

التقدم العلمي

**From
Managing
People to
Leading
The Future**

**The Power of
Connecting
The Dots**

**When Courage
Changes
The Course**



130

October - December 2026



AL-TAQADDUM AL-ILMI



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When Knowledge Becomes Impact

In a world shaped by rapid change, scientific and technological advancement is no longer simply a race toward new tools and innovations. It is an ongoing journey of learning, adapting, and transforming knowledge into meaningful impact for people and society.

In this issue of Al- Taqaddum Al- Ilmi Magazine, we highlight the stories and experiences of eleven Kuwaiti professionals who have embraced continuous learning and innovation as catalysts for new growth and transformation. Their fields may vary—from human resources and banking to retail, technology, and venture building—yet their journeys are united by a shared conviction: investing in people is the foundation of sustainable progress.

These stories take us through diverse experiences, offer fresh ways of thinking, and expose Kuwaiti talent to global perspectives.

As artificial intelligence and digital transformation continue to redefine the future of work, these journeys remind us of fundamental truth: Technology, no matter how powerful, remains a tool in human hands. The

capacity to learn, adapt, ask questions, solve complex challenges, and build trust will continue to distinguish those who shape the future from those who simply respond to it.

Perhaps the most important message woven throughout this issue is that the future is not something we passively await. It is something we actively create through knowledge, curiosity, and investments in people who are willing to learn, grow, and transform ideas into reality.

We hope these stories inspire every reader to reflect on a simple yet profound question:
What can we learn today to help shape the future?

Ameenah Farhan
Director General

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AI is a Tool. Humans make the Decisions

From Finance to Innovation, Technology is
a Tool for Problem-solving

For Abdulaziz Shamesaldain, the answer comes without hesitation. «It's my responsibility to adapt to new tools,» he says. «Take AI, for example. It has taken time for me to adapt, and I'm still learning. But I see it as another problem-solving tool.» That philosophy extends well beyond his own career. His mother owns a bridal fashion business, designing wedding dresses for clients across Kuwait. Rather than seeing AI as humanity's new apocalyptic terror, she has made it part of her business, using it in a plethora of ways: to improve engagement on social media, strengthen her online presence, and refine her marketing strategy. «At the end of the day, AI is only a tool,» Shamesaldain says. «The human being remains the decision-maker.»

It is an idea that has shaped his own career just as profoundly. After graduating with a bachelor's degree in Mechanical Engineering from Montana State University, Shamesaldain began his professional life in the energy and finance sectors, first as an oil trader and market risk analyst before becoming a financial analyst at Alghanim Industries. Today, he serves as Senior Manager, Innovation & Corporate Venture Builder Management at stc Group after earlier roles as Head of User Experience at stc Kuwait and UX design positions in Kuwait and Barcelona. The turning point, however, was not a promotion or a new employer. It was a Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences (KFAS)-supported program.

Shamesaldain has participated in three executive programs supported by KFAS,

but he points to the first as the experience that completely changed the direction of his career. The Digital Mindset program at the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology (HKUST) exposed him to artificial intelligence, big data, cryptocurrency, and the ways emerging technologies were already being used to solve real-world problems. At the time, he was working in finance. «That program completely opened my eyes,» he says. «I found everything so inspiring that I wanted to become part of this technological transformation.» By the time he returned home, he had already decided to change careers. Determined to gain the skills he needed, he later traveled to Barcelona at his own expense to study User Experience Design. KFAS had sparked the idea. The next step was his own investment.

After completing his UX Design training, he joined telecommunications company stc Kuwait, where he would eventually lead the company's user experience before moving into innovation and venture building. A later KFAS-supported program would shape something different—not what he worked on, but how he approached new ideas. Representing stc Kuwait in the KFAS Innovation Challenge at IE University in Madrid, he attended a presentation by a visiting professor on validating ideas before investing heavily in them. The example involved a paddle-court booking service in Spain. Before building sophisticated software, the founders simply used several mobile phones to book courts manually, proving that genuine demand existed before

“At the end of the day, ai is only a tool” Shamesaldain says. “The human being remains the decision-maker.” It is an idea that has shaped his own career just as profoundly

“Ten years from now, I still want to be solving problems, regardless of what the latest technology is”



writing the application itself. The approach is known as bootstrapping: testing an idea with minimal resources before investing heavily in it. «I continue to apply what I learned at IE University in my work today,» he says.

