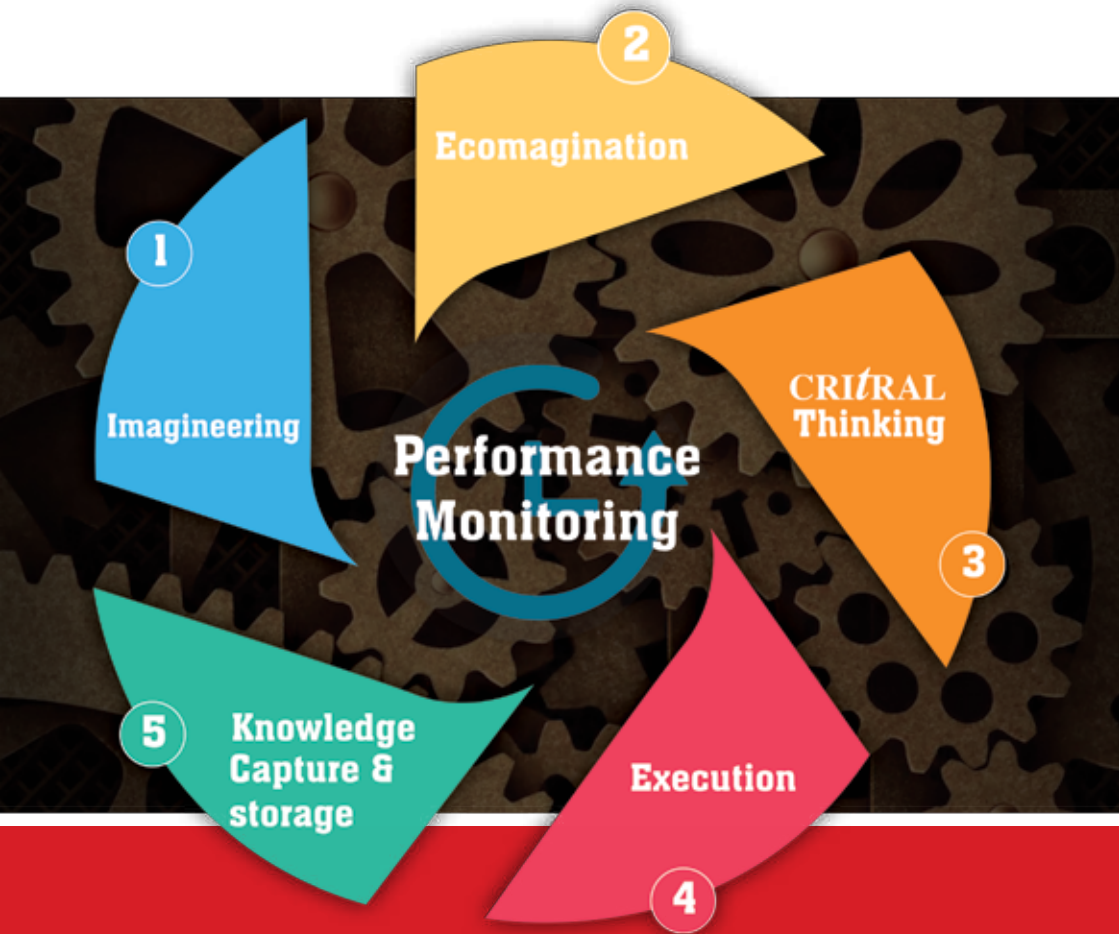


# THE SEWA PROJECT MANAGEMENT MODEL



**DR. RASHID ALLEEM**

The Knowledge Ambassador of the UAE

# THE SEWA PROJECT MANAGEMENT MODEL

DR. RASHID ALLEEM



## SEWA Project Management Model



*Keep Challenging Tomorrow*

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**"I have seen "mega"  
projects succeed against  
all the odds and I have  
seen "smaller-scale"  
projects fail regardless of  
methodology or tools.  
I have separated these  
experiences and I came  
to the conclusion that the  
critical success factor was  
not the methodology or  
the tools, but rather the  
RIGHT People."**

— Dr. Rashid Alleem

*For my beloved daughters Eman, Reem, and Hind.  
May God continue to bless them with peace and grace.*

