



COACHING HELPS TO REDEFINE THE
FUTURE
OF SAUDI TELECOM COMPANY



Saudi Arabia is in the midst of an economic transformation. Seeking to reduce the country's dependence on oil, the government announced its comprehensive VISION 2030, a plan to diversify the nation's economy for the global marketplace and enable a comprehensive digital transformation. Saudi Telecom Company (STC) found itself challenged to innovate in alignment with the plan.

While primarily a Saudi Arabia-based telecom company, STC faced a changing landscape not only in the communications industry but also its own country and throughout the region. To address the VISION 2030 goals, STC announced its own ambitious DARE strategy to grow the company into new digital areas, such as cybersecurity and digital payments, and deploy a new 5G network beyond Saudi Arabia to the entire Middle East and Northern Africa, growing the presence and contribution of international

subsidiaries. To accelerate this digital transformation, the company embarked on a major Talent and Executive Development Program in 2016 designed to fast-track executives, directors and high potential leadership candidates. These programs included the employment and development of female candidates, thereby aligning with VISION 2030 and its women's empowerment initiatives.

Such a bold new strategy required an innovative approach to leadership development, one that encompassed coaching as a method for helping leaders pave the way forward. A newly installed and comprehensive coaching initiative was oriented toward improving the organizational culture and promoting strategic workforce development.

In the three years following its launch, STC's coaching program demonstrated broad reach across the organization. Through a team of coaches credentialed by International Coaching Federation (ICF), the program reached more than 5,000 employees through indirect manager coaching conversations and engaged over 1,500 leaders through direct coaching and

coaching culture training. As a result, the organization realized tangible outcomes in its internal collaboration, out-of-the-box approaches, and opportunities for women in leadership at an unprecedented level for a Middle Eastern organization.

Recognizing the notable impacts of STC's coaching program during this period of significant change management, STC was named a finalist for the ICF 2019 International Prism Award. ICF's Prism Award program honors organizations that have achieved the highest standard of excellence in coaching programs that yield discernible and measurable positive impacts, meet rigorous professional standards, achieve key strategic goals, and shape organizational culture. (Learn more at coachfederation.org/prism-award.)

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Haithem Alfaraj
Senior Vice President of Tech and Operations, STC

Adapting to Support a New Strategic Plan

On its path toward alignment with VISION 2030, STC created its new strategy called DARE, which covers aggressive growth in scope and scale. This growth cannot be achieved only through traditional methods, growth was also needed in the leadership pool which the organization can tap into to achieve its objectives. An investment in the organization's current and future executives through coaching was a key component of the process for meeting these goals.

For senior vice president of tech and operations Haithem Alfaraj, “The coaching methodology helps leaders improve their skills and maximize business outcomes. This is clearly seen in the organizational transformation of the company and its continued growth in business performance.”

As leaders at all levels of the company began to utilize their coaching skills with employees, the gains

of this investment were evident: STC leaders moved away from a “command and control” management style to one focused on inclusion, involvement and participation. Through individual, group and team coaching, managers and all employees became more agile. The result is an enterprise-wide culture change that improves leadership, the working environment, and personnel motivation at STC.

Built for High Impact from The Top Down

The coaching strategy at STC focuses on senior leaders across the organization, including executives, senior managers and participants of the company's High Potential (HiPo) Leadership Program. These individuals were trained by ICF-credentialed coaches to add coaching to their management style.

The program included six full-day offsite training sessions spread over the course of a year. These sessions focused on understanding the purpose of coaching, building trust and identifying group and individual areas needing development. Each day of the program included individual and group coaching sessions. In between training days throughout the year, coaching sessions also continued.

The program aimed to support the development of managers, executives and leadership talent, creating a coaching culture that trickles down throughout the organization.

“To win in the marketplace, we must first win in the workplace,” said Ibrahim Balghonaim, head of succession management at STC. “We are rigorous in identifying, selecting and aggressively developing high-potential individuals who will provide STC with the required leadership capability in the years ahead.”

Unlocking New Ways of Thinking and Collaboration

When STC's team planned promotions to generate awareness for its digital channels, its coaching culture-supported team brainstormed and collaborated, resulting in a creative approach, now called the annual “Digital Day” where the company completely shutter all its physical retail locations for an entire day in December.

A significant level of coordination between several departments was needed, but through STC's coaching culture, the teams were well equipped to make it a major success.

Through coaching, leaders at STC are challenged to work across departments and disrupt the organization's old business models. One of the most notable outcomes has been increased collaboration and inclusion of new ideas and a focus on asking difficult questions, STC's coaching culture encourages innovation across the work force.

"The coaching culture supports teams to think out of the box," said Balghonaim. "It is unusual for a telecom company to close all its shops but we did it as part of digital day to raise awareness of our digital channels and show our customers faster ways of doing business with us."

STC Executive Coach Mike Andrew added, "Coaching is not the only solution, it's part of the repertoire, the tools we have that, when integrated, produce a powerful cumulative effect. We're coaching them to help them be better leaders."

A Cultural Change Through Coaching

Implementing a coaching culture at STC has not only influenced leadership styles and executive development, but also empowered women in the workplace to grow into leadership roles at STC.

Amani Alzahrani, the first female employee promoted to Director Level at STC, said, "Coaching helped me improve my personality, earn promotions and overcome all obstacles I faced as the only woman director at that time. It was not an ordinary process; it was truly an empowerment tool for me as a woman."

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Amani Alzahrani
Director, STC

Coaching for the Future

With Saudi Arabia's VISION 2030 plan driving change throughout the country, STC is in a prime position to leverage its coaching program as a role model for other organizations throughout the region.

STC tracks its overall success as an organization with the McKinsey Organizational Health Index (OHI), an assessment tool that offers a 360-degree perspective of an organization's well-being and performance. Since implementing its coaching program in 2016, STC moved from the third quartile of McKinsey's OHI to the upper quartile, demonstrating the positive impact coaching can create in an organization.

The scope of the coaching program at STC is continuously growing, adding new departments and people at all leadership levels. Coaching continues even when the program is complete, as graduates are involved in internal coaching projects and receive ongoing mentoring. This ensures that coaching continues to play an important role in individual and organizational development. Especially important, it positions STC to fully support the long-term strategic goals of Saudi Arabia's VISION 2030. 🌟

In 2020, the International Coaching Federation (ICF) celebrates 25 years as the global organization for coaches and coaching. ICF is dedicated to advancing the coaching profession by setting high ethical standards, providing independent certification and building a worldwide network of credentialed coaches across a variety of coaching disciplines. Its 35,000-plus members located in 143 countries work toward the common goal of enhancing awareness of coaching, upholding the integrity of the profession, and continually educating themselves with the newest research and practices.



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