Today, Shamesaldain applies exactly the same principle as part of stc's venture-building team, where one of the first questions he asks is whether a startup idea can be validated before significant resources are committed. Although he spends his days thinking about technology, he is careful not to confuse technology with purpose. AI, he believes, will replace far more jobs than many people expect, including routine administrative work, presentations, spreadsheets, and even some customer-facing roles. Yet despite working at the forefront of innovation, he openly admits that the pace of technological change can be frightening. «Oh, I absolutely fear it,» he says. Fear, however, is not a reason to stop adapting. «You won't be replaced by AI unless you allow yourself to be replaced.» He encourages people to experiment with AI every day, learn what it can do, and treat it as another tool rather than an enemy. «AI doesn't bite,» he says. «Use it every single day.» At the same time, he believes another trend will emerge: genuine human connection will become increasingly valuable.

To explain why, he invites readers to imagine two cafés. In one, robots prepare every drink at the lowest possible cost. In the other, a skilled barista remembers customers, smiles, chats for a few minutes, and creates an experience that goes beyond the coffee itself. «I genuinely believe people will pay a premium for human interaction,» he says.

“He had the confidence to leave finance for technology, the practical tools to turn ideas into ventures, and relationships that would shape both his professional and personal life”

That same appreciation for tangible human impact also explains why he eventually left finance. «In finance, I often couldn't see the direct impact of my work,» he says. Technology felt completely different. After designing parts of stc Kuwait's digital experience, he could walk through shopping malls, airports, or almost anywhere in Kuwait and watch people using something he had helped create. «That feeling is incredibly rewarding,» he says. Instead of looking at numbers in spreadsheets, he could immediately see the results of his work in people's everyday lives.

Today, whether he is mentoring startup teams, building new ventures, or exploring the latest AI tools, Shamesaldain still describes himself in exactly the same way: a problem solver. But the most lasting outcome of his KFAS journey was perhaps not technological at all. During the KFAS Innovation Challenge at IE University in Madrid, he met fellow participant Sarah Al-Khamees, who today works as a Talent Development Specialist at stc. The two have since married. It brings together people from different organizations, backgrounds, and professions and gives them the opportunity

to work toward a common goal. Along the way, participants build relationships that often continue long after the program ends. Some become professional connections. Others become close friendships. For Abdulaziz Shamesaldain, KFAS did far more than introduce him to emerging technologies in Hong Kong or teach him how to test ideas before building them in Madrid. It gave him the confidence to leave finance for technology, the practical tools to turn ideas into ventures, and relationships that would shape both his professional and personal life. For someone who simply wants to keep solving problems, regardless of what the future brings, that may be the most valuable lesson of all.



When Innovation Becomes a Bank

Building Kuwait's First Digital Bank
with People at Its Core

Amal Al-Duwaisan was progressing along what appeared to be a natural path in her banking career. As Deputy Head of Segments at National Bank of Kuwait (NBK), she had spent years working across customer segmentation, research and retail banking initiatives when an altogether different opportunity emerged: helping to build a digital bank from the ground up.

For many executives, leaving a well-established career path for a project that existed largely as an ambitious idea might have prompted hesitation. For Al-Duwaisan, it was precisely the scale of the challenge that made the opportunity compelling. “I think there was something that gravitated me towards the challenge,” she recalls. What attracted her was the opportunity to take on an ambitious project and see it through. “Usually, I get my sense of achievement and fulfillment from actually delivering big things.”

That decision would eventually lead her to become Head of Weyay, Kuwait’s first digital bank. The foundations of that journey, however, had been laid much earlier.

