsecurities by **S**haring **K**nowledge. To minimize risks, I love to follow the four eyes principle. Why not add a fresh pair of eyes to tricky situations at hand? This principle requires that two individuals approve action before it can be taken. Although the four eyes principle adds an extra element of security to any decision-making process, its effectiveness relies upon the ability, integrity, and diligence of the individuals involved.

The DuPont Crisis Management plan

A good example of a company that used this principle to strong effect is DuPont in October 2008. DuPont CEO Chad Holliday called his top executives together and asked them to investigate what effect the problems on Wall Street might have on the company. Their predictions were serious enough. To immunize the company to hold its ground during the foreseen crisis, Holliday charted out DuPont's Corporate Crisis Management plan. This plan is designed to help company executives assess the root of a problem, put measures/processes/action items in place to

shield the company from the economic blow, and inform/educate employees on their role in withstanding the issue. In this case, strategic cash flow and savings plans were put in place very quickly to help the company weather the storm. Bravo!

Transparency - In general, transparency means clear communication, openness, and accountability. Coupling transparency with risk assessment enhances the ability to co-develop trust. These days, it is no wonder that we see “consumer bills of rights” so often. Consumers/business partners must trust the firms with which they engage in co-creation. The smart motto for SEWA is fast becoming “When in doubt, disclose.”

4. Continuous Improvement - Continuous improvement is an ongoing effort to improve products, services, or processes. These efforts can seek “incremental” improvements over time or “breakthrough” improvement all at once. The lesson is to not to be afraid to adjust our approach. One of the most frequently used tools for continuous improvement in SEWA is **Plan-Do-Check-Act (PDCA)**.

Undoubtedly, it was ushering results par excellence. The employees were getting more confident about implementing PDCA in each and every walk of their work. Below is a simplified version of PDCA:

- Review what’s happened.
- Modify your approach.
- Adjust your plan.
- Monitor and repeat.

Hence, PDCA was extensively used in the organization. Now, I was looking for another handy tool that would give a fresh look to the situation at this stage of the turnaround.

Around this time, I happened to have a meeting with my quality auditors in which I remember mentioning a powerful management tool that

provides a structured approach to questioning the performance of an organization. This approach is called the RADAR. After holding this meeting, I said to myself, *The time has come*. Immediately, I logged into the website of the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) to see if there had been any new revisions to the existing tool.

If you are unsure what this tool is all about, I have compacted it for you below. And for the rest of you, I have also included a quick recap.

The RADAR

I believe that complying with a defined standard is not excellence. Rather, excellence is about going beyond what is expected. The European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) excellence model “RADAR”. It is tool that can help present an organization to go beyond expectations. The model below gives you a clearer understanding:

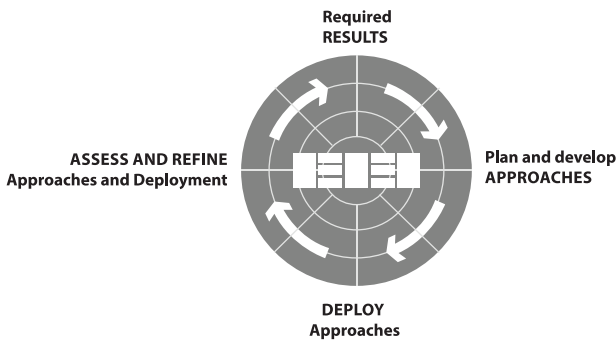


Figure 7.4 The RADAR

The RADAR logic is a dynamic assessment framework and powerful management tool that provides a structured approach to questioning the performance of an organization. At the highest level, Radar logic states that an organization should:

- Determine the *Results* it is aiming to achieve as part of its strategy.

- Plan and develop an integrated set of sound *Approaches* to deliver the required results both now and in the future.
- *Deploy* the approaches in a systematic way to ensure implementation.
- *Assess* and *Refine* the deployed approaches based on the monitoring and analysis of the results achieved and on-going learning activities.



Now let me share with you some successful co-operation and co-creation stories between SEWA and its global partners.

Fly High

On May 1, 2017, SEWA's Peak Hour initiative was propagated/aggrandized on Air Arabia airline's Air Bus. I would mention a token of appreciation to Mr. Adel Ali, the group CEO of Air Arabia for collaborating and co-creating with us in this joint venture. He is well-known for being at the forefront of the airline's development and managed to transform Arab aviation by setting up Air Arabia as the first low-cost carrier in the Middle East and North Africa.

Co-Create with GE

On February 27, 2017, SEWA and GE signed an MOU stating that both the parties were mutually interested in the development of a combined-cycle thermal power plant of up to 1.5 Giga Watt (GW) in Hamriyah in the Emirate of Sharjah. This thermal power plant would use advanced technologies, which may include GE's 9H technology, which has been recognized by Guinness World Records for powering the world's most efficient combined-cycle power plant based on an achieved efficiency rate.

GE showed its commitment to developing Sharjah's local talent by building both technical and leadership skills and will also work with SEWA to identify the opportunities to achieve this goal.

Co-Create with VITO

On the same day February 27, 2017 another MOU was signed between SEWA and VITO's Dr Walter J. R. Buydens CEO VITO Middle East LLC on (i) Promoting the concept of sustainability and sustainable development; (ii) Harvesting the waters of the Arabian Gulf in an effective and pollution-avoiding fashion; and (iii) Improving the electricity distribution of SEWA.

Technovation with Wipro

On April, 2, 2017, I met Mr. Pandurang Desai, Vice President and Business Head of Wipro Middle East. We signed an agreement to work together in the application of advance technology in SEWA's arena to help understand our customers' pain-points and innovate together in the quest for solutions to meet the 'unmet' needs.

During the meeting, Mr. Desai mentioned Wipro's Technovation Center. I was quite intrigued by it and got to know that the center is a unique tech hub that showcases the impact of future technologies on changing business processes and consumer buying behavior. The center delivers personalized experiences using immersive technologies, such as voice, touch, and gesture computing.

Innovative Solutions with Oxford Flow

On May 21, 2017, SEWA signed an MOU with Oxford Flow, UK, a commercial supplier of highly innovative technologies, developed at the world leading Oxford University in Techno Park. The MOU was signed with the intention of working together to develop the next generation of network management technologies. We intended to work together to pilot these innovative technologies in the SEWA water and

gas distribution networks. We intended to share information in pressure management in water distribution, and Oxford Flow was invited to supply the pressure reducing valves to meet the pilot specification.

This was a feather in SEWA's cap and showed our determination to walk on the path of glocalization. We reached out to the world. I can declare at this stage of the turnaround, that we have global partners and we are on the right path to be recognized as a global brand.





THE GREEN GIANT

I will begin this chapter with a quote by the Late His Highness Sheikh Zayed Bin Sultan Al Nahyan, the founder of the UAE: “Future generations will be living in a world that is very different from that which we are accustomed to. It is essential that we prepare ourselves and our children for that new world.”

One question I often hear is: “How do we ensure that sustainability remains engrained in the organization after the CEO or the Sustainability officer leaves?” In the last decade, sustained growth has become an increasingly integral part of doing business in any industry, especially after the release of the 17 global goals for sustainable development by the UN in September 2015. For companies to balance their financial, social, and environmental risks, as well as their obligations and opportunities, sustainability must move from being an add-on to just the way we do things around here. Unilever, for example, has found that its sustainable living brands are growing 30 % faster than the rest of its business, and in 2015, they delivered nearly half the company’s total growth. Yet, it’s a shame to see most business leaders lacking a clear understanding of it.

According to a Harvard Business Review article, companies that merge their business goals with sustainable development are grouped under a new breed of companies known as inclusive innovators.

A Legacy to be Created

In my book, *Sustainability: The Fourth Wave of Economy* I emphasized the clean and green economy and reiterated the dire need of basing innovation on the triple helix: People-Profit-Planet. The book urges the readers to create a sustainable and inclusive economy through corporate social responsibility and accountability.

The book was a breakthrough in itself because it touched upon the topic of the century—sustainability. Only a handful of people had heard of sustainability at the time. As funny as it may sound, I felt as if I had coined a new term to be added in the dictionary. Despite being a small book with just over 170 pages, the book gained much popularity, probably because the well-articulated content could touch readers' hearts and became ingrained in their minds. Due to public demand, I had to go for a second version of the book and this time the book had the privilege to have a foreword written by late His Excellency S.R. Nathan, late President of the Republic of Singapore, who was also a great friend.

But for a social activist like me, sustainability was not just restricted to the environment. My purpose is to integrate social and economic considerations into the objectives of the organization. I have strived to achieve this throughout my working life, all the way from the Sharjah Charity days back in 1995 to SEWA till date.

Iconoclastic Leadership

I underwent an inner journey; a journey that would strengthen my mission, changing the course to a sustainable strategy and permanently alter how the world sees us. It was time to spread my wings and unveil some of mine unique leadership muscle that I haven't stretched so far—it was time to flex those muscles!

Big deal, you may say. All great leaders showcase pretty unique leadership genetic make-up. However, worry not, for I listed down the salient traits that all sustainably strong business leaders possess (or should possess).

I unearthed these traits in E. Freya Williams's wonderful book, *Green Giant* while I was on a long-haul flight to Singapore to be the keynote speaker in the 10th edition of Singapore International Energy Week (SIEW) held on October 23, 2017. The book listed four dynamic qualities of being an Iconoclastic leader. The qualities rang true to me and I remember etching them down on my pocket notepad so that I could include them in this book's manuscript. I was so moved by the author's viewpoint that the moment I checked in the hotel suite, I took out my laptop and added the following 4Cs of Iconoclastic leaders.

Salient Trait #1: Conviction

These leaders are so self-motivated by an inner sense of conviction that they need to take things head on. This often stems from an internal personal transformation, and in some cases, conversion.

Salient Trait # 2: Courage

They portray the courage to stand up and make change happen—change things (often dramatically), often in a way that seems counterintuitive or risky to colleagues or shareholder. I call it being in a playing-with-fire mode.

Salient Trait # 3: Commitment

They are whole-heartedly committed to their idea(s) through thick and thin. They are tenacious enough not to give up on their idea(s) through mountainous objections, obstacles, or hindrances. I feel that bring it on is their pet word.

Salient Trait # 4: Contrarian

Yes, you read it right—they thrive on espousing different view from everyone else. They love to be challenged and debated. They happily contradict the status quo and perceive things from opposite aspect ratio, but they are constructive contrarians and not hard-nosed ones.

Hence, I allowed myself, like a sponge, to absorb every bit of the above-mentioned characteristics. Doing this, I must confess that I dared to envision, shape, own, and drive my organization through a green giant strategy. I can even recall affirming myself that, *I am very positive*

about it. I absolutely believe I can make it happen. And I visualized it happening in my mind's eye from inception to execution. As they say, it starts in your mind, and from there, your thoughts take a physical form through your action. Believing is necessary. As the saying goes, “Whatever the mind conceives and believes, the mind can achieve.”



SEWA Brand Energy Blueprint

Buoyed by successful co-creation statistics, I created the SEWA Green Council Research & Development arm to look into sustainable initiatives/ideas. I cherry-picked employees from our Climate and Planet Stewardship program to be active members of the council. These were the top-five performers who had been honored with the following creative job titles: Chief Sustainovation officer, Chief Greenification officer, Chief Efficienology officer, SHEngineer, and Chief Solargy Officer. They provided ample support and encouragement to the newly formed council.

The formation of the council was a turning point for all of us. One of the early meetings of the council was held at an external venue, *Radisson BLU Resorts*, which is just a stone's throw away from the SEWA HQ, and where some of our annual meets and events are conducted. On that day, I had called for a brainstorming committee to lay down the roadmap for the next 3-5 years of SEWA's Greenification efforts.

I stood up and said, “Like most SEWA strategies, this one is rooted in simplicity, too. We can begin by answering a few questions.” I handed them out a questionnaire comprising five questions. The team got a bit startled; perhaps they were expecting a buzzing brainstorming session. Upon reading their minds, I said, “Jack Welch puts it right; good business leaders create a vision, articulate the vision, passionately own the vision, and relentlessly drive it to completion.”

“Let’s be action-centered!” I commented again.

The questionnaire consisted of four open-ended questions along with four broad themes. I have summarized it below:

Global Vision - I asked the team, “What impact do we want our business to make in the world?” The Chief Greenification Officer raised her hand to answer. She said, “We want to be among the best, most authentic organizations in the world.”

“Bravo, for the prompt answer,” I replied.

Purpose - I posed the next question, “How do we want our customers to feel?”

The sustainovation officer quipped, “We need to enhance our customer’s emotional value and keep them engaged. We need to delight them, at every touchpoint, thereby turning their moments of misery into moments of magic.”

Impressed with her smart answer, I applauded her in public. “Well said! Give her a huge round of applause.” I announced, looking at the rest of the team. I felt proud to have employees wherein dedication to serving the community runs in their blood.

I then moved on to the third question.

Values - “Answering this question is as easy as pie.” I said smilingly. “What is it?” they exclaimed together.

In a reassured tone, I replied, “Here’s the million dollar question; what values will fuel and keep our brand energy strong?”

As expected, the SHEngineer replied in a single breath, “None other than SEWA’s 11 cultural core values will sustain our brand energy.”

“Bingo! I am proud of you, young lady,” I praised her.

“Now, let’s see who can answer the next question. This one is a bit tricky, so be attentive,” I cautioned everyone.

Personality - “What type of connection do we want to make with our customers?” I inquired.

Silence prevailed.

Unsure of the right answer, the team members murmured among themselves. I thought of lending them a helping hand. Dropping a cue, I asked, “Who remembers our mission statement?”

In a spur of the moment, they echoed, “To be the region’s best utility organization by offering affordable, reliable, and accessible energy and water and providing a world-class service so that we satisfy every customer.”

I was bowled over by the answer. “Bravo, you have hit the spot. You’ve swept me off my feet. Keep up this spirit green team. Now you are primed to plunge into SEWA’s green giant project. Let’s bring SEWA’s ecomagination statement to life,” I said, thrilled to bits. I continued, “Let’s begin with the first assignment on SEWA’s Green Giant mission—*Green Computing*.”

I turned to my Chief Efficienology Officer and asked her to log onto *technopedia.com* using her smartphone to look up the definition of green computing. Being a tech-savvy person, she immediately brought up an apt definition. She read aloud, “According to Technopedia, green computing is the environmentally responsible and eco-friendly use of computers and their resources. In broader terms, it is also defined as the study of designing, engineering, manufacturing, using, and disposing of computing devices in a way that reduces their environmental impact.”

CIA in SEWA

Don’t be bewildered! I am not talking about the Central Intelligence Agency—the United States premier agency providing global intelligence

and protecting America's national security. By CIA, I actually meant the CIA (Confidentiality, Integrity, and Availability) triad model. Upon accomplishing green computing, my next motif was to implement the CIA in SEWA. The following section gives you a sneak peek into the basics of this cybersecurity model.

The CIA model describes the three important goals of cybersecurity. The **C** stands for **confidentiality**. Cybersecurity requires privacy in data and information. Confidentiality is concerned with the viewing of data or information because if the wrong people see data or information that they are not authorized to see, many problems could arise.