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## CONTENTS

<a href="#">Foreword</a>	ix
<a href="#">Introduction</a>	1
<a href="#">How To Read This Book</a>	3
<b><a href="#">PART ONE: A THOROUGH TURNAROUND</a></b>	<b>4</b>
<a href="#">WHAT TO DO</a>	13
<a href="#">MY PRIORITY</a>	24
<a href="#">PROJECTS, PROJECTS, AND PROJECTS</a>	29
<a href="#">THE IRON TRIANGLE</a>	32
<a href="#">DO US A FLAVOR</a>	37
<a href="#">BRAND WITH POTENTIAL</a>	41
<a href="#">SHOSHIN</a>	46
<a href="#">ROOM OF POSSIBILITIES</a>	48
<a href="#">STAY EAGER</a>	54
<a href="#">IMPLEMENT A CHANGE PROGRAM</a>	58
<b><a href="#">PART TWO: THE SEWA PROJECT MANAGEMENT MODEL</a></b>	<b>63</b>
<a href="#">PERFORMANCE MONITORING</a>	67
<a href="#">THE SECRET</a>	70
<a href="#">GO/NO-GO DECISIONS</a>	72
<a href="#">STAGE 1: IMAGINEERING</a>	76
<a href="#">STAGE 2: ECOMAGINATION</a>	89
<a href="#">STAGE 3: CRITICAL THINKING</a>	93
<a href="#">STAGE 4: EXECUTION</a>	108
<a href="#">STAGE 5: KNOWLEDGE CAPTURE AND STORAGE</a>	124
<a href="#">The Way Forward</a>	131
<a href="#">Acknowledgments</a>	133
<a href="#">About The Author</a>	134

# THE SEWA PROJECT MANAGEMENT MODEL



# FOREWORD

His Excellency Dr. Rashid Alleem understands how to breathe life into organizations. He does that by challenging the status quo and by inspiring those around him. Change is never easy. Most people fear it. However, His Excellency knows that an organization that will adapt is one that will thrive.

Prior to his arrival, Sharjah Electricity and Water Authority, or SEWA, was in disrepair. His Excellency recognized that the only way to reverse the negative trend at SEWA was to alter the institutional culture. The financial losses, low morale, and lack of customer trust occurred because the old system prevented anyone from becoming a stakeholder in the organization's success. In order to reverse the course and meet the challenge assigned by His Highness Sheikh Dr. Sultan Bin Mohammed Al Qasimi, His Excellency needed to change SEWA's routine.

Change can be risky. Those that propose change are often questioned. Internally, doubt is common amongst the people that we try to lead. Externally, critics will focus on anything negative to undermine a leader's efforts to pioneer new practices. But a true leader must have the courage to risk failure.

Courage is not the absence of fear. Courage is the willingness to persevere despite being afraid. A leader has not demonstrated courage until they have accepted risk. This is the difference between an actual leader and a career administrator.

Another sign of leadership is strength. But that doesn't mean that a leader must bear the weight of an organization on their own back. The most effective leaders are ones that leverage the capabilities of their own people. When barriers are eliminated and collaboration

is embraced, ideas flourish. His Excellency recognized this. He recruited new talent to integrate with legacy workers. He broke down horizontal departments and vertical command barriers. He created a safe environment to share inventive thoughts. This not only enhances communication, but it also enables all employees to feel vested as contributors to the improvements in the organization.

Like His Excellency, my approach to funding infrastructure is to proactively embrace innovation. When I first arrived at Johnson Controls, the JCI Structured Finance business was stationary. It had a traditional way to do business and lacked innovation. It passively waited to follow the market and struggled to keep pace. We changed all of that.

Now it's part of our mission to be creative. We think less about the financial services that Johnson Controls wants to supply and more about what our customers demand. We seek to understand our customers. To use a medical phrase, we prefer to diagnose the ailment before we prescribe the medicine. At the same time, we collaborate both internally and externally. This communication has inspired innovation. His Excellency shares the same philosophy. Readers of *The SEWA project management model* will learn from His Excellency's management approach and can hopefully implement a similar style in their own organizations.

