

Case Study: UAE Government Leaders Programme

The world is preparing for a future where oil prices do not control the economy, and no one is working harder than the United Arab Emirates (UAE), where oil and gas currently dominate the export-based economy. The UAE must expand its economy well beyond oil in order to maintain its position as a significant player, and it is actively pursuing that agenda now. Meanwhile, government and UAE nationals are concerned that expatriates—foreign labor made up 80 percent of the UAE population in 2010—could overwhelm the country’s cultural and business environment.



برنامج قيادات حكومة الإمارات
UAE GOVERNMENT LEADERS PROGRAMME

To retain its culture and national identity while preparing for a future very different from the present, the UAE must expand the abilities and skills of Emirati nationals. The government has made it a priority to develop the capability and competency of leaders at all levels.

In the UAE and across the region, leadership is highly respected. Among the traits most valued in leaders are visioning and the ability to influence through personal relationships (as opposed to formal authority). But leading a country requires more than just “having a vision.” Leaders must have the knowledge and skills to execute their visions. The Prime Minister’s Office, Ministry of Cabinet Affairs in the UAE federal government identified several competencies it felt were crucial to the continued development of its leaders, then enlisted the partnership of Duke CE and others to address those competencies through a series of modules, offered to government leaders at multiple levels of seniority, and across many departments and agencies.

Duke CE was charged specifically with the topics of Project Management, Financial Management, Human Resources Management, and Leading and Managing Others. The modules provided experiences where participants learned the tools required to lead and manage projects, engage stakeholders, and consider all the alternatives and choices when prioritizing projects. Upon completion of the program, participants departed with the specific frameworks and knowledge to improve performance across their departments. In addition, Duke CE was asked to deliver a module on strategic leadership to the most senior career government officials, the Director General cohort.

To emphasize the practical aspects of project and financial management, participants took part in various immersive learning experiences, including a competitive simulation delivered in collaboration with Knowledge Launch, a long-time and trusted partner, in which teams develop competitive proposals for managing the World Cup in their region. Participants were challenged to uncover information relating to both project and financial management priorities for multiple stakeholders, whom they interviewed live via the web and phone. At the conclusion of the six-hour exercise, participants presented their arguments as to why their team should be chosen to manage the World Cup. Immediate feedback was provided through a structured scoring process, and the team that best gathered, interpreted and responded to the information won the bid.

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continued on next page ►

“The World Cup was a timely reality-based example that challenged participants to apply collaboration, coordination and project management skills real-time, and the proposals they presented were thoughtful and impressive,” said Duke CE’s John Malitoris. “As an opening experience, it set the stage for a rich and relevant learning environment in the days ahead.”

The World Cup Experience showed participants how to adapt to complex and changing situations and how to navigate an environment with multiple stakeholders and priorities. The experience encouraged flexibility: participants received unexpected information and found alternate solutions for the evolving situations.

Duke CE’s Tom Hughes also works with the UAE Government Leaders Programme. “The teams who did best were those that listened well—to each other, and to their stakeholders—and then were willing to revisit their assumptions based on what they learned,” he said. “Sometimes teams just seemed to start off working that way. More often, it was thanks to a key individual who insisted on these things, and showed the team the value of careful listening and thinking.

“When they saw the results, teams tended to come around quickly. It was a tremendous example of the power of individual leadership, and the ability of an experience to do the teaching better than a lecturer could do it.”

The UAE government has shown that it is committed to the power of leadership, preparing for the future by developing those who will lead the country through the coming uncertainty. With its farsighted view of what it means to lead a nation, the UAE dramatically increases its chances of being a major contributor in the future.