The **I** in the CIA model stands for **integrity**. Cybersecurity requires us to feel safe that data transmitted, processed, and stored has not been changed from its original form either accidentally or maliciously. For example, if one bit of a message is changed, the whole message could change. Also, the whole message could be corrupted or unreadable.

The last letter—**A**—stands for **availability**. Availability guarantees that with all the cybersecurity measures in place for dealing with hardware, software, people, processes, and more, users who are authorized to do their job should be able to do so. It requires that authorized users should be able to access the resources they need to do their job with ease while ensuring that the system has full tolerance and load balancing in the event of cybersecurity incident or disaster.

• • • •

I disbanded the team by saying, "People make choices. Choices make history. You have done a great job so far. Now, put your heads together to conjure up innovative ideas under the theme of green innovative ideas for future. In a week's time, bring me a doable, actionable, and achievable project plan. Wear your CRITICAL thinking hats and toss-off some credible ideas to create history."

The team left the room brimming with enthusiasm, indomitable optimism, and can-do spirit. What followed next was SEWA's rich success stories in its path to be the region's *Green Giant*.

The rest of the chapter is a detailed account of our triumphant victories and how we controlled our destiny by the better understanding of the key trends affecting the global green economy.

Circular Economy—Made to be Made Again

First, I shifted my paradigm to a circular economy by looking beyond the current “take, make, and dispose” industrial model. The circular economy is restorative and regenerative by design. It heavily relies on system-wide innovation and aims to redefine products and services to design waste out while minimizing negative impacts. Nevertheless, it is underpinned by a transition to a renewable energy source, while the circular model also builds economic, natural, and social capital. This requires a change in perspective to allow us to re-design the way our economy works; that is, by designing products that can be “made to be made again” and powering the system with renewable energy. In so doing, the circular economy questions whether we can build a restorative economy through creativity and innovation.

Green Office

To infuse life to my objective, I brought forth the concept of Green Office, which is an initiative towards a green economy, in accordance with one of our 2020 Vision Pillars—*Planet*. We joined hands with top-notch global brands, such as DELL, HP, Kodak, and XEROX to support their sustainability principles towards zero waste in our offices—this is an ethical, cost-efficient and visionary approach that SEWA employs. This ensured that the end of the life-cycle of any equipment, devices, and gadgets is safely diverted to the landfill.

Did you know?

If you happen to visit the website called the *paperless project*, you'll be surprised to see the facts and figures of the environment and time optimization. The updated website states that 15% of an organization's revenues are spent creating, managing, and distributing documents, 60% of employee time is spent working with documents, 85% of business documents are in paper form, and the average document is printed 5 times. Without a doubt, SEWA was one such organization.

Thinking of the mountains of paper that the SEWA offices gathered every day gave me sleepless nights. I must admit here that my day usually started by de-cluttering my office desk, but in the end, it would be back to square one, buried in a paper-mountain.

Though I had signed an MOU with *Beeah*, to recycle the waste- paper SEWA generates every day, I realized that alone wasn't enough. I have to go to the grassroots level and focus on transforming the way SEWA was using papers.

Green Solution with Kodak Alaris

In an effort to go green and store/secure critical organization information and data, I signed an MOU with Kodak Alaris. They offered us a green solution related to the archival of documents at SEWA. This allowed greater access to documents since they were scanned, which would also decrease the reproduction of documents as the documents would be available digitally. This would minify the process for workers who regularly scan across departments to implement and use the information. Moreover, the green solution offered by Kodak Alaris would maintain security and capture business critical information. This was my effort to make SEWA go paperless.

I realized that reducing bulky paper was just the beginning of the payoff. Not only would switching to a paperless office increase workplace productivity, but it would also:

- Cut the costs of paper-related actions including copying and printing.
- Reduce/minimize less time spent searching for paper documentation.
- Refocus staff on other critical administrative tasks.

Regardless of the company size, I was confident that adapting an electronic content management method would streamline procedures throughout all departments.

Co-creation and collaboration with Kodak Alaris proved to be fruitful. In fact, they proposed an idea to conduct a case study on SEWA. Below is a snippet from the elaborate case study.

Case Study by Kodak Alaris

A part of the digital transformation effort was to digitize documents stored in the organization's various offices and warehouses over the past few decades to facilitate the easy retrieval of information.

SEWA currently has 30 Kodak Alaris high-volume production scanners in the centralized scanning center and across the various service centers. On average, SEWA has been scanning roughly 500,000 pages, which amount to approximately 100,000 documents having multiple pages per month using Kodak Alaris scanners.

Xerox..Welcome Onboard

My commitment towards the environment is intense. SEWA, being a utility that provides electricity, water, and natural gas to the city of Sharjah, does have an impact on the environment. Apart from the CO2 emissions and waste that we add to the environment due to the non-stop operation of our power-plants and the rest of transmission and network systems, we consume trees to print utility bills for the consumers.

Pondering our environmental impact, I decided to have Xerox conduct a gap analysis. Subsequently, I found that SEWA was consuming 600 trees annually to produce the bills. What a shame!

At that moment, I took the wise decision to move towards being a paperless organization. Immediately, I announced the initiative and asked my ITC department to take action and put it with effect from January 1, 2017.

Plant for Planet

Moreover, to give back what I could to the environment, I decided that SEWA employees would plant 600 trees instead. These trees would carry the names of the SEWA individuals who have contributed heavily to protecting the environment and fostered the spirit of “saving planet earth”. In their own unique way, owing to their commitment to the environment, they have volunteered to environmentally friendly practices.

Digital Banking Solution with Rakbank

Soon, we entered into a partnership with RAKBANK. This partnership would facilitate SEWA’s bill payment solution through the bank’s digital banking platform and other touch points for RAKBANK customers that live and have businesses in the emirates of Sharjah.

The SEWA bill payment service offered to the bank’s customers had currently been enhanced, allowing them to pay their bills through other touch points, such as Interactive Voice Response technology (IVR).

Geoffrey Stecyk, COO of RAKBANK, stated: “In line with the bank’s commitment to strengthen its digital banking services to customers, the partnerships with SEWA made a tedious task such as paying bills seamless. It helped us offer customers convenient, secure, and simple bill payment solutions through all the different touch points from the comfort of their own homes.”



SEWA Safety Passport

This is one of the innovative ideas that I introduced in SEWA in my early days. I saw this implemented in the *Unger* steel factory during my visit to Austria. I was so amazed by the idea that each employee working on-site was mandated to be aware of the basic health, environment, and safety norms. The workers were given Safety Passports that designated them with their respective duties. Hence, I thought about implementing a similar concept here too. Every day, hundreds of SEWA workers are on-site—sometimes on a tower, sometimes under a tunnel. Their safety is my top priority; hence, I made it one of SEWA’s top core values list.

The aim of the SEWA Safety Passport scheme is to ensure a basic knowledge of health, safety, and environment for all site personnel to enable them, after appropriate site induction, to work on-site more safely with a lower risk to themselves and others.

SEWA safety passports are similar to conventional passports as they both have a colored photo of the passport holder, name, age, qualification, as well as other credentials. The immigration pages of SEWA safety passports are stamped by the site safety engineers, thus ensuring that the passport holder is abiding by the safety rules. Now, the next question is, who holds the passport? Workers, Contractors, Project Managers, Construction Managers, Project Engineers, Supervisors, and others who need access to the site where construction work is going on.

Benefits of the Safety Passport

Adopting the passport as a site requirement is a practical step that can be taken to improve health and safety awareness and the actions of everyone working on a SEWA project. The passport, which is known as both a Safety, Health, Environment passport and among the staff and partners as a “SHE Passport,” is a course designed to ensure that all workers coming on site have a basic understanding of their health,

safety, and environmental responsibilities. The goal of the course is to improve safety performance and minimize accidents. Let's have a look at the other goals and objectives the passport aims to achieve:

- Understand how to do your job safely.
- Identify the reasons for on-site actions.
- Recognize the impact of your actions on yourself and others.
- Take personal responsibility for being safe.
- Become part of a positive safety culture.

Since the start of the scheme, more than 400 SHE Passports have been issued. SEWA Passports have been issued to contractors' personnel. There has been a significant reduction in near-miss incidents in every location where the passports had been implemented.

Green Collar

With concerns about the environment at an all-time high, green-collar jobs have become the hot new employment sector focusing on sustainability and conservation. This can range from renewable energy and energy efficiency to policy, design, and technological development. Some green-collar jobs also include environmental consultants.

At SEWA, or SEWA SHE, passport holders are also given the title of green-collar workers. Though I keep reminding each and every employee of SEWA that environment conservation is not restricted to only SEWA's conservation department and that it ought to be everybody's responsibility, SEWA green-collar workers directly promote environmental responsibility and accountability, and hence have a bigger role in the green efforts of SEWA.

R.E.S.P.E.C.T

Why do people fall victim to workplace hazards? I can argue that the vital reason is simply not respecting the workplace. Recently, I spotted a wall sticker during my city walk in Singapore, which had an acronym for the word respect. I immediately clicked a picture and sent it to Syeda, my Chief Knowledge Officer here. She got excited about it and shared it with the rest of my team. As expected, they all loved it and thought it would also fit well in SEWA. I have listed the acronym below:

Responsibility

Engagement

Strict Compliance

Performance

Execution

Communication

Teamwork

I made a mandate for my employees to R.E.S.P.E.C.T SEWA in each and every job that they carried out at different sites. I believed that this acronym could work wonders and save SEWA employees, especially onsite workers, from hazards that would earlier lead the day's work grind to a halt.

Clean, Green, and Blue

On January 19, 2017, H.E Cheong Ming Foong, the council-general of the Republic of Singapore in Dubai, paid me a visit and gifted me a book titled “Clean, Green and Blue” authored by Tan Yong Soon. During our official meeting, he said that I was quite popular as a *Sustainable* sustainability specialist. He appreciated my efforts to create an optimal business environment for sustainable growth, job creation, and innovation at SEWA.

The book that he gave me embodies Singapore's journey towards environmental and water sustainability. I was amazed by the council general's kind gesture and thoroughly enjoyed reading this enriching book.

Un-freeze to Re-freeze

At this point, you're probably thinking, "Wow, things got pretty attractive at SEWA all of a sudden." Well yes, you are somehow right. We discussed how SEWA was embracing "greening" in all walks of life and how we were reaping the benefits of our eco-friendly enterprises. In the coming chapters, I'll share how we paved the path for SEWA to be a built-to-last green organization.

SEWA was only just beginning to explore what is possible through changing the behavior of its customers. A humungous task, it required a lot of effort and energy. As mentioned in the opening section of the book, we have 160 nationalities living in Sharjah. We had to start by first unfreezing the old paradigm, and then introducing the change champions to re-freeze the new paradigm of a responsible way of living.

Primarily, I was looking at propagating environmental cultural change by involving the residents of Sharjah and changing their perception of sustainability, clean operations, and environmental protection. This required cultural re-education (un-freezing) and a mind-shift towards environmental methods of working and thinking so that this becomes an accepted normal way of working.

One of the significant un-freezing the old paradigm tools we used was "the SEWA SHE Model." This helped in integrating green practices into our mission, vision, and values.

HSE or SHE?

Usually, organizations have a designated **Health, Safety, and Environment (HSE)** department that is responsible for the observance and protection of occupational health and safety rules and regulations, along with environmental protection.

SEWA SHE Model

You must have known by now that SEWA has a *knack* for doing things differently. Thus, we renamed it the **S**afety, **H**ealth, and **E**nvironment (SHE) department and went further by assigning a young, talented woman as the manager of the department—Fatima—with the honorable title *SHEngineer*.

Fatima has been instrumental in preparing a unique safety, health, and environment model for SEWA. We named it the SHE-Model because it comprises five creatively-coined elements. Below is a short synopsis:

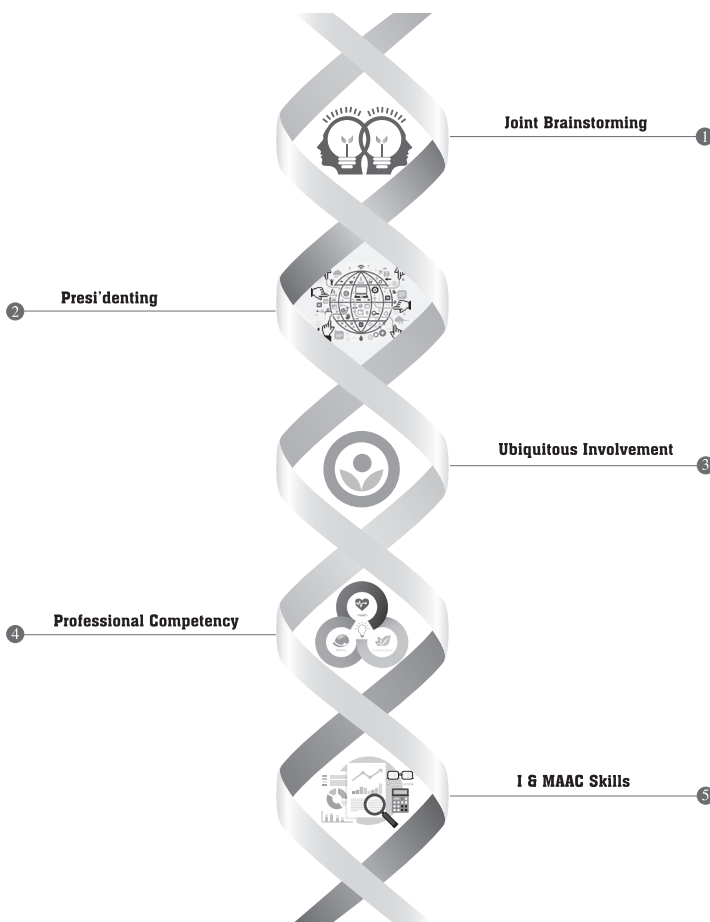


Figure 8.1 SEWA SHE Model

1. Joint Brainstorming - This enables outcome planning to reach a plan and facilitates the below actions:

- To plan clear and solid responsibilities regarding safety, health and, environment activities.
- Collaborative idea construction for the initiation of new SHE actions.

2. Ubiquitous Involvement (UI) - This means ever-present, continuously progressive involvement. UI concerns ensuring the presence of Health, Safety, and Environment in all the activities and simultaneous involvement that incorporated all of the SHE categories. Moreover, UI calls for reporting documents that adhere to the SHE laws and involve sections for safety, health, and environment.

UI expedites implementing on-site boards that summarize the manpower, fatality, first aid injury/illness cases, medical treatment cases, and near-misses on a daily basis. Moreover, the SHE officers are designated to inspect SHE-related rules and regulations on-site.

3. Presi'denting - This is a unique term coined by my SHEngineers. It's an amalgamation of two words: *president* and *denting*. President refers to mastering activities performed by the health, safety, and environment section, while denting means depressing the risks/accidents associated with the job performed. Presi'denting can be carried out by a qualified SHE Manager who would guide the actions and tasks of the SHE department and/or proficient employees, as well as the contractors, who are well-trained and hold the SEWA SHE Passports.

4. Professional Competency - This means complying with internationally accepted Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) in addition to international SHE standards and adhering to the UAE Federal law No. (8) of 1980.

5. I & MAAC Skills - This incorporates periodic Implementation, Management, Assessment, Auditing, and Controlling of SHE activities.

Taking precautions using corrective and preventive actions and ensuring compliance with standards and KPIs mentioned above.