Ben Speed  
Global Executive Director  
Structured Finance  
Johnson Controls International, USA

# INTRODUCTION

## SURVIVE AND THRIVE

*“Only those leaders who act boldly in times of crisis and change are willingly followed.”*

—Jim Kouzes

### **Making Things Happen**

My favorite word in the English language is ‘how.’ How does this work? How was this made? How did they do this? Whenever I see something interesting happen, I’m filled with insightful questions that involve this small but powerful little word. I have this incurable desire to pick the brains of people I meet. Most of the answers I find center on how people apply their own intelligence and wisdom rather than their knowledge of specific technologies or theories. After 15 years of building/creating things and comparing my experiences to those of others in the field of project management, I’ve learned how to manage projects well. This book is a summation of those ideas.

It includes approaches for leading teams, working with ideas, organizing projects, managing schedules, dealing with politics, and making things happen—even in the face of great challenges and unfair situations.

Unlike some other books on how to lead projects, this book doesn’t ascribe to any grand theory or presumptively philosophy. Instead, I’ve

placed my bet on innovation, practicality, and diversity. In fact, project management skills are not so *esoteric* that only geniuses can master them. All of us can learn them and excel at project management, and that is what this book is about. Projects result in good things when the right combination of people, skills, attitudes, and tactics is applied, regardless of their origin or (lack of) pedigree. I've wagered heavily on picking the right topics and giving good advice over all other considerations. I hope you find that I've made the right choice!

This inspiring and practical guidebook is based on my own personal leadership principles I lived and practiced at SEWA, but you won't find these principles in any official SEWA guide to leadership success. These principles can, hopefully, help you find your own authentic voice, success, and fulfillment. This is important and the soul of this book.

This book contains a treasury of lessons and techniques that will benefit project teams of any experience level. The lessons in this book are easy to read, understand, and apply—and they will help you not only survive but also thrive in today's project management world. It can also help you avoid the kinds of mistakes that will derail you.

Surely, the above may have caught your attention and kept you reading until this point. Now, let me take you to a flashback. Rewind your clock to the spring of 2014, when I zigged and zagged my way to success.

In the first few pages, I'll explain what the whole book is about.

Turn the page to find out more.

# HOW TO READ THIS BOOK

Your aim should be to make *The SEWA Project Management Model* a part of your daily projects (big or small). I urge you to read this book slowly and then reread it. Dog-ear the pages that you might want to revisit or find interesting.

Take it all in. Throughout the text, I have provided famous quotes where I invite you to pause, review, and contemplate. However, you don't necessarily have to pause after each quote. Just get a global sense of the entire story we are telling.

I urge you to give *The SEWA Project Management Model* a test drive and make it your own. Work toward letting the model become second nature. I encourage you to revisit chapters again and again—different elements will resonate with you at different times. The more you absorb and practice these elements of *The SEWA Project Management Model*, the more you will get out of them.

*The SEWA Project Management Model* is unique in that it isn't about outdated theories or philosophical ideas. Instead, it is simply packed with tips, powerful stories, and motivational quotes that I've gathered and used in my personal and professional life. They have made a huge difference for me, and they can do the same for you and your team in a sustainable way.

And yes, once you've mastered the model, feel free to pass this book on to someone you know who needs it or donate it to the local library. As Homer said, "The charity that seems trifle to us may seem precious to others."

Enjoy!

# A THOROUGH TURNAROUND

## AGAINST THE CLOCK

*“All the world’s a stage, And all the men and women merely players.  
They have their exits and their entrances, And one man in his time  
plays many parts, His acts being seven ages.”*

—William Shakespeare

### A Serious Problem

APRIL 22, 2014: It would be a day like no other in Sharjah’s history. Unsurprisingly, more than 1.5 million of Sharjah’s residents were soon asking the obvious questions: Who is this Rashid Alleem? Why him? And where on earth did he come from?

No, you haven’t picked up the wrong book mistakenly; this isn’t a book about my career or my personal achievements. It’s neither an autobiography nor a biography. It’s about business, specifically the way organizations can learn faster and become more agile and competitive when the customer is the focal point. The book contains a great deal of useful lessons from my many successes and a few failures and how to handle them. And boy, did I learn from my mistakes—over and over again.