Al-Duwaisan began her banking career in 2002 as a Customer Relationship Representative, initially working in a branch environment. After completing her MBA in Marketing at the University of Texas at Arlington, she joined NBK, where she steadily expanded her responsibilities across marketing research, customer insights and segmentation before becoming part of Weyay’s core founding team. There was never, she says, a rigid master plan behind her career. Rather than mapping out every future title, she focused on pursuing meaningful opportunities that would allow her to grow, contribute and build experience over time. “I’ve always taken a long-term view of my career,” she says. “Rather than focusing on the next title, I think about where I can create value,

continue to grow and what that experience could enable five or ten years down the line.”

Her experience in customer research and segmentation reinforced a lesson she had first encountered in branch banking: understanding customers must come before designing products. Whether conducting market research, developing value propositions or later building digital journeys, she consistently approached banking from the customer’s perspective rather than viewing it purely through technology or financial metrics.

That mindset helps explain why the opportunity to build Weyay appealed to her. The attraction was not simply the role itself, but the chance to create something new and contribute to a project with the potential to reshape the banking experience.

“That mindset of boxing myself into something is usually not how I operate,” she says.

Building Weyay required exactly that openness. With the full endorsement and support of Mohammed Al-Othman, Chief Executive Officer – Consumer and Digital Banking at NBK, Weyay’s core founding team spent more than a year building the new bank from the ground up. The team established its governance structure, assembled multidisciplinary teams, developed products and customer journeys, and created a new operating model.

The result was Kuwait’s first fully digital bank, which continues to expand its customer base and capabilities as it approaches its fifth anniversary.

For Al-Duwaisan, the distinction between a digital bank and a traditional bank is straightforward.

“We’re not digital-first,” she says. “We are only digital.” That principle shapes every decision the bank makes. Every service must be capable of



being delivered digitally from beginning to end, while products and journeys continue to evolve in response to customer needs.

Although Weyay was originally designed with younger customers in mind, Al-Duwaisan believes digital banking is rapidly moving beyond any single demographic. When digital banks first emerged, they primarily attracted customers who preferred managing their finances through an app and minimizing in-person interaction. Today, increasingly intuitive technology has made digital banking accessible to a much broader range of customers across different age groups.

A formative experience in shaping Al-Duwaisan's approach to innovation came in 2018 through the Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences (KFAS), which supported her participation in the UCLA Anderson Innovation Challenge.

The program combined academic learning with practical exposure to innovation. Visits to organizations including Disney, Gensler and Riot Games introduced participants to very different approaches to customer experience, organizational design and problem-solving. Participants also worked on practical business challenges using structured innovation frameworks, combining classroom learning with observation, experimentation and collaborative project work.

For Al-Duwaisan, that practical dimension made the experience particularly relevant to the challenges she would later encounter at Weyay. "The educational level was unparalleled," she says. "It was highly practical, much less theoretical and very challenging."

The program also influenced projects she later worked on. Participants developed a Personal Financial Management module while learning

to apply structured innovation frameworks. Although the feature eventually introduced at Weyay evolved beyond the original concept, the discipline of beginning with a genuine customer need and working systematically towards a solution remained with her.

“It helped us begin thinking differently,” she says. The international exposure also broadened her perspective. Watching organizations such as Disney place extraordinary emphasis on customer service, and seeing Gensler design spaces around human behavior, gave her a wider frame of reference for how organizations can approach customers, design and innovation. It also gave her something she believes is difficult to gain from textbooks alone: confidence.

“When you come back and you want to introduce change or improve something, you have the clarity because you’ve seen it,” she says. That perspective continues to influence her thinking about artificial intelligence. Al-Duwaisan expects AI to transform virtually every area of banking, from internal operations to customer-facing services. Rather than navigating through multiple menus to complete a simple transaction, she envisages customers interacting naturally with their banking application while AI performs the required action seamlessly in the background. “AI is here to stay,” she says. “It will continue growing, and it will influence every function within the bank.”

Yet technological sophistication, she is quick to add, should never come at the expense of humanity.

“The core of digital should be human.”

For Al-Duwaisan, even AI-powered interactions should feel personal rather than mechanical. A

technically correct response without the right tone, context or understanding is not necessarily a good customer experience. Regardless of how advanced the underlying technology becomes, the interaction itself should remain intuitive, relevant and human.

As she reflects on her career, launching Kuwait’s first digital bank remains one of her proudest achievements, not simply because Weyay was created, but because it continues to grow and evolve.