Zero-Waste by 2020

May 25, 2017, was a significant day in SEWA's business milestones. On this day, SEWA signed a power-purchasing agreement for the landmark waste-to-energy project with Beeah. This decision supported the green economy strategy even though the cost of buying from the plant was 20% higher than the cost of the generation of electricity itself. It was decided that we would buy the electricity generated by the state-of-the-art waste-to-energy plant. With the completion of the new facility, Sharjah would become the first city in the Middle East to achieve a target of 100 percent diversion of waste from landfill. It is no exaggeration to say that this was a historic day for all of the UAE.

The agreement was a great milestone that would propel the realization of two main objectives of the UAE's National Agenda to raise the percentage of treated waste to 75 percent and increase the contribution of clean energy in the national energy mix to 27 percent.

SEWA's strategic vision was to grow its business whilst *decoupling* its environmental footprint from its growth and increasing its positive social impact.

The Global Clean Energy Ministerial Award

The Global Clean Energy Ministerial (CEM), a high-level global forum of 24 countries and the European Commission, promotes policies and programs to advance clean energy. CEM organized an awards program under the banner of Energy Management Working Group (EMWG), in which government officials worldwide collaborated to create high-impact national programs that accelerate the use of energy management

systems. The EMWG included representatives from Australia, Canada, Chile, China, Denmark, the European Commission, Finland, Germany, India, Indonesia, Japan, Mexico, the Republic of Korea, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Sweden, United Arab Emirates, and the United States.

The Energy Management Leadership Awards recognized organizations using an ISO 50001-certified energy management system. Nomination for participation in this award was done by the country's Ministry of Energy, and SEWA was the only government utility in UAE who participated in this award out of 32 participants globally. SEWA had received the 2017 Energy Management Insight Award, which recognized us as an ISO 50001-certified organization for providing a case study to share insights into the benefits of energy management systems.

It's a great pride to be recognized at such a globally recognized platform amongst great nations. And I could proudly say, "We made a history. We are global-shapers."

Green Buildings

We had the foresight for being a pioneer in the voluntary initiative of implementing the requirements of the Pearl Building Rating System (PBRs) in one of SEWA's new buildings. The aim of the Pearl Building Rating System is to promote the development of sustainable buildings and improve quality of life. The PBRs encourages water, energy, and waste minimization by using local materials. Also, it aims to improve supply chains for sustainable and recycled materials and products. The Abu Dhabi Urban Planning Council (UPC) congratulated us on our voluntary initiative and demonstration of commitment towards sustainability and have us a certificate of appreciation. This was a remarkable achievement for SEWA's green journey. As they say, "With great power comes great responsibility." SEWA is proud to demonstrate responsibility towards green building program.

SEWA Goes CNN

In December 2015, the world came together to sign the Paris Agreement—a global climate change agreement that laid the groundwork for a low-carbon future. In order to make that future a reality, companies, governments, and individuals must work together toward climate neutrality.

The United Nations Climate Change secretariat invites organizations to take the CNN pledge (Climate Neutral Now). The pledge represents a growing movement of companies and governments taking the lead in reducing emissions and contributing to accelerating the global journey to a climate-neutral future. SEWA being a utility that aspires to be a green giant took the pledge to:

- Measure our greenhouse gas emissions
- Reduce them as much as possible
- Report our greenhouse gas emissions

Why not start small? I thought to myself, so I decided to launch a pilot climate-neutral project with our *Zulal* water company. Immediately, I assembled a team of employees with the expertise and knack to protect the environment. I then gave them the task to focus on offsetting the carbon footprint of our water subsidiary. We have targeted measuring, managing, monitoring, and reporting the greenhouse emissions of Zulal yearly and publishing the findings, just the way we published our annual sustainability report.

This was a bold and unfamiliar move in this region. For sure, being transparent with our Corporate Social Responsibility and Accountability, had made us pioneers in the field, but did we succeed?

We became the first entity in the Middle East to have achieved UNFCCC's climate Neutral Now status! For example, At SEWA, we have worked continuously to reduce our GHG emissions over the years.

The majority of our operations utilize natural gas, which is a cleaner fuel, and in addition, we are investing in renewable energy, energy efficiency, reducing system losses etc.

Taking things a step forward, we joined the Climate Neutral Now initiative of the UNFCCC, which you can find out by logging into the SEWA website, www.sewa.gov.ae and getting a free download of both our sustainability report and a climate neutral report.

3.4M Gallons of Water Saved a Year

As part of the Green Energy Initiative organized by SEWA, in collaboration with the Sharjah Women's Association, a total of 3.4 million gallons of water, equivalent to US \$14,000 was saved. In addition, this initiative led to a significant reduction in power consumption by an average of 33 percent.

The initiative aimed at rationalization and the optimal use of energy and water in 30 houses and transforming them into archetypal examples for the rest of the city. The houses were provided with water rationalization devices that helped the families monitor their water consumption and take the necessary steps to reduce any waste.

World Energy Issues Survey

The world energy council selected SEWA among the best organizations for a world energy issues survey. The issues survey forms the basis for the world energy issues monitoring. The survey report presents a snapshot of how the energy landscape is perceived by energy leaders across the world. The Issues Monitor provides valuable analysis on emerging trends, issues that require priority action, and among energy leaders' major concerns.

The survey was targeted to capture SEWA's perception towards three key issues affecting the energy sector:

- **Impact** - How strongly do we perceive the potential impact of the issue (e.g., nuclear) to be on the energy sector in our country? This impact may be positive or negative.
- **Uncertainty** - How uncertain are we about the impact of the issue?
- **Urgency** - How soon do we think the energy sector in our country needs to react to the issue?

Pioneers in Sustainability Report

We proudly published our first sustainability report for the year 2016 under the theme of *sustainovation*. What makes this report unique? It is worth mentioning here that SEWA is the pioneer among all Sharjah Government entities in preparing a sustainability report. This was a great milestone achieved because it was the *first* and only ever sustainability report published in SEWA's history, and more precisely, the first ever in the history of Sharjah Government authorities.

The act of informing our stakeholders of SEWA's sustainability performance showed our commitment to the sustainable management of resources, the creation of economic value, the reduction of the environmental footprint, and the pursual of social development. The sustainability report was prepared as per the Global Reporting Initiative's (GRI) G4 sustainability reporting guideline while embracing the G4-18 principles.

Sustainability Innovation Award by Oracle World

I have devoted the last couple of years to studying and writing about my commitment to the 17 UN Global Goals, released in September 2015. I very happy and committed to those goals and I have written a book about them called, "I am committed," which covers the targets, facts, and figures about each goal and some of my personal stories. These 17

goals aim to transform the world. Here, I would like to draw attention to goal #9, which highlights “fostering innovation” as one of its key components.

I swell with pride to share with you that SEWA’s effort and partnership with Oracle over the years was recognized by Oracle World in San Francisco on September 30, 2017, when we were also presented with the Sustainability Innovation award for proactively embracing the new technologies and trends in the field of sustainability and circular economy. It was a remarkable step towards becoming a continuous, innovative, and learning organization.

The 100 most Sustainable CEOs

On October 11, 2017, the founder of The World CSR Day and World Sustainability, Dr. R.L Bhatia, listed me as one of the 100 most sustainable CEOs in the Middle East. This was a moment of immense happiness, pride, fulfillment, gratitude, and much more. I was speechless and could only be grateful to them for recognizing my efforts in the field of sustainability. I have been devoting relentless efforts in the attempt to make a change and trying to be the change agent.

The Global Green Ambassador

Under the patronage of the UAE Ministry of Energy, the Global Solar Leaders’ Summit took place on November 27, 2017, at the Dubai World Trade Centre as a part of The Big 5 Solar event. It was a new platform pursuing the escalating green demands in the GCC market. In a bid to reduce environmental impact and support sustainable development, SEWA was a strategic partner of this event and encouraged the adoption of solar technology at a community level.

I was invited to be the keynote speaker at this high-level conference and present SEWA’s sustainable plans to reduce environmental impact by

investing in clean technology and business innovation and developing solutions with our partners for a greener, more sustainable tomorrow.

To add to my excitement, I was bestowed with the title award of “The Global Green Ambassador”. Receiving this prestigious award was nothing short of amazing, and I was overwhelmed to see my efforts recognized and appreciated at the global level. Of course, there’s more to be done, more to dream, more to learn, and more to achieve in the field of solar energy. Nevertheless, receiving the award put me on cloud nine.

Voluntary Cancellation Certificate

The United Nations framework convention on climate change presented the voluntary cancellation certificate to SEWA on December 3, 2017. This certificate confirmed that 2.710 tonnes of CO₂ were offset by emission reductions (CERs) in the climate neutral now project.

This was a remarkable achievement for SEWA as this proved we were adhering to our vision pillars and taking massive steps to reduce our environmental footprint and greenhouse gas emissions.

It gives me immense pride and delight to see SEWA being recognized and glorified at international platforms. That is what I meant in my first speech at SEWA, back in April 2014 when I said, “I want to go global”. Back then, it seemed I was cracking a joke or trying to project an over-ambitious self-image to my people. However, I meant every word of my sentence. In fact, I had already visualized SEWA going global. And all the awards and achievements that you have read about so far are nothing but a manifestation of my visualization and intense belief in my team. Read on to find out another such dream-come-true story.

A strategy that can answer all the above questions is rare indeed. In next to no time, we discovered that we had begun developing a blueprint for our ultimate goal—becoming customer-centric. Our brand energy blueprint was consciously designed to strike the emotional chord of our

consumers. But the question is *how*? Where did we begin? What challenges did I face? Did I change the game or did the game change me? The next chapter has all the answers.

Peak Man

Yes, you read it right. Not Super Man, not Bat Man, but Peak Man. Do you want to meet him and know his super-cool characteristics? Just like other wonderful Disney characters, Peak Man is also an all-endearing iconic character of SEWA. Peak Man is a cartoon/animated character I created to capture the interest of kids and teach them the significance of eco-friendly practices.

But why?

It's an accepted fact that children are far more creative and imaginary than us adults, and what they learn in the early foundation stage of their childhood forms the basis of their future. I wanted to create a generation that is responsible towards its environment and the planet that we live in, and, as I have found, the best way to achieve this is to instill a love for environmental habits. Hence, Peak Man was born to do that job for me. Kids love animation and they admired our fun-loving Peak Man. He became their friends and taught them a lot about the sensible usage of our resources; namely, electricity, water, and gas. My conservation team visits schools along with Peak Man to spread awareness among the children in a fun and entertaining way. This is real edutainment!

With time, our Peak Man gained immense popularity. Apart from kids, it also grabbed publicity from regional and international media. He made headlines and appeared as Mascot at a number of SEWA's events.





BECOMING A CUSTOMER-CENTRIC ORGANIZATION

In this chapter, I will share my course of action to make SEWA a customer-facing brand associated with a high level of service and professionalism, while I will also provide insight into what it takes to sustain SEWA's brand identity to retain loyal customers.

Here's a piece of useful advice—this chapter is full of surprises and jaw-dropping stories. Here, you will meet some of the cardinal crew members of my SEWA Mars Team who were instrumental in implementing my customer-centric model. You'll be awe-struck to know how I stumbled upon them and how they befitted the daunting task appointed to them. Honestly speaking, this chapter is a book in itself. And to justify the efforts and excitement locked in this chapter, I thought it deserved to be an elaborated account. In case you want to know whether the SEWA Mars Team was rocketed to Mars or not, you'll have to wait for the fully-fledged book to be published. Don't worry, I have started working on it—that's the next big thing on my mind.

Hazy and Crazy

SEWA had embarked on the bandwagon of co-creating a green economy. Now, my next step was to make SEWA customer-centric rather than a product or price-centric organization. By customer-centric, I mean that the customer is the center of the universe; everything revolves around the customer. You can not become customer-centric until all parts of the organization passionately embrace the customer. While I was writing this chapter, I came across a very interesting quote said by Jerry Gregoire, CIO of DELL: “The customer experience is the next competitive battleground.”

“Seriously?” I exclaimed in response, “Then SEWA is absolutely in the wrong territory, and totally unarmed...What a challenge!”

During my initial days at SEWA, the major thing that gave me sleepless nights was SEWA’s poor customer service performance as it lacked both the management know-how and the deep pockets to ensure their success. Further, it was facing frustrated and unhappy customers round the clock. The comprehensive customer satisfaction survey, which was carried out at over 10 locations in SEWA with the help of a local, leading customer service organization called *Tasheel*, brought forth a very low satisfaction index compared to the industry trends. The situation was dire, and I feel the phrases used by John Bogle in his book “Enough” aptly describe my situation.

- “Too Much Cost, Not Enough Value.”
- “Too Much Complexity, Not Enough Simplicity.”
- “Too Much Counting, Not Enough Trust.”
- “Too Much Focus on Things, Not Enough Focus on Commitment.”
- “Too Many Twenty-first Century Values, Not Enough Eighteenth-Century Values.”

In my words, “It was completely hazy and crazy.”

SEWA Customer Journey Map

While writing this page, I swelled with pride because SEWA was undoubtedly the pioneer in the region to map its customer journey! Let's begin with (my favorite) definition: "A customer journey map tells the story of the customer's experience—from initial contact, through the process of engagement into a longer-term loyal relationship."

Mapping a customer's journey wasn't enough. To delight my customers and to wow and win them, I needed to create unforgettable, compassionate experiences that would not only meet and exceed their expectations but also advance my customer strategy.

Amidst all that craziness (and the futile effort to catch up on my sleep!), I decided to move beyond lip service and re-orientate the entire operational model of SEWA around the customer, which would thereby lead to increased customer satisfaction, and in short, build a customer-centric organization. It's an established truth that consumers have never been smarter than they are today as they have more information than ever before to help make decisions. Point taken!

Knowing well that the journey would *not* be an easy endeavor, customer expectations continued to increase, and my rational mind reminded me, *Rashid, things ain't getting any easier*. In the utility business, serving customers is one of the hardest parts of business, given its breadth and complexity. I had plenty of thoughts in my mind, all bidding to be put into effect. I lulled my mind by settling for two vital elements of customer experience management:

- (1) Standardization and Integration, and
- (2) Customer Service Promise/Pledge

1) Standardization and Integration

It's no surprise that customer experience management is a challenge for all organizations, however, aiming to be a cutting-edge organization, I wanted to place standardization and integration among people, processes, systems, and data at the heart of SEWA's customer experience management.

SEWA corporate governance facilitated transparency. As a result of my proposal, on January 22, 2015, His Highness Dr. Sheikh Sultan, the ruler of Sharjah, issued an executive order containing all our tariffs, charges, and commercial levies in a published book to our customers. This was the first time in the UAE that a utility had started an initiative likes this.

2) Customer Service Promise/Pledge

In order to deliver great customer service, SEWA pledges to provide its customers, stakeholders, and partners with services in the following manner:

- **Smile** - “Smile, You are at SEWA,” is our catchphrase/motto. We speak this universal language to imbibe passion for customers and will do what it takes to achieve excellence in customer experience.
- **Friendly and Courteous** - We will be welcoming, helpful, and pro-active with enthusiasm in our customer service efforts.
- **Timely and Responsive** - We will be prompt, showcase a can-do attitude, and take the initiative to try to anticipate our customers’ needs and wants.
- **Accurate and Consistent** - We will always aim for 100% accuracy and be compliant with the policies of SEWA Customer Service.
- **Accessible and Convenient** - We will continue to be affable and continue to simplify and continuously improve our procedures and policies to satisfy our customers.
- **Truthful and Transparent** - We will embed ethics and integrity as a core component of our processes. Also, we will foster a culture of honesty, clarity, and trust.