### The Turning Point

Monday, April 21, 2014, was a historical and momentous day in my life. It was 3 p.m., 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 Sheikh Dr. Sultan Bin Mohammad Al Qassimi, a member of the Supreme Council of the United Arab Emirates and the President of Sharjah, stating that His Highness had chosen me, exclusively, to chair the Sharjah Electricity and Water Authority (SEWA). SEWA provides electricity, water, and gas to the entire city of Sharjah. His Highness's decision was based on his displeasure with the previous management's performance, both financially and administratively. Furthermore, His Highness believed I could make things like no one else. The call was a huge surprise! I could not believe my own ears and was speechless for a moment. I could not even enjoy the rest of my lunch.

To put it bluntly, the position would mean more responsibility and a new challenge, but I wondered if it was right for me. It introduced a degree of uncertainty that required a different kind of leadership. As His Highness believes, "Till the last man in the last village is happy, the work of the government is not done."

## **A Decision Based on Intuition**

I was asked if I would accept this daunting task. It was not a good time for me to make a quick decision, as I was preparing for the sixth annual leadership and management congress the following morning, which one of my non-profit organizations, Alleem Business Congress, had organized. I was at sixes and sevens!

I consulted with good friends and colleagues, 99% of whom told me I shouldn't accept the position: "big no, you can't do that"; "it's not plain sailing"; "it's a very complicated world out there"; "it's going to be your Waterloo." Scenarios like these often bring feelings of isolation and fear. However, deep inside me, there was a voice that said yes, definitely yes, the most powerful word in the world. With an 'I believe I can do it' mindset, I accepted the appointment because it came directly from the President of the Sharjah Government, whom I love and respect for who he is and his leadership philosophies.

There was no doubt in my mind that SEWA's transformation would be difficult, but someone had to do it and do it well. Despite all the confusion and uncertainty, I followed my *intuition* and decided to accept the position. I was committed, emotionally and intellectually, to do all I could to help it succeed. We all know that 'with God, all things are possible.'

## Executive Order

Without delay, the very next day, the executive order of my appointment as the new Chairman of SEWA was given and issued, but not made public, because His Highness wanted to see me personally first and share his words of wisdom. Indeed, my mind was full of thoughts and big ideas, as I thought to myself, *Transformation cannot happen without emotional investment. How will I frame my transformation game plan and present its roadmap? What will I do first? What are my top priorities?*

## Zero Hour

His Highness wanted to meet with me at 9 a.m. the following morning to appoint me as the new chairman officially. I still remember that *defining* moment when he signed the executive order in front of me and issued it to the public. This act was followed by a private meeting in his office, where he gave me some personal directions and instructions, explaining the way forward. Almost before the ink was dry on the executive order, the news spread like wildfire and was soon the talk of the entire country. As the announcement reached the blogosphere and other social media channels, it gained momentum and was tweeted and retweeted thousands and thousands of times, acquiring traffic even through my personal Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and Instagram accounts.

It was decided that I was to report to His Highness directly without intervening board members to ensure speedy and efficient



decision making. SEWA's performance had to improve rapidly to rescue the authority from expected bankruptcy—a struggling brand in obvious decline. The transformation must be both bold and rapid to be successful. The story is interesting in itself, despite the odds.

How, then, did I save SEWA from its brush with bankruptcy? Well, I took an approach that has *not* been discussed and codified in the business literature, and the goal of this book is to define and explain the approach. I assure you, if applied appropriately, this approach can help recover any organization of any size. It wasn't all a matter of clearing the decks, though. I had to immerse myself in the world of SEWA, a highly bureaucratic, slow moving, hierarchical, and complex organization.

## **Making a Commitment to Lead**

There was no turning back and no backpedaling. Surely, this event was a turning point in my life. I felt thrown into a moment of truth, and indeed, it was a transformational moment. I recognized that this was going to be the most difficult assignment I had ever been asked to do, which was self-evident, as His Highness had given me the responsibility personally. I knew that right then and there, I was re-defining myself. His Highness's order definitely filled me with pangs of inner conflict. One voice beckoned me back to the security of my comfort zone, yet another pulled me forward so powerfully that I simply couldn't say no to realize the business' continued prosperity.

## **It's Lonely at the Top**

We can either keep on cruising along the same old track, or we can veer off the path and forge our own trail. I told myself, *Rashid, it's time you write a brand-new script for your business life. Just go that extra mile...but remember, that extra mile is a lonely place.*

I thought, "Every person needs his or her own personal proving place, and this is mine. I'm here!" I like what the philosopher William

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