

SAYYED HUSSAIN YOUSEF AL-ZALZALAH
“SHIRAA” contributed in converting Think Café into a global franchise

Name	Sayyed Hussain Yousef Al-Zalzaleh
Date of birth	20.10.1982
Marital status	Single
Present occupation	Chairman of the Board of Directors of Shiraa Project Management Company, founding partner in Think Café
Trade Marks	Think Café

Sayyed Hussain Yousef Al-Zalzalah’s experience in the world of entrepreneurs and owners of small and medium projects when his trends found their echo in the ambitions of a group of other young people who wished to forge a new path for themselves in the business world. The common interests of this group were soon rewarded through the initiative establish Shiraa Project Management Company in 2009 at a time when every one of those young men occupied a position in the private sector. How and why did an idea develop into the forming of a company specialized in project management? Al-Zalzalah says: “we had an ambition to establish our own projects and had a number of new ideas for a variety of projects, but that needed capital to start with, and capital was not available at a time when the government entity or the company that was entrusted with providing finance for initiatives like ours was fettered by slow procedures and decision taking. At that time, young people with good initiatives could not find the finance they needed to launch their projects. We had to think of something that would pull us out of that situation. Eventually we decided to establish a specialized company that would operate on the basis of the concept of “co-investors”, thereby providing two essential elements for young people with initiative and who wish to establish their own projects: the first element was providing them with the management experience they would need to launch their enterprise and the second was to provide finance by contributing part of the capital. By this business model Shiraa would be a partner in those new projects that the young entrepreneurs wanted to establish. The company derived its vision from the needs and requirements of the young entrepreneurs, taking into

consideration to need to avoid the obstacles that stood in the way of this business segment and sought to cater for their requirements.”

Al-Zalzalāh explained: “Having agreed upon those broad lines and general trends, we came upon the challenge of collecting the capital, particularly because it was a time when the whole world was in the midst of an overwhelming financial crisis and when tight money was the order of the day. Against this background, we were forced to reduce the targeted capital amount from KD 2 million to KD 500,000 by agreement among the shareholders”.

He recalls the real motivation and economic indicators which drove the launching of the business model of Shirāa Company: “At that time, we were in the midst of the global financial crisis and most specialized studies indicated and emphasized the vital role of small and medium projects and their importance in contributing to the economic development of any country”. Today, less than a decade after that difficult beginning, small and medium projects have become the global norm adopted by many governments worldwide including the economies of modern and advanced countries.

Think Café Converts into a Franchise

The expectations of the founders of Shirāa Project Management Company were inline with the real-life needs of young people. The Company received a large number of applications involving numerous ideas. The process starts with a study of the files and the ideas behind the project. One such project was “Think Café”.

“After we have studied the project rationale and accepted the possibility and elements of its success” Al-Zalzalāh says, “Shirāa Project Management Company became a founding partner in the project with a 50% ownership of its capital. The other 50% was provided by the other founding partners. The project was based on the concept of providing a different business model, a departure from the prevailing well-known pattern of the European and American cafes. The idea of the project was to provide an environment suitable for students and businessmen. A closed space was designated for holding meetings. Another space was equipped with computers, printers and communication equipment that any

business sector would need. The idea was an instant success, and soon after it was established it became the place of choice for those who needed a quiet place for work, study or reading”.

Al-Zalzalah sums up the successful progress of the project ...”I can confidently say that Think Café is already in the process of becoming a global franchise”. He explained that four countries which approached and undertook an in-depth study of the concept are now moving to adopt it. He added that some of those countries are regional (the Emirates and Saudi Arabia). The United Kingdom is another country that is interested in the idea.

Naturally, the Think Café experience was easier talked about than lived. It was a project that confronted tremendous challenges. Some of those challenges were more general, being of the type that usual face owners of small and medium projects, although a large number of those projects met with such difficulties during the past few years. They included the steps of incorporating the companies and the mountain of paperwork that needed to be overcome through a number of government entities. The other was the need to increase awareness by entrepreneurs, the importance of their having a deep understanding of management concepts, the need to improve their experience at this level, and most important, the need for those entrepreneurs receiving the right kind of training in order to sharpen their skills and enrich their experience in the area of management.

Shiraa and the Added Value to its Partners

On the other hand, Al-Zalzalah highlights the role played by Shiraa in the success story of Think Café and the added value that could have provided to the project and that it might provide to any other future project. He went on to say that Shiraa sought to place the experience of its own human resources at the disposal of the entrepreneurs by providing advice and familiarizing them with the sound principles of accounting. He elaborated that the company organizes periodical meetings with the entrepreneurs in order to discuss with them the extent to which the business plans match the real situation and the business strategy adopted at the start of the project. He adds that Shiraa’s strongest element has been its success during a

short time of a few years in building a wide network of strong relations and close communication with many entities at the GCC level. Its efforts in this field were rewarded through the holding of work seminars under the patronage of His Highness the Amir of Kuwait, Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al Jaber Al Sabah, which was attended by a large number of entrepreneurs along with the government entities concerned with small and medium projects in Kuwait or the Gulf region.

Toward a New Strategy

Since its inception, Shiraa Project Management Company achieved several key developments in the rules of supporting small and medium projects at the Kuwait level. Foremost among these is the establishment of the National Fund for Small and Medium Projects which is directly involved with providing finance to project owners. At this point he raises a question about the trends of the company in light of those developments, and responds that "Indeed, with the establishment of the Fund, there is no longer need for the financing services provided by the Company. However, we have always enjoyed a sufficient degree of flexibility that allowed us to focus on the services and needs relevant to small and medium projects, and that have not been fulfilled until now. In this regard, focus was placed along two axes: The first is to follow up the existing projects operating under the umbrella of the Company and seek to achieve further development as in the case of Think Café. The second axis is to provide economic consultancy services such as preparing economic feasibility studies, training services and help in preparing systems and management trends with a view that the work team of Shiraa Project Management Company would undertake the functions of supervision and following up the adopted plans and provide advice on an on-going basis.

Advice Derived from Experience

Perhaps the importance of Shiraa Project Management Company's experience rests in the premise that it has always been in constant touch with the small and medium projects owners. This enabled the supervisors of this function to reach numerous important conclusions that Al-Zalzal places under several important bases: "The entrepreneur", he says, "should be bold both in work and in dealing

with the surrounding risks. This is an aspect of any kind of project, particularly small and medium projects. However, this should be accompanied by a close and continuous follow up by the entrepreneur of the details of their projects, to be aware of all details, in order to be able to deal with any circumstances or developments that may arise. At the same time, he added that the owner of any small or medium project who wishes to launch his business in Kuwait should ensure that his plans include economic feasibility studies, the most appropriate means of expanding into regional and surrounding markets, while giving due attention to the element of innovation in the launching of projects in order to avoid or duplicate projects in a copy-and-paste manner.