- **Resolution-mindset** - We will strive to resolve difficult situations calmly and effectively, and advance towards “zero pending complaints.”
- **Socially-Engaged** - We will embrace social media for customer engagement.
- **24/7 Listening Center** - We will assure round-the-clock communication management with our customers through our highly efficient, trained, and multi-lingual agents.

High Tech with High Touch

You may notice that I have used the word listening center instead of call center, and I can proudly quote here that SEWA is the only utility to have renamed its call center to a listening center. With this, I was able to balance the “high tech” with the “high touch,” thereby adding the human element to the monotonous province of customer experience.

The inspiration behind this ingenious initiative was Facebook COO Sheryl Sandberg’s recent conversation with Stanford University, in which she spoke about building your voice, not the brand. As Sandberg asserts, “If you are doing it to develop your personal brand, it’s empty and self-serving and not about what you’re talking about.” She continues, “If you’re doing it because there is something you want to see changed in the world, that’s where it will have value and depth and integrity.”

It is entirely possible for a call center to operate efficiently but *not* effectively. This paradox happens when organizations aim to meet customer’s expectations only; however, that’s just the tip of the iceberg. Real customer delight is achieved when you find the *sweet spot* by striking a balance between customer’s needs, wants, and expectations. My SEWA listening center serves this purpose. To avoid customers leaving frustrated, the role of the SEWA listening center is to ensure that each

of our customer's wants, needs, and expectations are met, and that the customer's voice is heard loud and clear. This is what we call "seeing through our ears."

Well Said!

You may have come across the phrase, "People always tell you what you do wrong, but they are hesitant to compliment you for the many things you do right." Well, here's an instance that would prove the statement wrong. In our 2nd Annual Partners Meet, held on July 19, 2017, Skyline University, one of our esteemed partners, was awarded the certificate of appreciation for doing a research case study on SEWA. Dr. Nadir Kolachi, the chairman of the Research and Case Study center, attended the event to receive the award.

The following day, he updated his LinkedIn profile with a dashing photo of ours and a great comment, which I couldn't stop myself from sharing it with you here. "His Excellency Dr. Rashid Alleem appreciated our efforts on writing the SEWA Case study. Dr. Rashid is a great example of a modern corporate executive. He reads to apply, he reads to search for the world's best models, and he reads to apprise people through his lectures around the world."

Thank you, Dr. Nadir, for your kind words. You proved that good work does get noticed and appreciated.

What's Next?

The SEWA customer pledge/promise delivered great rewards. The results were good enough at this stage, such as ensuring quick resolutions to customer issues, which, in turn, leads to decreased queuing and waiting time. We saw the *First call resolution (FCR)* metric moving from red to green in the performance dashboard for the first time ever. Eventually, lesser calls were abandoned or routed. Nevertheless, customers still went in circles and my listening center agents continued to pass the buck on customer issues.

Though I personally pledged the SEWA Customer promise, which gave me little peace of mind and laser-focus mindset, the question then was “How do you build a truly customer-centric organization?” Interesting question, isn’t it? Sometimes it takes creativity to ask an interesting question and it takes innovation and technology to answer them. Let’s experience the journey!

The Missing Piece

The idea of creating a SEWA customer-centric model was the answer. The model was where creativity met innovation and technology. The question posed above was my takeoff point towards creating effective customer experience management. After conducting intensive research and sifting through white papers, case studies, global best practices, and lessons-learned from mega-corps worldwide, as well as consulting great successful leaders and colleagues, I developed this model.

I found that mega-corps models are generally built on one of the trusted models, so I decided to go for it. Specifically, I referred to The Malcolm Baldrige Award Recipient’s innovative customer-focused practices and imbibed them within the SEWA spectrum. This became the missing link that would complete my vision of a truly great customer experience management. Prior to sharing my SEWA Customer-Centric Model, I would like to highlight the Malcolm Baldrige Award Winner’s best practices that inspired me. Have a look!

The Malcolm Baldrige Award Winners Practices:

- **Utilize Multiple Listening Methods:** The winners utilized multiple listening methods to understand customer requirements and capture customer perception of their company’s performance, as well track customer relationships and consumer trends.
- **Highly refined complaint management processes:** The winners use a closed-loop complaint management process—the process

begins and ends with the customer. The frontline employees handle customer complaints as they are communicated and focus on continuous improvement and performance measures.

- **Customer focus is demonstrated at all levels and cascades from the top:** Senior executives/leaders are the explicit guardians of customer service. Focus teams hold focus groups with customers to understand the need.

Bonding with Customers

Now, I felt it was high time to start bonding with customers. This was the proverbial Gulliver among the Lilliputians, and hence it called for my immediate attention. As I wanted to switch gears, I took a back seat and viewed the process from the customer's perspective. I wanted to get rid of the reactive, descriptive, and transactional past and evolve as proactive, energized, and progressive. You may be curious to know how I did. Though my way was distinctly un-SEWA-like, I felt this was the *desperate* need of the hour. The change had to be both incremental and revolutionary.

Transmodify SEWA

SEWA's core values stated having a passion for customers, but SEWA lacked an external radar that would align it with the same. Redesigning SEWA to put customers at the center was nightmarish, especially because the employees were highly diversified and change-resistant. Who cared about the customers! However, I declared to my employees that we had to take the onus to *transmodify* SEWA into a cutting-edge customer-centric organization. I could sense that they were scared to death. To be honest, so was I. Customer service was not our domain. SEWA is the only provider of electricity, water, and natural gas to the Sharjah residence. That was the be all and end all; as they had no choice, we enjoyed the monopoly.

To become customer-centric, we needed to train our customer-facing employees in the *art* of delighting the customers. Further, we needed to infuse in them proactive problem-solving skills, while we also needed to teach them to realize a sense of responsibility and accountability. We needed a lot.

I thought all my wisdom and logic would fail. We plunged ahead anyway and began with a customer journey map.

Pain Tax

I have learned a lot over the years, and most of the lessons were hard ones. As Bob Proctor thoughtfully points out, “Big failures big lessons, little failures little lessons.” Consequently, I have also had to pay my fair share of pain tax too.

Whether be it the creation of the SEWA project management model or the SEWA branding cycle, all have been revelations of the *Eureka* moment I had when I was pressed with towering issues.

SEWA Customer-Centric Model

It was 11 p.m. I was about to retire to bed to catch up with an early meeting next day. I still remember that moment with great clarity. While in deep slumber, in my subconscious sleep I heard people enthusiastically repeating what I’d been saying, and this was a validation that I was hitting the mark. I immediately sprung out of my bed, grabbed a double espresso shot, sat in my study, and grabbed my pen and a notebook. My hand could hardly keep up with the words that were rushing into my mind. After laying down the fundamental elements of the customer-centric model I felt a powerful sense of relief that I can’t explain even to this day. The very thought of creating the customer-centric model infused me with enthusiasm. I began by surfing through mega corps such as Amazon and Apple, which are well-known for keeping customers at the heart of their processes. I asked myself what they do, and more importantly, how they did it.

I always end up having the Eureka Effect—that sudden, unexpected realization of the solution to the problem I am grappling with.

Bingo, that’s it! My Eureka moment had arrived! I thought this was the time for creating another model that would become the nucleus of SEWA’s customer-centric roadmap. I told myself, *After all, profit is not why we are in business, we are in business to solve problems.*

The model depended heavily on the journey of the individual consumer across the SEWA services’ touchpoint.

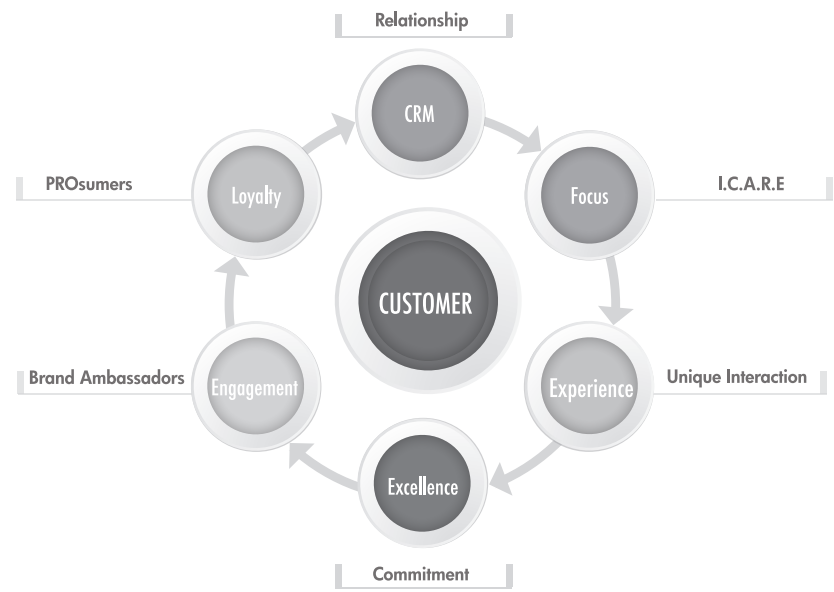


Figure 9.1 SEWA Customer-Centric Model

Obsess over Customers, not Competitors

Everything we do needs to make sense of what the customer needs, so we put customer in the middle of our “doughnut” and ensured that all our activities and resources are coordinated around our customer’s current and

future needs. Below is the infographic of the model I came up with to center SEWA on its customers. Listed below are the key strategic imperatives:

1. Customer Relationship Management (CRM)
2. Customer Focus
3. Customer Experience
4. Customer Excellence
5. Customer Engagement
6. Customer Loyalty

Key Strategic Imperative # 1: CRM

In business terms, Customer Relationship Management (CRM) is a term that refers to practices, strategies, and technologies that companies use to manage and analyze customer interactions and data throughout the customer lifecycle with the goal of improving business relationships with customers, assisting in customer retention, and driving sales growth. This definition fitted partly in SEWA's domain, though I replaced customer retention with customer delight and driving revenue and growth by driving innovation. Our SEWA CRM is the sum of the knowledge, experience, and trust SEWA has with its customers, employees, suppliers, and distribution partners.

The Building Blocks of SEWA CRM:

I. Solution Mindset

Becoming a customer-centric SEWA presupposed a fundamental shift in mindset from selling services to solving problems. By engaging our customers over and over to truly understand them, we were able to

transform *every* customer touchpoint into a memorable and delightful experience. Hence, we introduced three main communication tools: Communicate with SEWA Chairman, Round-the-clock toll-free service to customers, and Customer Happiness Index. Let's have a close look at each one.

Communicate with SEWA Chairman

To listen and learn from customers, have effective feedback mechanisms to capture complaints and gather general satisfaction data, and analyze this information regularly in a meaningful way to identify areas for improvement. Communicate with SEWA chairman was launched with the intention to achieve a 'zero-pending complaint' status.

This is one of many extraordinary initiatives that serves as a bridge between the outer world and SEWA. In fact, there's even more to it. What makes this initiative unique is that it paves the way for the community to contact me directly through our website. Using this portal, our consumers can register their suggestions, queries, and grievances, etc. at the click of a button. Then, my proactive team follows up each and every query to ensure that they are addressed within a designated timeline/timeframe. This helps me to *delight* my customers as well as crowdsource innovative ideas and translate them into services that deliver happiness and positivity at the highest level.

How many so far

The initiative was launched on May 31, 2016, and, as per the data comprising the entirety of 2017, 1258 queries were registered with 1201 resolved. The rest were directed to the concerned department to be resolved as soon as possible—hopefully by the time you finish reading this book!

This is what Mr. Eu Hong-Gay, Director of NuWater, Singapore commented, "Communicating with the SEWA chairman is unique for the one cardinal reason that, as most CEO's usually run away from complaints, here we have an unconventional chairman who openly welcomes complaints and other inputs."

Be Engaged

I urge my readers to touch base with me using the Communicate with SEWA Chairman Interface. Be engaged by reaching out to me from any part of the world by giving your ideas, suggestions, and views by visiting www.sewa.gov.ae. Let's collaborate. Let's co-create!

Seeing Through our Ears

This is a round-the-clock toll-free service to customers. Through this, SEWA practices seeing through our ears, which means we not only see the customer's issues superficially, but also what's behind the issue—the root cause. As a result, we created 800 SEWA.

Customer Happiness Index

Most of us have good reasons to be concerned with customer happiness; after all, no one wants to be connected with the bad guy. As a standard, our customer happiness index includes three core metrics that gauge overall happiness levels—satisfaction, loyalty, and propensity to recommend. They provide guidance on how to improve overall happiness by identifying the specific behaviors which have the greatest impact and measuring performance against these.

Benchmarking

I really wanted to move the needle. To exceed customer expectations and to keep the 'smile' intact, we started holding workshops with customer-facing employees to ensure they understand customer expectations and are properly equipped. This was done by using the benchmarking techniques. The objective of benchmarking is to find examples of superior performance and understand the processes and practices driving that performance. Companies then improve their performance by tailoring and incorporating these best practices into their own operations—not by imitating, but by innovating. This also involved discovering what the best performance being achieved was—whether in a particular company, by a competitor, or by an entirely different industry. In light of this, we came up with a checklist of organizations we would like to benchmark with, with Disney topping the charts.

Talking of exceptional experience, I am reminded of my recent visit to the Mall of Emirates, located in Dubai, UAE, where I had previously lost my car in the mall parking lot. However, this time the experience was completely different thanks to the new Smart Park Assist system that they introduced. It saved my day!

Smart Park Assist System

The Mall has developed a bright new solution for frazzled shoppers. To combat the problem of lost cars, the Mall of the Emirates has recently introduced the Park Assist system. Using innovative technology that incorporates M4 sensors and smart kiosks, Park Assist lets shoppers find their cars in seconds, thereby saving time and reducing stress for mallgoers. Mall visitors' first need to enter their car plate number in one of the several kiosks installed around the parking lot. Park Assist will then locate the car, take a photo of it, and display it on the kiosk screen so the visitor can confirm it is indeed their car that is being located. Once confirmed, a detailed map will show the exact location of the car.

The time saved by the Park Assist System is already boosting people's happiness, resulting from memorable experience.

II. Fit-For-Purpose Business Processes

The primary reason companies fail in their efforts to become customer-focused is organizational complexity. At SEWA, I decided to inject cost-effectiveness, trimmed the extraneous long-hauling processes, and uprooted the clunky rules/regulations/policies. Simplifying things is a sm(art) move, as is strictly assigning critical success factors (CSF) for the processes and embedding continuous improvement showcasing our principle # 13: *Foster a culture of continuous Improvement.*

III. Collective Effort

SEWA built linkages across its departments. The employees formed the "SEWA Family" Whatsapp group to stay connected and share/discuss their initiatives, etc. I am an active member of the group, where I share knowledge and solve customer's needs. I made it evident that employ-

ees at every level in every division will also need to deeply understand customer needs to make the end-to-end customer experience streamlined and satisfying.