For Al-Duwaisan, however, Weyay remains above all a collective achievement, made possible by the vision and support of NBK management, the work of its core founding team and the wider teams that have continued to develop the bank.

What gives that achievement particular meaning is the impact it can have on people’s lives.

“What I’m most proud of is what we have been able to build together and the impact it can have on people’s lives,” she says. “Digital banking should not only be about technology; at its core, it should be about people.”

There is particular significance, she believes, in helping shape how younger generations experience banking from the beginning, making that relationship simpler, more intuitive and more relevant to the way they live.

That may ultimately be Weyay’s more meaningful legacy: not simply introducing a new model of banking to Kuwait, but helping transform the way a new generation experiences and engages with money.

“What I’m most proud of is what we have been able to build together and the impact it can have on people’s lives”

From Data Analysis to Decision-Making

Strategic Development and Artificial Intelligence



The tools leaders rely on to shape their decisions continue to evolve as the volume of data grows and the pace of change accelerates. The challenge is no longer simply accessing information, but rather analyzing it, interpreting what it reveals, and translating it into choices that support an organization's direction and long-term objectives. From this perspective, Badriyah AlHasawi, General Manager at Tamdeen Group International Restaurants Company, views

artificial intelligence as a tool that contributes to strategic development and broadens the perspective leaders draw upon when making decisions.

This interest in knowledge-based decision-making is also reflected in AlHasawi's own professional journey. Rather than limiting herself to the experience gained at each stage of her career, she has continued to seek new opportunities for learning and growth.

After earning her bachelor's degree in Accounting from Kuwait University, AlHasawi embarked on an entrepreneurial journey, founding Fleur Flower Shop and Fleur's Corner Bakery. She later moved into consulting before joining Tamdeen Group International Restaurants Company, where she currently oversees the strategic planning and execution of food and beverage operations across the Group's real estate portfolio. She has contributed to the development of several leading destinations, including Food Hall Threesixty and Food Hall Al Khiran. The transition from entrepreneurship to working within large-scale real estate development projects marked a turning point in AlHasawi's understanding of the importance of operating within a knowledge-driven strategic framework. She found herself working within an interconnected ecosystem of disciplines and responsibilities, ranging from construction and engineering systems to leasing, design, pricing, and operations. "I applied my planning and project management skills to overseeing both on-site and operational responsibilities. That was when I began to understand the difference between creating a plan and building a strategy. Strategy requires seeing the bigger picture and understanding how each decision affects every other part of the business. This pushed me to continuously expand my knowledge and seek tools that would help me interpret information more deeply and make decisions based on more objective and informed indicators." Her pursuit of learning extended beyond practical experience. Through the Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences (KFAS), AlHasawi participated in a number of executive education programs combining leadership, technology, and decision-making.



In February 2025, she participated in The Digital Leadership program, delivered by HKUST Business School in Hong Kong. The program included a module on AI and Data-driven Decision Making for Executives, exploring applications of artificial intelligence and machine learning and how data can be used to support decision-making in a business environment.

Reflecting on one of the achievements she is particularly proud of, AlHasawi says:

“During the design and development of Food Hall Threesixty, we did not view the spaces simply as units that needed to be leased. We approached them as part of an integrated experience. We studied what I like to call ‘the art of the mix,’ ensuring that every tenant added clear value to the destination while creating the right balance between quality and variety, with a strong presence of Kuwaiti brands.”

She continues: “As a team, it was important for us that the Food Hall reflected the unique character of Kuwaiti society, where going out and dining are an essential part of social life. This has contributed to creating a highly competitive market, where expectations for quality and variety have continued to rise. Over time, some local concepts have matured to the point where they are now expanding beyond Kuwait as complete experiences. At Tamdeen Group, we therefore wanted the tenant mix to reflect the identity of the Kuwaiti market and to give outstanding local brands a platform worthy of their quality.” “We realized that the tenant mix alone would not create the experience; the design and allocation of the space were equally important. Prior to opening, we studied food hall models, customer

“During the design and development of Food Hall Threesixty, we did not view the spaces simply as units that needed to be leased. We approached them as part of an integrated experience”

behavior, and seating patterns to understand how the space could deliver a better customer experience while making more efficient use of the available seating. This research helped shape the communal seating concept, giving visitors greater flexibility and allowing people to sit and dine together even when ordering from different restaurants.”