SEWA 24/7 Listening Center

One of the great ideas that reached out to us through the Communicate with Chairman Portal was that our customers wanted a round-the-clock service. Hence, the idea was immediately fleshed out and a toll-free number-800 SEWA (around-the-clock service for all our customers) came into existence. Later on, I renamed the 24/7 call center to a Listening Center, as mentioned earlier in this book.

Are you wondering why I renamed the call center a listening center? This is because we follow the H.E.A.R.T principles to address any complaints. When handling customer complaints, we always have this principle with the acronym of H.E.A.R.T:

H – Hear them out

E – Empathize with the guest

A – Apologize

R – Respond

T – Take action immediately

That is H.E.A.R.T! We at SEWA will never give up on our pledge to delight all our customers and give them the best experience possible.

Chief Listening Officer

We created the listening center as a part of SEWA's customer service pledge, as well as to achieve the objectives of the listening center and sustain our theme. This allowed us to see through our ears, and to ensure that the listening center seamlessly functions day in, day out, we appointed a Chief Listening Officer to lend a patient ear to all our customers with a resolution-mindset. I appointed a Chief Listening

Officer—Shareef. He pays undivided attention to the customer complaints adhering to ISO 10002:2014 and manages the processes that help us to handle customer complaints more effectively and efficiently, making sure that more customers are satisfied with the service we provide.

We created a unique checklist that helped us shape our pledge to customer service. It's a five-step guide for being an active listener:

1. **Pay Attention** - To acknowledge what the customers are saying.
2. **Show you're Listening** - Use positive body language and friendly gestures.
3. **Show you Understand** - To validate the customer concerns/issues.
4. **Don't Interrupt** - Don't curtail customers talking by an untimely intrusion.
5. **Respond** - To be open and honest in your response; treat the other person sensitively and appropriately.

Why Listening to Your Customers Matters

Michael Dell, founder of Dell Computers, once said that his organization's three golden rules are: "Disdain inventory, listen to customers, and never sell indirect." Critical among these is listening to the customer. It is important to emphasize here that, even in syndicates like DELL, listening closely to customers and responding in real time to their needs and wants is vital.

I designated my Chief Listening Officer to meet face-to-face with global and large commercial customers regularly. We use various mechanisms to keep close contact with these customers and what they want by organizing events such as *SEWA Energy Meet*, *SEWA Bankers Meet*, *SEWA Partners Meet*, and *SEWA Business and Media Meet*.

Empathize with Customers

Solving customer complaints is one of my top priorities. Hence, we delve deep into our customer shoes and empathize (the ability to understand and share the feelings of another) with them. My chief listening officer and the listening center team empathize by following some crisp steps:

- a) **Interview** - Have thoughtful conversations with customer(s) and understand them through their stories.
- b) **Observe** - I always suggest that my team should, “Be a fly on the wall around the customer.” This doesn’t mean bothering them or pestering them, but rather carefully observing customers experience.
- c) **Immerse** - Become a customer yourself by experiencing life in the shoes of the customer. Immersion enables us to experience first-hand what it’s like to be a user. It is an excellent method of identifying the user’s tacit feelings/needs.

Right from the outset, I had advised SEWA’s chief listening officer to find out the prominent reasons for our customers’ frustration. After a few weeks, he came with a long *sulking* face and a longer customer frustration list. I was horror struck! Here are some reasons that topped the frustration list:

- Having to communicate with SEWA multiple times for the same reason.
- Long wait times.
- Impolite customer representatives.
- Having customer representatives claim one thing and deliver another.

The list continued...

I realized that having only a chief listening officer will not suffice. It needs a host of well-armed and dedicated employees to eliminate the above-mentioned experiences. I said to myself, *Rashid, be ready for a full-time job.*

Hence, I decided to appoint a *Chief Service Officer* as an aide to clear up the fog of disappointment in our customer's mind. Immediately, I rang up my HR recruitment officer and asked him to line up an interview for the same. After days of scrutinizing potential candidates, I finally found one. Want to know more about him? Read on.

IV. Chief Service Officer

I appointed a resourceful, service-minded employee and designated him as Chief Service Officer (CSO). The CSO is typically responsible for developing processes and tools, both internally and externally, to give all customers the maximum value through an intelligent and efficient use of resources. His top job was to understand and remediate the largest root causes of dissatisfaction and frustration among our customers. This typically involved identifying *toxic* service interactions and trouble-shooting them right away.

By now, we were listening to our customer's needs and wants. We were also solving customer friction, and had begun to provide them spectacular seamless services at every interaction point/touchpoint.

During this phase, I remember having a meeting with my CSO to discuss the challenges he was facing in his role and his contribution. I could see a ray of sunshine break through the dark clouds of doubt. Now was the time to put customers at the center of our universe and move on to gain customer loyalty.



Key Strategic Imperative # 2: Customer Focus

Almost half a century ago, Mahatma Gandhi stated a fact that is still relevant today. According to him, “A customer is the most important visitor on our premises; he is not dependent on us. We are dependent on him. He is not an interruption in our work; he is the purpose of it. He is not an outsider in our business; he is a part of it. We are not doing him a favor by serving him. He is doing us a favor by giving us an opportunity to do so.”

As mentioned earlier, SEWA is successfully qualified for four ISO certifications. This element of SEWA’s customer-centric model was in alignment with ISO 9001, which is underpinned by the 8 Principles of Quality Management. Just as you’d expect, customer focus is the first principle—just where it should be.

The second Key Strategic Imperative covers both customer needs and customer service. It stresses that a business should understand their customers, as well as what they need and when, whilst trying to meet, but preferably exceed, customers’ expectations.

As a result, customer loyalty increases, revenue rises, and waste reduces as a business’ ability to spot new customer opportunities and satisfy them improves. More effective processes result in improved customer satisfaction. The orientation of an organization toward serving its clients’ needs and wants. Having a customer focus is usually a strong contributor to the overall success of a business and involves ensuring that all aspects of the company put its customers’ satisfaction first.

Visible, Customer-Focused Leadership

Having clear leadership from the top that articulates what customer-centricity means to your business, and what it looks like in practice, is critical to creating a customer-centric organization. I did this by empowering top executives to own the customer journey, from initial contact through to final resolution.

I wanted to leave no stone unturned. As is evident, our customer base was a mixed bag. Some would prefer to pay their bills online, whereas

some would physically drive to lodge a complaint, and there was this huge bracket of suppliers, partners, vendors, etc., who would pay us (surprise) visits quite often. Sounds a bit slippery? I admit here that providing a unique experience to these diversified customers was grueling.

We needed a Chief Customer Officer.

Chief Customer Officer

I appointed a Chief Customer Officer (CCO) to be responsible for a customer-centric SEWA and to maintain a total relationship with my organization's customers. Though this position is relatively new in this part of the world, I introduced it to provide a single vision across all methods of customer contact and *wow* our customers with service excellence.

The CCO was in charge of managing the walk-in customers. As for the irate and angry customer, we had appointed a chief listening officer who had mastered the art of informal water-cooler conversations, resolved customer pain-points, and communicated with the SEWA chairman about serving the *digital* customers. This is what I call, a real deal in showcasing customer-focused leadership.

It's done ... Now, Tell Me What's Your Concern?

As a customer-focused leader, I was convinced that to meet the demands of prosumers, we have to be proactive, which meant infusing the spirit of wanting to serve more in my employees. Many times, without hesitation, I have reached out to a dissatisfied customer and used the *Arabic* sense of humanity and said, "It's done...now, tell me what your concern is?" This magic line immediately spreads smiles and eases tensions.

I realized this gesture from my end also helped to shape our brand image. Since then, I have continued to personally intervene to make sure the needs of the customers and prosumers are surpassed each and every day.



Key Strategic Imperative # 3: Customer Experience

The customer experience needs to be positive at all points of contact along the way, with consistency, every single time! In so doing, you have a brand that lives and grows *emotionally* with people. Our exceptional customer experience pillar was built on two fundamentals:

- (1) Late Steve Jobs Customer experience philosophy and,
- (2) Disney's I.C.A.R.E Model.

Jobs Customer Experience Philosophy

Where other industry leaders idealized a “hard business head” as the key to success, Jobs insisted on demonstrating the superiority of “passion, taste, and belief.” With this value system, Jobs engaged anyone and everyone whose lives were touched by Apple—from his senior leadership to his customers. Below is a glimpse of his philosophy.

Create insanely great experiences - Jobs was (mostly) a lateral thinker. However, lateral thinking is best suited for those knotty problems that serve up “Catch 22” situations (you can’t get X unless you first get Y, but you can’t get Y unless you get X first!) This is when you stop examining the alternative solutions and start examining the problem itself. He believed that lateral thinkers don’t wear blinkers! Taking a cue from Steve Jobs innovation secrets, we innovated the customer experience by benchmarking the very best model for customer service.

Jobs didn’t choose to look at his competitors; he had a larger vision of what a consumer experience might look like in a retail store selling computers. He out-did his competitors by deciding on a blue ocean strategy, which is what I also imbibe in my professional life. Sometimes we tend to make decision-making much harder than it needs to be because we are clinging to pre-conceived ideas. Such ideas are incredibly difficult to uproot, like old habits that die hard. Instead, often the best move may be to widen our range of options. How? Click on the ‘drop down menu’ in our mind and examine whether there are options we may have overlooked.

So, rather than haggling with competitors, why not choose to create a competitive advantage. SEWA did it by choosing to create an insanely great customer experience for every customer, every time.

Disney's I.C.A.R.E Model

I couldn't agree more! While I rolled up my sleeve to write this paragraph, I remembered reading a book titled, "The Experience," which I had bought long ago. Back then the book had enthused me in many ways (and it continues to do so), simply because it unravels the puissant ways for any organization to become customer oriented. I immediately, rushed towards my bookshelf in the house, looking for it among my treasure chest of hundreds of books, it felt like I was on a treasure hunt searching for gold. After a while, I tracked down the book. "Bingo! I found you. I cared about you over the years, now you care about me," I said.

I.C.A.R.E is my second customer experience pillar. Below is the brief of the well-known acronym: I.C.A.R.E.

'I.C.A.R.E' Principles, adapted from the book "The Experience" written by Bruce Loeffler and Brian T. Church.

I. - Impression: The first and the last imprint on people's mind; this is the catalyst to building a great relationship.

C. - Connection: The pivotal point between contact and relationship. Striking the right chord to convert clients and customers from consumers to Ambassadors (those on a mission to tell the world specifically about you). All this rests upon the ability to create a deep/intellectual, emotional, and personal connection.

A. - Attitude: Attitude is the lens through which you see the world. It's the outlet of the outer expression of your inner feelings. It's the manifesto of everything you think, say, and eventually do.

R. - Response: The hallmark of customer service and an exceptional experience is the response. The motto of service is to respond and not react. The crux lies in the response time, tone, and talent.

E. - Exceptionals: The management team and employees must be prepared, empowered, and endowed to have the exceptional experience living and breathing within them.

Job's philosophy and Disney's I.C.A.R.E can rev up even customer service laggards. When I applied I.C.A.R.E at SEWA, the outcomes were *extraordinaire*! The main idea was to offer the highest level of customer experience possible, thus creating brand ambassadors for SEWA. Here's a recommendation from me. If you make this a focus for your organization, you are one step closer to creating one dynamic, focused, and practical solution to what most companies are missing today: an exceptional experience.

Do you want to know how important listening to your customer is? Disney is a classic example here—Disney wants all of its customers to leave as happy as they arrived. But they were facing a problem, they realized that some visitors were unable to locate their car in such a large parking lot. As this was becoming a mounting issue, Disney set out to efficiently and effectively solve this problem. We all know how frustrating it can be when we are unable to locate our cars after a full day of fun in the sun, to such an extent that it can dampen our day's experience. Disney wants to ensure that our memorable stay at their theme parks remains just that. Hence, Disney created a system of chronology that works by one's arrival time which determines what lot you park your car. So, if you're lost in their massive parking lot, simply call for help from the many conspicuously-attired Disney staff. Tell them when you arrived at the park and you'll be at your car in no time. Disney understands that the total customer brand experience needs to be positive at every stage of the way. Wow! Now that's listening to customers and immediately addressing their changing concerns or needs.

So, to claim your seat at the heart of your customers, you must ensure their experience has the "wow factor." Read on to better understand what I'm talking about.

Customer Experience Lab

A *customer experience lab* (also referred as customer room) is a way for leaders, as well as other members of the organization, to really understand the customer experience(s). Whether this happens monthly, quarterly, or annually, it's one of the most robust and direct ways for a company to really see what their customers go through to interact with them. Not only does it engage leaders, but it also unifies their decision-making and creates an accountability forum.

I have been fascinated by this idea for quite some time now. And now, customer experience labs have become *en vogue* in the last couple of years. One organization that caught my attention in the field of gaining insights into customer's tastes and preferences is IBM—nicknamed the 'The Big Blue.'

IBM was among the first large brands to open a customer experience lab, which had three major goals:

1. **Enhanced customer insight:** The goal was to better predict individual customer behavior across multiple channels.
2. **Customer engagement:** This was about personalizing the experience and not delivering a one-size-fits-all CX to consumers during a time of increased personalization.
3. **Employee engagement:** Essentially, a greater involvement by employees in the processes of defining and reimagining different customer touch points.

Rational and Emotional Customer

Customer experience engages both sides of the brain. Hence, humans are both emotional and rational. We want good value and efficiency, but we also want to like and trust the companies we patronize. We want to feel good about ourselves when we do business with them. We'll put up with a less than perfect service if we feel that the people we're dealing with care about us, are trying hard, and will get there in the end.

SEWA had to deal with the rational and the emotional customers, and we knew the importance of satisfying both. Quite a task, eh!

To tackle this mixed bag of customers and provide my listening center staff a direction to handle these customers proficiently, I asked my chief customer officer, Mariam, to conduct a workshop with the team on Disney's *Guestology* (Disney's philosophy of customer service) Compass Model. The fact is that Disney's customer service is the gold standard for every business. In SEWA's case, the Disney's Guestology compass model showed the following:

North: Needs, or what the customer desires from the experience. Some needs are stated, but it is important to understand that many are not. For example, "I need to pay my electricity bill" might be one need.

West: Wants—the underlying objective or purpose of SEWA customers, whether stated, unstated, or perhaps not even fully recognized by them; for example, "I want a really positive and seamless experience from SEWA billing offices, that leaves me feeling good, relaxed, and in a positive mindset to go home."

South: Stereotypes, or preconceived notions, whether positive or negative, that customers have about the SEWA experience. A customer might believe there will be a long queue at the customer billing counter, or that the SEWA Customer Care & Billing (CC&B) software will not recognize my details.

East: Emotions that customers have or are likely to experience; for example, "I feel rushed and annoyed that this is so hard to deal with. I am exhausted by queuing up for so long."

The above workshop helped us to understand different types of customers. In fact, one fine day, my chief listening officer rushed to my office with some documents in his hand. His big smile and bright eyes hinted me that it got to be a great news. While handing over the documents to me, he said, "The points of the Disney compass helped me plan a

customer satisfaction program by identifying the emotional mindsets, wishes, and needs of our customers.” Then, he requested, “I need your approval to implement the plan.”

I quickly glanced through the plan and approved it immediately. Before he could utter a word, I said, “Go and bring your plan to life. You can thank me later.”

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Key Strategic Imperative # 4: Customer Excellence

My definition of customer excellence is 100% customer satisfaction, 100% of the time. We can never truly say that we have achieved excellence because it’s a journey, *not* a destination; the journey clearly requires a great deal of commitment on our behalf, but also from those who work with and for us. The starting point in this attempt to “rise above the norm” is to demonstrate a real commitment to that aim. I am in!

Demand-Driven

Just how did McDonald’s know that it was time to introduce salads and keep their stores open 24 hours per day? How did Apple know that consumers wanted “an intelligent, on-the-go personal assistant” (SIRI) to help assist in any and everything that a phone can do? The simple answer is that each of these companies deeply understood the facts, the content, and the economies of what the customers/consumers demanded. At SEWA, our study is similar; we drilled down and peeled off the layers of customer demand. How? We know that not all customers are equal.

The Challenge was how to transition from the existing traditional model to those that deliver “What customers Want” and knowing the customers’ needs better than anyone else. This started by asking a thought-provoking question: What Customers Want? The answer lied in The Five Fs of Customer Motivation.

1. **Functions:** How does the product or service meet their needs?
2. **Finance:** How will the purchase affect their overall financial situation, not just the price of the product or service, but also other savings?
3. **Freedom:** How convenient is it to purchase and use the product or service?
4. **Feelings:** How does the product or service make customers feel about themselves, and how does it affect and relate to their self-image?
5. **Future:** How will they deal with the product or service and company over time, whether support and service will be available?

Customers, of course, want benefits in all these areas, so we better be aware of how our product or service fulfills the entire range of their needs. But we need to remember that business, like life, has trade-offs, and we are not going to be able to do everything. So, we have to figure out in which of these areas our product and service excels—and which most motivates our customers—and concentrate on those.

So, we classify them into six categories: Major, Regular, Ad-hoc, One-off, Digital, and Abusive customers.

1. **Major Customers:** We treat them like *royalty*. (We give them exceptional service, or who I like to call “the red carpet treatment customers”).
2. **Regular Customers:** We make sure they get *good* service and take note of anything they say about our business. (We call them VIP customers).
3. **Ad-hoc Customers:** These customers buy from us every now and then (we mustn’t give them that much special treatment).
4. **One-off Customers:** These are people who have bought only *once* and are unlikely to buy from us again. (We don’t recommend spending much time on them).

5. **Digital Customers:** We don't know who they are, but they pop up from time to time. They are (mostly) impatient and demanding. They surface only when they are worried about a blackout or emergency interruption to their electricity or water supply. However, they are quite informed and easily pleased if tackled tactfully.
6. **Abusive Customers:** They are the nasty and notorious ones. They are the ones who go beyond angry to abusive mode, making life miserable for the entire listening center team. (Just let them go and ignore them). I call them red tape customers.

McDonald's is one of the good examples which deals with abusive customers tactfully. Here's what I witnessed first-hand at a McDonald's outlet in Singapore. I spotted a notice board addressed towards abusive customers. This is what the notice read:

Dear Customers,

We believe in fostering gracious behavior in our restaurants and creating a pleasant environment for both our guests and staff. Please treat our staff with respect and dignity. McDonald's reserves the right not to serve abusive customers.

That's a crystal clear message to all those notoriously abusive customers who throw tantrums at the drop of a hat.

SEWA Customer Happiness Centre

SEWA opened a new and sophisticated world-class happiness center to suit the aspirations of its customers and enhance their level of satisfaction. It is designed to receive clients/customers in a relaxed mood and atmosphere, away from the queuing lines. The center ensures that it receives customers with a smile and makes efforts to meet their requirements. It also has a library, containing some useful books in different languages.

Employees First

The reader may be wondering whether I have a half-baked knowledge of customer-centricity. What about the internal customers? The employees! Well, I take pride in the fact that I take the mental well-being and contentment of my employees seriously. As a matter of fact, that's the mettle I am made up of. I can't see people around me frowning and unhappy.

Primarily, organizations majorly focus on their external customers, such as partners, clients, profit-making consumers, and other such stakeholders. The employees are the last concern! At SEWA, we did it inside out. Employee happiness has secured the top position on my agenda since I joined SEWA, while I also introduced monthly gathering and progress meetings from the outset.

To become a holistic customer-centric organization, the next great initiative I took was appointing a Chief Happiness Officer.

Chief Happiness Officer

I didn't take on a Customer Happiness Officer (CHO) to win a bizarre competition to become the happiest company on Earth; I created this role to become as productive as possible. Our CHO was chosen from the HR department; in fact, he was our very own Saeed Al Qaseer, the HR manager, the one who is closest to all. He busied himself with diagnosing the emotional wellbeing of SEWA employees, as well as adjusting workplace policy and culture in order to create the conditions for happiness. This involves distributing surveys that measure satisfaction, leading workshops on everything from communication skills to mindfulness meditation, and generally diagnosing the office atmosphere.

SEWA Happiness Mailbox

Another notable initiative is the SEWA Happiness Mailbox. Ever heard of it? This is a great initiative, and it deserves an elaborate description. Employee engagement and contentment is at the heart of SEWA strategy and vision. As they say that employees are company's asset, I believe, it's true only if the employees are actively engaged. To ensure

just that, at every monthly employee gathering, the Chief Happiness Officer nominates a SEWA employee, from any department, who has actively spread happiness and positivity SEWA, which thus enhances employee engagement. This SEWA practice is close to my heart because engaged employees do meaningful work and have a clear understanding of how they can contribute to the company's mission, purpose, and strategic objectives. I personally hand over the key of happiness to the nominated employee who opens up the happiness mailbox containing some gifts and goody bags. This is one of the most-loved initiatives that works wonders to bring that "smile" on employees faces and help them aim towards a standard of excellence.



Key Strategic Imperative # 5: Customer Engagement

To create an exceptional relationship with its customers, I was determined to make SEWA a place where customers experience second-to-none service. As traditional marketing methods became less effective, customer engagement became the new *currency* by which SEWA aimed to measure its effectiveness.

The internet is replete with multiple definitions of customer engagement, which explain various strategies and models/frameworks to successfully implement customer engagement. I would share an explanation that rings true to me. Simply stated, customer engagement is the depth of the relationship a customer has with a brand.

Engage All Six Senses

I can recall walking the floors and repeating this sentence to all my customer-facing employees, "Services are external to the customers, and experiences are inherently personal, existing only in the minds of individuals who have been engaged on an emotional, intellectual, or even spiritual level. So, strive to engage all six senses."

To literally engage all the six senses of our customers, I planned to conduct a quick one-on-one with my customer-centric officers. It may have sounded unbelievable, but I proved that we can truly engage the sight, sound, touch, smell, taste, and intuition factors of a customer's overall experience. The key points taken from this meeting are listed below:

Sight - This is vital because about 70 percent of our body's sense receptors are located in our eyes. It's about targeting the visual means of customer connection. Interesting and colorful SEWA business models that decorated our walls were perfect for our customers, who were visual enthusiasts. The bright and eye-pleasing color created memory links that would last for years to come, leaving an indelible mark on those prone to "perceptual blindness."

Sound - Connecting with people who prefer an auditory experience. I installed a high-quality sound system to play calm, mood-enhancing music at all the customer touch-points. And to keep everything upbeat and positive, I encouraged my customer-centric officers and their team to avoid chatting over phones or about frowned-upon topics nearby customers.

Smell - Studies have shown that scent can have an effect on mood. Since the sense of smell is instrumental for the overall experience, we diffused the entire SEWA premises with pleasant air neutralizers, which the open, cross-ventilated offices always smell fresh and invigorating.

Taste - By taste, I mean the after-taste left behind in a customer's mind once they visit SEWA. It's the flavor of experience that lingers on, creating an ever-lasting impression. This fusion, between the initial impression of SEWA and their response, is what the word taste refers to.

Touch - If dealt with tactfully, this point of contact can do wonders. It's about touching the right chord of the customer's rational and emotional mind. A good customer experience can even touch their soul, and going that extra mile to serve them really helps. I advised my officer to find a sweet-spot between the two.

And, now the sixth sense;

Intuition - By engaging all the five senses, we reach the sixth—Intuition. This takes time and requires immense patience as it is aroused in mind. As I recommended my officers, “Unless you are successful with the above five senses, you would get nowhere near the sixth one, so give it your best shot right from the start.” At this level, you become more aware, which helps to improve relationships and galvanize collaboration.

So, dear readers, if you happen to visit SEWA, remember that you are a targeted guest. SEWA is looking to play with your senses and grab/engage your emotions in every possible (good) manner.

Chief Guestology Officer

So far, so good, I said to myself. *My customer-centric officers are doing quite well.* However, tackling the WOW! factor of exceeding customer expectations needed a special person. A well-known proverb rang in my head, “Horses for courses,” which means that different people are suited for different things. I was clear that I would require someone who had nailed the art of customer service and customer engagement.

Hiring a Chief Guestology Officer

I immediately posted a job opening on my LinkedIn profile and mentioned the below bullet points as the basic candidate requirements:

- Superlative face-to-face service.
- Understanding the needs, wants, as well as expectations of the customers.
- Paying close attention to every aspect of the customer experience and engagement.
- Analyzing that experience from the customer’s perspective—walk in the customer’s shoes.

As expected, my followers poured in questions enquiring about the details of the job. The title itself received thousands of hits and was liked by thousands of them. This was expected because Chief Guestology Officer was a novel and off-beat title. One of my followers commented, “It sounds unconventional and exotic.” Hearing these responses made me happy.

In addition, hundreds of CVs floated in my inbox. Candidates from completely contrasting industries also applied for the job. I even received CVs from the region’s best hotels and leading airline companies.

Well, this was to be expected.

I passed on the CVs to my HR department and asked them to shortlist the relevant candidates who would eventually go through a final round of selection through me.

Days passed, and weeks went by.

Almost a month later, the HR manager rang me up. I could sense that he was completely nonplussed and bewildered. Before I could greet him, he uttered, “His Excellency, you have put me in a stew for the last month.”

I laughed hysterically.

He continued, “Since the day you posted a job advertisement for the “Chief Guestology Officer” at SEWA, CVs have been pouring in from every possible corner of the world.”

SEWA Customer Engagement Hub

As we transitioned to a customer-centric organization, it was time to move from smart talk to smart action. I adapted a totally new breed of customer engagement technique. I worked elbow-to-elbow with my customer-centric officers and created *customer engagement hubs* all across SEWA branches, including the SEWA Head Office.

Our customer engagement hub office spaces were exclusive areas only to render specialized *human-to-human* experience to our customers. I believe the fact that customers don't quit the brands, they quit the *bad* experience they had with the brands. Literally speaking, I wanted my customers to be genuinely engaged with the SEWA brand as opposed to merely sleep-walking around because of having no alternative.

This initiative was completely unique and one-of-its-kind in the city. SEWA customers felt valued and this resulted in pronounced positive effects on our brand value. Internally, this initiative shaped up a culture that doesn't stymie SEWA customers, but instead engages them to work things out together.



Key Strategic Imperative # 6: Customer Loyalty

To me, customer loyalty runs hand-in-hand with emotions. Customer loyalty is the result of consistently positive emotional experiences, which turns customers into loyal advocates. For any good marketer, earning customer loyalty is achieving *nirvana*. I believe that to really win their loyalty, we need to simply solve their problems and delight them with our services and products.

But How?

I didn't want to lock people with absurd fine prints and contracts, for instance, which would only hurt SEWA's relationship with its customers in the long term. Therefore, I had to figure out what the customer really wants, what their aspirations are, and what's in their best interests.

The search of the answers to the above questions led me to an interesting story about *Amazon*: It's been said that Amazon, in the not-so-distant future, will send you two boxes every single week that you didn't order. The first box will be full of things that Amazon can predict you might want, while the second box will be empty, to be used to send

back the things you didn't actually want. As A.G. Lafley and Roger L. Martin argued in a recent issue of Harvard Business Review, "a brand's long-term performance is sustained not by offering customers the perfect choice but by offering them the easy one."

Wow! Amazon has plans to put customers in the driving seat! Can SEWA take some inspiration from Amazon? Yes, but if SEWA is moved to a state of loyalty, that cannot be done without loyalty strategy. Let's start by appointing a customer loyalty officer. Ever heard about this position?

Why do we need a Chief Loyalty Officer?

As mentioned earlier, I wanted SEWA's customers to be loyal to the brand and its products and services. However, the irony of this ambition started setting in when I asked who should shoulder the responsibility of this *mammoth* task. I started by asking, "Is there any marketing activity which is not done to make our customers loyal to our brand?" Any marketing activity should and will end up engaging our customer by either making that customer loyal or otherwise, whether it is branding, promotion, or research.

Hence, I made an intention of making our customers loyal, and infused all the 5 Ps (**P**rice, **P**roduct, **P**lace, **P**romotion, and **P**eople) of our marketing strategy, which should be the authoritative function of the Chief loyalty officer.

I vividly remember that there was huge unrest and bitterness in the organization when I decided to mix marketing with customer loyalty. I told myself, *Until I break down my company's internal walls, the external wall with customers will remain.*

Net Promoter Score

Mr. Colin Fraser, Group Head of wholesale banking, Abu Dhabi Commercial Bank (ADCB), paid me a visit on May 17, 2017. During our meeting, he shared information about the Net Promoter Score (NPS) tool that the bank uses to pin down their customer loyalty.

NPS is an easy way to quantify loyal customers for a company's brand, products, or services. Since the metric is easy to calculate, most companies use NPS as part of their customer relationship management (CRM) strategy. All the customer needs to do is answer a simple question: "How likely is it that you would recommend us to a friend or colleague?"

Answers are assigned a score from zero to 10, with 10 being the most positive. Customers are then divided into three categories: Promoters, Passives, and Detractors. *Promoters* (score: 9-10) are the most loyal, *Passives* (score: 7-8) are satisfied yet unenthusiastic, and *Detractors* (score: 0-6) are unhappy. The Net Promoter Score is calculated by subtracting the percentage of Detractors from the percentage of Promoters.

This simple exercise helped us to determine how many of our customers are assets and how many are liabilities!

I modified the NPS technique by asking my marketing department team to complete this sentence: "Our customers become much more valuable when..." The immediate answers tended to be predictable and obvious. For example, someone said that customers become much more valuable when "they buy more of our stuff" or "pay more," and that "they reliably come back to us," or "they're loyal to SEWA." I jokingly told them, "Think of our customers as *value-creating* partners and not as value-extraction targets." Below is what my team said next:

Our customers become much more valuable when they...

- give us good ideas;
- evangelize for us on social media;
- reduce our costs;
- collaborate with us;
- try our new products;

- introduce us to their customers;
- share their data with us;

We discovered that our customers were not a source of immediate income only. They were a source of future revenue and partners in success, provided we struck up a lifetime relationship with them, and hence, invest in the customer lifetime value. The big question here was how to achieve and sustain such a lifetime relationship, especially when we were experiencing a large paradigm shift in our consumers' interactions and relations. They were becoming what is called in new marketing term, *PROsumers*!