“We wanted the space we created to welcome everyone and to encourage people to engage with it in ways that went beyond dining. This led us to launch 360 Camp for children, a summer camp that ran for several weeks and combined educational and hands-on experiences across art, cooking, and sports. We utilized Tamdeen Group’s facilities and destinations to provide a diverse range of workshops and activities. Children played tennis at the Rafa Nadal Academy, went behind the scenes at Cinescape, they experienced the sales and customer service at the Food Hall restaurants, and explored their creativity through arts and crafts at Make Meaning. It was rewarding to

see the space take on a role beyond its commercial function—bringing children together and giving them opportunities to explore and learn.”

Throughout this journey, AlHasawi attributes an important part of her professional development to Tamdeen Group, which placed its trust in her and expanded the scope of her responsibilities. This enabled her to take on new experiences, opened broader horizons, and further strengthened her leadership capabilities.

Speaking about the connection between team leadership and strategic development, AlHasawi says: “Absolutely. Leading a team begins with human values—giving people the space to learn, develop, express themselves, and ask questions, while also understanding their individual capabilities and competencies. I therefore do not see the team as separate from strategic development. The capabilities we have today, and those we are working to develop, largely determine what the organization can aspire to achieve tomorrow.”

She continues: “coming from an entrepreneurial background, I was used to take on everything myself, but I’ve learned that leadership also means knowing when to step back and give others the opportunity to take responsibility. When you trust your team, you give them room to grow, learn, and become more confident in making decisions.

For me, that is what leadership is ultimately about: growing with your team and building something that can continue to evolve beyond you.”



Risk Creates Opportunity

From Pandemic
Challenges to Aviation
Leadership

On a Wednesday evening at around seven o'clock, Dhari Alawwad picked up the phone and called Jazeera Airways. At the time, he was working for Kuwait's Directorate General of Civil Aviation during the COVID-19 pandemic, coordinating one of the country's most urgent digital projects: introducing QR codes across airport terminals and linking them to the Ministry of Health's systems. Everything had to be ready before the Minister of Health arrived for an inspection on Sunday. "I'll provide you with all the data you need," he told his counterpart at Jazeera Airways. "I want everything implemented by Saturday at the latest because the Minister of Health will be visiting on Sunday. I'll personally inspect



your terminal, and I want to see everything working." The man listened carefully. "Okay," he replied. "Are you done with your request? "Yes," Alawwad said. "Can I speak to you for a few minutes?" The conversation lasted two and a half hours. "I've been observing you for the past three months," the man told him. "I wasn't sure how to reach you, but now that you've called... What are you going to do in government? What's your future? Do you realize what you could do in the private sector? I know it's COVID... I know people are losing their jobs... I know it's a risk... But risk comes with benefits." By the end of the call, Alawwad had accepted an invitation that would eventually bring him to Jazeera Airways, and the man on the other end of the line would become his future manager. It would not be the first time he had taken a risk

that changed the course of his career. Long before joining Jazeera Airways, Alawwad was already working full time with only a high school diploma. From 2010 to 2014, he supervised one of the Touristic Enterprises Company's facilities along Kuwait's Arabian Gulf Street waterfront. When his supervisor resigned, however, the promotion went to someone with less experience. The explanation was simple. "We know you're the most competent person," his managers told him. "But this other guy has a bachelor's degree." Rather than argue, Alawwad resigned. He moved to the United Arab Emirates, enrolled at Ajman University, and earned a bachelor's degree in Public Relations in December 2017. His university years also produced one story he still laughs about today. Most students try

to graduate with the highest possible GPA. Alawwad had a different goal.

"I wanted a GPA of exactly 3.33 because I simply liked the number."