Shift from CONsumers to PROsumers

The term prosumers isn't a new one. It's been around the marketing world for years, but in today's world of the social web, it has taken on a new importance that business leaders and marketers can't ignore. Prosumers are creative individuals who have a predilection for engaging in activities concerning firms or institutions with which they have a relationship with. They are valuable assets if fully engaged with a company. Prosumers provide feedback, creative ideas, and information for innovation. Veritably, they co-create with the firm and establish a relationship of trust and involvement. They become the voices of your firm's products/services, and therefore have a significant impact on the success or failure of your company, products, and brand, particularly through their involvement on the social web. Here's a credible example of prosumerism:

Mountain biking enthusiasts wanted a better bike: a machine built specifically for the purpose of mountain biking. To fulfill their desire, a group of amateur mountain bikers were willing to put in the effort and time, share their expertise, and learn from the expertise of others in building a special-purpose mountain bike. In their willingness to network, collaborate, and share, the mountain bikers were acting as both customers and producers of the mountain bike, and were thus prosumers of modern day mountain bikes.

Chief PROsumer Officer comes On-board

I felt an immediate need to hire a Chief PROsumers Officer as we know that SEWA prosumers are consumers who become involved in designing or customizing products for their own needs, thereby becoming a part of the design process, contributing their intellectual capital to the organization by participating in the overall production phase.

I still remember my first advice to the new Chief PROsumers Officer. “The gap between company and customer is shrinking daily. As collaboration, co-creation, and personalization increase, SEWA customers have taken brand conversations away from the company in the form of tweets, posts, blogs, comments, and videos, etc. In turn, prosumers who become brand advocates will be the Holy Grail for SEWA.”

I was quite fascinated by the prosumers concept. “Here in Sharjah we have over 1.5 million consumers. Imagine the heat generated if we are able to convert them all into prosumers.”

I quizzed myself. My CRITICAL mind inquired, “*How?*” This question kept teasing me for weeks until I found my answer in a *Forbes* article. To make the concept more relatable, I have captured a quick glance for you. The high-level steps to leveraging the power of prosumers are as follows:

1. **Identify the key online influencers** for your product, brand, business, or industry.
2. **Acknowledge those people** (e.g., send product samples, ask opinions, etc.).
3. **Join the online conversation** where those people already spend time.
4. **Develop relationships** with those people by interacting with them, providing useful information, and being accessible and human.

- 5. Leverage the opportunities of the social web** by creating your own branded destinations, such as a blog, YouTube channel, Twitter profile, Facebook group or fan page, LinkedIn group, podcast, etc.

Soon enough, in a meeting with my chief PROsumer officer, I discussed the above ways to create the “big-bang” transformation that would take the entire customer experience somewhere completely new. I told him, “Sometimes these big-bang ideas come from customers.” I continued, “At first, the process may have a few hiccups, but there’s no shortage of tools and books on how to leverage upon the customer’s ideas. This can feel scary, but don’t worry, you aren’t alone.”

He sighed with relief.

I then told him, “I have decided to hire a ‘chief customer officer’ to help you on this mission. His/her prime job will be to focus on the customers—decoding their needs, wants, and expectations.”

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The Upshot

It’s been a long, hard road, especially for SEWA, which has neglected its customers for years. Turning that around required considerable energy and resources, and it took time. But now, the journey is no longer a mysterious riddle, and the rewards are substantial. I was so confident about the potential of the model that I remember telling my customer-centric officers, “You don’t need to be a Steve Jobs or Marriot to create this kind of customer experience. Yes, it is hard, and yes, it takes time. But it’s a process that can be learned and launched like any major change program, here in SEWA. Eventually, it can be built into SEWA’s DNA.”

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Dear Reader, at this stage you may ask, “What did we gain from the model so far?” Well, the following points summarize the quick wins—the hanging fruits—that we have experienced.

- We started building a culture that puts the customer at the center and aligns the objectives, targets, rewards, and recognition of customer needs, wants, and expectations.
- The SEWA family started to deliver a positive and seamless customer experience at every touch point across the customer life cycle.
- Customer grievance traffic decreased.

And if you are thinking, “What about the financial returns?” My answer is, “Obviously, yes.” As we became increasingly customer-centric, our once-tarnished brand image began to change. Gradually, we saw an increase in global organizations extending their hands for partnership, which then became our brand ambassadors to the world. This significantly drove our top-line growth as well as bottom-line net income and profits.

To Begin with the End in Mind

Mr. Thomas Shaw Dunn, head of Power & Water Engineering Middle East, visited me on August 2, 2017. In our meeting, we discussed the future prospects of working together. The team were then taken around for a quick journey of SEWA’s brand turnaround and were pleased to see the turnaround. Eventually, the customer-centric model caught his eye. Inquisitively, he said, “The customer-centric model is fantastic, but in practicality how close are you to being customer-centric?” To this, I answered: “Customer-centricity is a moving target, not a static one. No organization can claim that it is 100% customer-centered because the moment it becomes one, the customer’s needs evolve! The customers and their needs are ever-evolving and ever-changing.”

“And as Stephen Covey mentioned in his book *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, to begin with the end in mind. Hence, we have this model that serves as a reminder for all the employees of the destination that we want to reach,” I added.

The customer-centric model was a success. Customer grievances traffic decreased. Looks like a happy ending, doesn't it? Ultimately, it was, but the challenge was to establish a system that would ensure the above model benefits SEWA—it had to be indoctrinated into the bloodstream of the entire organization, just as I had done with SEWA Balanced Scorecard. However, this time I decided to look into the customer perspective of SEWA BSC through the lens of the Learning & Growth perspective, which was an interesting and unique approach. At that time, I didn't know what I was in for, but its culmination resulted in an amazing feat in SEWA's history.

Wait a moment! I know, by now you must be secretly wishing to hear another story. So here's an interesting one for you.

Burn the Midnight Oil

Dr. Ali Anaqbi, professor of bioengineering and head of the mechanical department at UAE University, visited SEWA on July 30, 2017. Much to my dismay, he had a tarnished image of SEWA in his mind, and he arrived with the preconception of us being a slow-moving business. However, within a few minutes of his stay here, he witnessed a paradigm shift in his perception of SEWA. He was greatly pleased and thrilled about SEWA's customer-centric model, the 8Ps of branding cycle, SEWA A, and various other SEWA brand turnaround widgets. He could hardly conceal his excitement, and with a sparkle in his eyes, he said, “You must have burnt the midnight oil to come up with such thoughtful concepts and breathe life into it.” It was such a gratifying feeling for me. While he was leaving, he smiled and said that he was immensely grateful for the red carpet treatment we ushered at him. The way he was greeted with a smile and the warm welcome he was

received with, the journey he went through, and until the moment he was escorted out of the Head Office, every moment was memorable.

In another significant meeting on October 18, 2017, Mr. Nabil Hayeb, President & CEO of GE, Mideast N. Africa & Turkey visited SEWA to sign an MOU with us. After the signing ceremony, I personally took him around, showcasing our models and frameworks. I could see the excitement on his face; he was basically soaking up the energy and vibes flowing through our Hall of Fame. Once we reached the customer-centric model, he was startled, and said, “Dr. Rashid, I am blown away by this model. I can’t believe my eyes. The model speaks volume and it’s incredible to see a government organization producing and implementing such novel and advanced models. Everything is spic-and-span, and I am in love with it.” This was indeed a proud moment. Further, he invited me to speak at the Jack Welch management academy in Virginia, USA. And the cherry on the cake was that he invited other senior leaders to fly down to the Jack Welch Academy to attend management trainings.

The Way Forward

As you witnessed, SEWA was aiming to figure out the right permutation and combination in its development, and to safeguard the model. The organization was experiencing a multitude of changes of all kinds, ranging from remodeling to process refinement, and from the revision of a policy to the renovation of the departments. All the while, a tricky question kept teasing me in this state of flux: *How do I keep SEWA’s culture from spinning out of control?* Since culture is an unwritten rule, it can often seem *invisible*, but it very much *exists*! Neither did I want it to run SEWA on auto-pilot, nor did I want a single grain of negativity crawling into it. This owes to I Jack Welch’s quote: “A negative or resistant culture can derail even the best strategy.”

Chief Culture Officer

I got my answer while feeling most jetlagged on a long-haul flight. I met a fellow passenger, whom I later found out was a Chief Culture Officer at a renowned firm. His youthful smile captured my attention, along with his “salt-and-pepper” hair. *Well, that’s a rare combination*, I thought. I got quite curious about his role, so I dug deeper. He said, “My job is to protect my company’s cultural core as it evolves into a massive multinational.” I was quite charmed by his reply. I felt the need to appoint a Chief Culture Officer too. Getting back to square one—culture.

The day I landed, I called my C-suite officers—Chief Happiness Officer, Chief Listening Officer, Chief Service Officer, Chief Loyalty Officer, Chief PROsumer Officer, and Chief Customer Officer, and discussed hiring a Chief Culture Officer. As anticipated, they were a little puzzled, but eventually, I was able to sell the proposal to them. I’m sure you’d like to know how I convinced them; it was a tough row to hoe, but I didn’t throw in the towel.

Boot Camp

I soaked in the present moment and decided that to convince my C-suite officers, I might have to take a different approach altogether. Aren’t we aware of the fact that our environment sets our mood and our surroundings influence our decisions? At first, I thought of taking them out for coffee or brunch to discuss my opinion with them, but then, I realized, *coffee or brunch would not serve the purpose of this heavy-duty discussion; this is a critical discussion that demands a special environment*. I wanted to set an ambiance of formality without choking their freedom of speech. I wanted a mix of seriousness and ease. A bit of mindfulness in a more ‘laid back’ setting.

After giving it some thought, I decided to go with a boot camp. Wait a moment! I don’t mean the old military strict training boot camps; we have come a long way now. The concept of boot camps has also evolved! Today, a boot camp means a short, intensive, and rigorous

course of training with a lot of fun elements thrown into it. That's it, a boot camp was the best option. This is how some successful global companies develop their future leaders. So, I was just following suit!

I summoned up my C-suite officers and informed them about the boot camp. Right away, we hopped into our cars and headed forward.

Drill Sergeant - An Epitome of Excellence

As we know, a boot camp is incomplete without a drill sergeant. According to a U.S Army website, *a drill sergeant* is a symbol of excellence in initial military entry training; an expert in all warrior tasks and battle drills. He lives the Army values, exemplifies the warrior ethos, and most importantly, is the epitome of the Army as a profession. A drill sergeant is responsible for coaching, counseling, and mentoring of hundreds of soldiers.

Yes, you guessed it right! I decided to don the hat of a drill sergeant, right here, for my C-suite Officers.

I kicked off the meeting by stating, "Let's get our hands dirty." They must have thought I was kidding. They stared at me with starry eyes, expecting what would come next. I asked them to list down the key reasons to "Why they think appointing a chief culture officer is pointless?" I was quite amazed at the answers. One of them argued, saying that this role is best managed within HR. "You have given us the 15 winning principles and the core cultural values, so aren't you, as chairman, the keeper of culture here?" The Chief Loyalty Officer commented with a cat smile. And the rest of them said, "Culture is about the collective way in which people work together, and it cannot be owned by any one person." They sounded unhappy. I thought all hell would break loose today!

By now, I have figured out a broad-brush picture as to what's in their hearts and minds.

Phew! At the moment, the atmosphere in the meeting room could be imagined as a teakettle on fire. For a moment, I felt that the drill sergeant would also have to play the role of the Chief Firefighter Officer! I scratched my head in disbelief. As I put together my thoughts, a very recent political example that aligned with my point of view knocked my mind. The news was making headlines all over the world. It disturbed me. It must have affected you too! Here's what this edition of *The Guardian*, published on January 15, 2018, used for its headlines. I have encrypted some portions of the article for you.

There's No Other Word but Racist: Trump's Global Rebuke for 'S*hole' Remark**

US President Donald Trump has been branded a shocking and shameful racist after it was credibly reported he had described African nations, as well as Haiti and El Salvador as “shitholes” and questioned why so many of their citizens had ever been permitted to enter America.

US diplomats around the world were summoned for formal reproach, amid global shock that such crude remarks could ever be made in a semi-public meeting by the president of America.

In a strongly-worded statement, the UN said it was impossible to describe his remarks as anything other than racist, while the Vatican decried Trump's words as “particularly harsh and offensive”. The 55-nation African Union said the remarks were “clearly racist”.

I further clarified, “Trump's comment had caused fury and agitation around the world because his offensive comments showed lack of respect and ignorance towards the culture of the countries in context. It was a shock; a culture shock. Culture being the most sensitive link in any society, is the first element to be offended.”

I continued, “Some countries struggled to translate the obscenity because of a lack of verbatim terminology, but also due to the term's vulgarity. The famously polite Japanese media tied themselves in knots

trying not to offend their readers, with national broadcaster NHK (Nippon Hōsō Kyōkai, official English name: Japan Broadcasting Corporation) sticking to “filthy countries as a translation for s***hole countries.”

I could see their thunderstruck faces.

“It is time we did things that are unique, different, and differentiated. I want SEWA to encompass cultural competency and sensitivity.” I reiterated. “Are you aware of the repercussions SEWA might face, if, even unintentionally, we happen to hurt the cultural sentiments of our customers?” I questioned. “According to a census done by the Department of Statistics and Community Development in Sharjah (DSCD) during the year 2016, it is revealed that Sharjah’s overall population stands at over 1.5 million people, including around 200,000 Emiratis and over 1.3 million expatriates. Can you imagine the anger we will cause if we hurt the cultural sentiments of people from over 150 nationalities living in Sharjah?” I interrogated.

I tried to convince them by explaining that our culture is a different culture, and by culture, I don’t mean the corporate culture exclusively. By culture, I mean the world inside SEWA and the world outside the corporation—the body of ideas, emotions, and activities that make up the life of our customer. I wanted someone who would be with my people *and* the external world. Probably someone with a salt and pepper look, but with higher competencies; someone who knows SEWA in and out! Moreover, I needed to find someone who knew SEWA’s culture deep down, who would live and breathe the unwritten/ undefined rules of the organization, and who could do regular pulse-checks with my people, as well as my customers. That meant gauging the happiness, engagement, and emotional health of those that supported us. And while customer service is an integral part of the equation, culture included just about everything SEWA does.

A Time-Out

I could say they were all awestruck at the example that I gave. Wide-open bleary eyes and rounded (O-shaped) mouths. I was expecting this. I smiled and said, “Enough for now, we need to review and reflect our

thoughts here. Let's take a short recreational break. Some refreshments are spread out on tables for you all. Think bright, over a bite."

The team dispersed. A 10-minute time-out followed.

Soon after, they assembled back. "The weather has been on our side today. It is quite favorable for meetings like these." I remarked. Some of them responded with a nod, while the rest were still soaking up the heat of the moment.

"What are your feelings now?" I probed. "Share what's on your mind." My Chief PROsumer Officer replied, "First of all, a big thank you for taking us all out for a boot camp today. Honestly speaking, I was a little apprehensive about this idea; I thought it wouldn't work. There's still a lot of deliverables at work, and I am going on a boot camp. Seriously, eh? A day wasted."

He started off again, "But, I am glad, you proved me wrong. The green environment, the objective of the meeting, and the example that you cited, were all on-point. And yes, the snacks were amazing too!"

I smiled. Their hearts started to melt. Now was the time to share another relevant example with them. This example would strike the right chord again; this time they would all be convinced by my idea of hiring a chief culture officer for SEWA.

"Alright, let me show you another recent example from the corporate arena. This time it's the high street retailer, H&M."

Silence prevailed. Pin drop silence prevailed.

I read aloud a Reuter News article from January 13, 2018.

South African protesters ransack H&M stores over 'racist' ad

H&M featured a black child modeling a sweatshirt with the slogan "coolest monkey in the jungle" on its local website in South Africa. This immature act caused angst and unrest, and H&M's ad was wildly criticized. South African activists trashed a number of H&M stores in response.

Silence prevailed.

Then, I took my phone out and showed them the video footage of the protestors tearing down stands, knocking over mannequins, and throwing clothing around at the store in Pretoria, South Africa.

The violence reportedly spread to at least six shopping centers across the country. People twittered that the company was “facing the consequences of racism.”

My officers replayed the video over and over again. I could see their crooked eyebrows straightening out and the tension in the room easing out as well. The storm in the teakettle had started to settle.

The FISH Philosophy

To make things clearer, I asked them, “How many of you would like to go fishing with me?” They must have thought their chairman was losing his focus or trying to change the subject—I could read their minds. Then, I relaxed them by saying, “Okay, okay. Have you ever heard of The Fish Philosophy?”

“The Fish Philosophy!” They responded together with a shrill in their voice.

Filmmaker John Christensen was in Seattle when he discovered a business that pulsed with enthusiasm and commitment. It was the world famous Pike Place fish market, where large crowds come to watch the fishmongers work—and buy lots of fish. He was so charmed by the energy and positivity of the fishmongers that he formulated a philosophy inspired by what he witnessed. This philosophy releases the enthusiasm and creativity inside each of us. It helps you build a culture where people choose to bring their best to work. The FISH! The philosophy includes four simple, interconnected practices:

Practice # 1: Be There

This means being emotionally present for people. A powerful message of respect, “being there” improves communication and strengthens relationships.

Practice # 2: Play

To play is to tap into your natural way of being creative, enthusiastic, and having fun. Play is the spirit that drives the curious mind, as in “Let’s play with that idea!” It’s a mindset you can bring to everything you do.

Practice # 3: Make Their Day

Finding simple ways to serve or delight people in a meaningful, memorable way. It’s about contributing to someone else’s life, not because you want something out of it, but because that’s the person you want to be.

Practice # 4: Choose Your Attitude

This means taking responsibility for how you respond to what life throws at you. Once you are aware that your choice impacts everyone around you, you can ask yourself, “Is my attitude helping my team or my customers? Is it helping me to be the person I want to be?” Through The FISH! Philosophy, we build stronger relationships with the team members we work with, and the customers we serve.

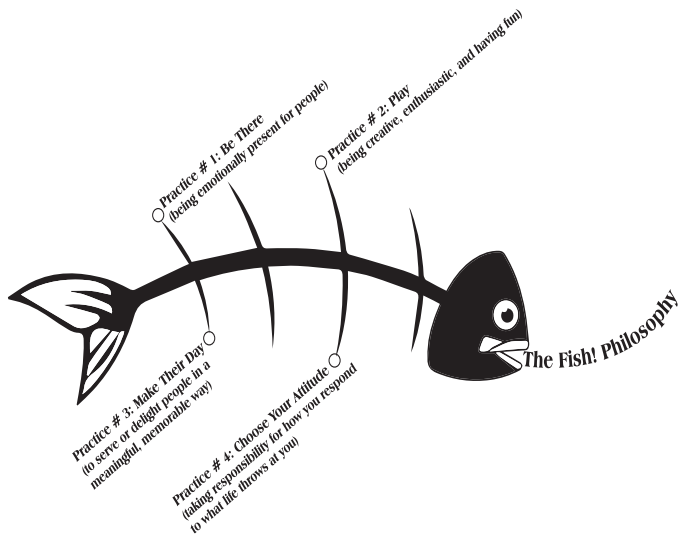


Figure 9.2 The FISH Philosophy

100 Percent Commitment

Incredible? But possible. I could see a light bulb flashing in one of my customer-centric officers' heads. With their eyes wide open to the possibility, they said, "Let's bring him on!"

Without further delay, we started the hunt. We lined up interviews immediately.

I decided to join in the candidate interviews because there was something I was looking for. I knew that my customer-centric team would accurately evaluate skills, education, knowledge, experience, compatibility, and service-oriented proficiency; whereas I was focused on the cultural and capability fit.

While on the subject, I was also keen on finding certain vital skills and a potency for this unique role. At the top of my list was the Lean Six Sigma methodology. I didn't want the new chief culture officer to be a person who wants to reach an 'XYZ' destination but doesn't know the 'ABC' of reaching there. I wanted him to exhibit a comprehensive problem-solving tool-set to increase the speed and effectiveness of any process within our organization. As a result, there would be much-improved collaboration and performance at SEWA. This can be easily achieved if my chief culture officer has a sound knowledge of the Six Sigma process.

For the ease of reading, I have briefly explained the five phases involved in the process below:

DMAIC- (1)Define, (2)Measure, (3)Analyze, (4) Improve, and (5) Control

Define the Problem

This phase is about the bird's eye view of the process, also known as a high-level process map. A simple question is sufficient here; what problem would I like to fix?

Measure

Mapping out the current process. How does the process currently perform? Keeping a track of the process and trying to uncover the reasons, or the “root cause(s)” for slack in the current process or defects as a result of the process.

Analyze

This phase is about listing concerns or pain points within the process. Essentially, analysis concerns narrowing this list down to the vital few causes.

Improve

It’s time to move on to solution development by asking, ‘*How* will I fix the problem?’ At this stage, the effort is to produce as many ideas as possible—a structured improvement effort that can lead to innovative and elegant solutions.

Control

This phase is about maintaining the solutions by simply answering, “How do I sustain the newly-achieved improvement?” The key element at this phase is documentation of the entire process.



It was an arduous day, and many bright and talented candidates had appeared for the job posting. It was quite surprising because we never anticipated that such a talented group would be interested in a job profile/title that was so unheard of. I must admit that they made our job quite difficult.

Choosing one applicant and rejecting the other was a tough nut to crack. After screening a number of candidates, my customer-centric team sent one candidate for the final call. He looked calm and composed. I offered him a seat, and after a long briefing conversation with him, I said, “SEWA sees its culture as a competitive advantage, a differentiator, and

a critical foundation for its brand.” Because culture is a key component of the SEWA brand identity, having someone with a title that reflects that importance makes perfect sense.” I further questioned him, “Why do you think we should hire you as the chief culture officer for SEWA?”

He confidently replied, “Culture is not something to be managed but rather something to be led. A leading culture involves investing in people, developing ‘next practices’, collaborating, and embracing risk and risky people.”

He paused.

“I have read your book, *The SEWA Way* and I’ve been following the news that you made about your recent brand turnaround efforts in SEWA.” He continued, “All that I could perceive from what I’ve learned about you is that you are keen on creating a healthy culture by making it the focus point within the corporate values, purpose, vision, mission, and strategy. And I think I should be given a chance to prove my mettle.”

I was quite impressed by his confidence. He had an airy, breezy attitude, and I got carried away with it. I told him, “You are in.”

By now, I was convinced that SEWA could be powered by the positive energy of my chief culture officer. On one hand, the SEWA customer-centric model had already started showing palpable results. And the same time around, the chief culture officer will do the rest! I can enjoy my sleep, now.

Yet, there was one last bit of task left. Currently, SEWA’s situation was nothing less than marvelous, and the future also seemed bright. However, as they say, “Nothing in this world comes with a guarantee.” I improvised this lovely saying in the following way, “Nothing in this world comes with a guarantee or a warranty.” In other words, you should ensure a robust infrastructure around your efforts so that it doesn’t collapse when you are not around. This thought gave birth to

SEWA A. Read on to learn about another pivotal component of SEWA's 180-degree turnabout.

SEWA A

I wanted to create a training and development dynasty, where employees could be rigorously trained/coached to be upbeat, friendly, and customer-focused to create “the happiest place on Earth for both the employees and the customers.” The SEWA Academy (SEWA A, as I love calling it) emerged out of this thought. My emphasis was on conducting SEWA-style leadership and customer service programs/workshops that would create super-engaged employees whose positive outlook would extend to all customer interaction. I started to develop in-house training programs that breathed a mission into SEWA A: *Edutain & Innovate*.

Gearing Up For the Future

I wanted SEWA A to offer curricula that would support functional managers/employees in improving their skills in a variety of leadership and management disciplines, from business planning and strategic thinking to operations and people development, and ultimately empowering my employees to self-manage and manage teams.

I believed that the most important step was motivating and developing SEWA leaders and future leaders. Hence, the goal of my robust coaching and mentoring program was to lay the foundation of prosperous and passionate future leaders. It's difficult, if not impossible, for any organization to soar with the eagles if you are led by a flock of turkeys. Hence, at SEWA, I focused on creating a culture in which employees can fly high. I mandated upon building a workforce that stays ahead. Even if they leave SEWA or are head-hunted by dark-horses around, they are worthy of lapping up superior positions and leading organizations in the near future. This belief of mine is embedded in my leadership philosophy: “The true test of truly visionary organization is not the healthy balance sheet, nor the size, nor quality certificates, but rather the kind of men and women the organization turns out.”

Listed below are the initiatives (that later turned into mandates) embraced by SEWA A:

- SEWA is to give a 6-9 month of intensive orientation and on-job training to its new employees in the company's headquarters, where they earn SEWA's technical certifications and learn the organization's principles and policies before moving on to actual work.
- The programs should be oriented around The SEWA Way's 15 principles and our 11 core cultural values.
- Encourage co-opetition (a healthy mix of cooperation and competition) among employees.
- The end result of all programs ought to produce happy and satisfied customers.

On the inauguration day of SEWA A, I began my speech with the following words, "Budgets, contracts, meetings, reports, and the never-ending things that eat up your time are of no value unless they end up producing a happy customer."

Not long after making my above statement, I had Mr. Fausto Nepote, the managing director of Ansaldo Thomassen, Italy, and his team, visit us for the first time. As a protocol of the VVIP visits in SEWA, the guests were taken on the SEWA brand turnaround journey. Interestingly, one of the team members, who happened to be their business development manager, had paid a visit to SEWA almost five years ago. He immediately remarked, "I have visited SEWA before, but this time it's remarkably transformed into what I experienced before. I could feel the change right from my first step onto the new SEWA premises."

A Heartening Conclusion

I would conclude here that as we move into the next century, companies will have to become customer oriented and market driven in all that they do. Like what SEWA did. We oriented ourselves around our customer 'needs' and 'wants' and marketed ourselves with the right tools

that wins customer satisfaction and recognition. It's not enough to be product or technology driven—too many companies still design their products without customer input, only to find them rejected in the marketplace. Not surprisingly, we are now seeing a flood of books with titles such as *The Customer-Driven Company*, *Customers for Life*, *Turning Lost Customers into Gold*, *Customer Bonding*, and *The Loyalty Effect*. These books emphasize that the key to success in the rapidly changing marketing environment will be a strong focus on the marketplace and a total marketing commitment to providing value to customers.

When I held the reign of SEWA's brand turnaround, a plethora of colleagues, friends and well-wishers had raised a red flag at my attempt to transform SEWA. They said, "There's no need to reinvent the wheel." I replied to them, "But reinventing the brand is another story—If I abide by conventional wisdom, then you are right. However, I like to play my cards unconventionally. In SEWA's case a rebranding was imminent."

In a recent interview, I was asked to share some rebranding tips with the world. Let me share the secret sauce behind SEWA's phenomenal success. The reader may distill my wisdom from the reply I gave to the press; "If your business is changing, it's OK to be bold with your rebranding. I started by thinking about SEWA's history, values, strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, future goals, and key differentiators. Based on the organization I was determined to create, I reverse-engineered my marketing. I asked myself; what do I want prospective customers to think and feel about SEWA brand moving forward? Remember that rebranding is like an iceberg—your customers only see the surface. The most successful brand transformations include a thorough internal transformation while also providing a crystal-clear external repositioning and seamless experience for customers."

I would sum up my final thoughts in an infallible quote by William Jennings Bryan; "Destiny is not a matter of chance, it is a matter of choice; it is not a thing to be waited for; it is a thing to be achieved."



About The Author

Dr. Rashid Alleem is ranked third among the 25 most influential CEOs in GCC and is considered one of the 100 most influential CEOs in the Middle East. Recently, the Academic College of Oxford, United Kingdom, honored Dr. Rashid Alleem with the title of “Honorary Professor” in recognition of his scientific, administrative and humanitarian efforts, and contributions, especially in the field of sustainable development. He is a passionate writer; an environmentalist; a sought-after thought leader; the creator of CRITICAL Thinking, a unique blend of “critical and lateral” thinking; and an internationally respected transformational leader. The founder of Alleem Knowledge Center, Dr. Alleem is a dynamic leader who has worked with prestigious governmental, semi-governmental, and nonprofit organizations. He is an entrepreneur par excellence with a flair for effective, strategic decision-making by means of innovative thinking. Dr. Rashid was recognized as “The Knowledge Ambassador of the UAE” by His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum—the Vice President and Prime Minister of the UAE and ruler of the Emirate of Dubai—and as “Environmentalism of the Year 2012” by the fourth Prime Minister of Malaysia, Dr. Mahathir Bin Mohamad.

Dr. Alleem earned a Ph.D. from the University of Salford, in Manchester, UK. Being a “sustainovationalist,” he has received five honorary doctorates from different universities: Atlantic International University (USA), in recognition of his achievements in the socioeconomic fields; Somalia National University, for his humanitarian services; American Global International University (USA), for his global business contri-

butions and numerous academic achievements; Indian Peace University, from which he received a Doctorate in Philosophy for his exceptional contributions, dedication, and social services to society; and Doctor of Philosophy (D. Phil) from Amity University, in recognition of his exceptional vision, deep commitment to the environment, professionalism and direction in the pursuit of excellence; his strategic vision and inspirational leadership in steering his organization towards continuous growth and dedication to the good of humanity.

Dr. Alleem was recently recognized as The Global Green Ambassador by DMG. Under his leadership, SEWA received the Voluntary Cancellation Certificate for excellence in energy-saving and the reduction of CO2 emissions by the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in 2017. He was bestowed with the Friend of Singapore Sustainability Award 2017 by the government of Singapore, and he became a member of the advisory board of the Singapore World Water Council. He has received the prestigious title of “The Ambassador of Peace & Happiness in the Arab World” by Voice of Kerala (VOK) Radio Station.

As a highly sought-after keynote speaker, presenter, and teacher, Dr. Alleem is well-known for delivering compelling and practical messages to audiences of more than 200,000 people per annum, including at some of the largest regional and international venues.

Last but not least, he is one of the most interviewed and published charismatic media personalities in the region. A prolific writer both in English and Arabic, Dr. Rashid Alleem is the author of several books on management and leadership. His newest book, *The SEWA Way*, showcases 15 winning principles, providing a roadmap for achieving success both on an organizational and a personal scale. Aiming to improve social, economic, and environmental living conditions worldwide and helping to improve the quality of life for hundreds of millions who have not yet seen the benefits of sustainable development and inclusive growth, he has written four books on the topic of sustainability: *My Green Journey*

in Hamriyah; Sustainability: The Fourth Wave of Economy; I Am Committed: 17 Global Goals; and Alleem Sustainable Development Goals.

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