He even asked some professors to award him lower grades than he had earned so the mathematics would work out. "I was literally designing my grades to reach 3.33." He missed. His final GPA was 3.32. "I was very disappointed because I missed it by just 0.01." After graduating, he returned to Kuwait and joined the Directorate General of Civil Aviation while also co-founding Bricks Design, an advertising and marketing company. For a period, he balanced both roles before eventually focusing full time on Civil Aviation. Although the business grew quickly, disagreements with his business partner eventually led him to step away. "I don't regret

the experience,” he says. “Running your own company teaches you things you simply cannot learn as an employee.”

The pandemic became another unexpected turning point. Working at Civil Aviation, Alawwad found himself coordinating digital systems, airport procedures, and public health requirements at a time when regulations were changing almost daily. The work brought him into regular contact with airlines and government agencies—and eventually caught Jazeera Airways’ attention. Today, he serves as Senior Manager of Government Relations and Projects and Head of Revenue Management, overseeing responsibilities that extend far beyond the Public Relations degree he once earned. Two programs supported by the Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences (KFAS) also shaped his development as a leader. The first was the High Potential Leader program, a three-month course that combined sessions in Kuwait with a final week in North Carolina. The second, a Harvard negotiation program, would have an even deeper impact.

“When I came back, something had changed,” he says. The change was not reflected in a new title or qualification. It showed in the way he approached people. He struggles to identify one lecture or one exercise that made the difference. Instead, the change happened gradually. Before Harvard, he says, he tended to make decisions quickly. Afterwards, he became more patient. “Now, before making a decision, I listen,” he says. “I ask more questions. I try to understand the other person’s perspective before reaching a conclusion.”

Harvard also changed the way he negotiates. Previously, he believed negotiation was

mainly about convincing the other side. The program taught him something different. “First, understand what the other person actually wants. Sometimes people ask for one thing, but what they really need is something completely different. If you don’t understand that, you’ll never reach a good agreement.” The program also changed the way he leads his team. Today, Alawwad leads professionals from different countries, including India, Ethiopia, and Nepal. Instead of interrupting, he lets people finish speaking. Instead of assuming he already has the answer, he listens. “Sometimes they surprise me,” he says. “Sometimes they see something I completely missed.”

He also believes leaders have a responsibility to protect their teams. “If senior management has an issue,” he says, “I tell them, ‘Come to me. Speak to me. Don’t speak to my team.’” That same willingness to challenge authority extends to his own managers. “I always do what I genuinely believe is right,” he says. “When someone tells me to do something and I believe it’s wrong, I challenge it.”

For young Kuwaitis considering a KFAS program, however, his advice has little to do with titles or certificates. The certificate is probably the least important part, he believes. What matters is the experience. The people you meet. The discussions you have. The different ways of thinking you’re exposed to. The single lesson that has stayed with him throughout his career is neither strategy nor negotiation. It is “patience.”

“The Harvard program taught me that. Today, before making decisions, I listen. I ask questions. I try to understand. It has made me a better leader. It has made me better at negotiations. And, honestly, it has made me a better person.”

“Today, before making decisions, I listen. I ask questions. I try to understand. It has made me a better leader.”

The Power of Connecting the Dots

Curiosity, Innovation and Lifelong Learning



Life, Faris Ali believes, would be considerably less interesting if it moved in a straight line. To explain this—and his own career—he reaches not for a business-school metaphor but for seashells, Romanesco broccoli, branching trees, lightning and galaxies. All of them, he says, grow and move in patterns that are expansive rather than linear. Why should a career be any different?

“I view career trajectories in the same light as I view the cosmos,” Faris says. His own CV makes the argument rather convincingly. After earning a bachelor’s degree in International Business from Gulf University for Science and Technology in 2012, he worked at the Kuwait Fund for Development, where his responsibilities included facilitating payments for infrastructure projects and supporting humanitarian financing involving international organizations. During roughly the same period, he co-founded Experimental Eatery, which he describes as Kuwait’s first pop-up restaurant concept. He later worked as Operations Manager at the non-profit Nuqat, became Business Development Manager at Kuwait Dana Lubes Company and eventually joined Tamdeen Group in 2023. Today, his CV lists him as Business Developer, under the real estate arm of Tamdeen Group.

To Faris, however, the apparent jumps between industries make considerably more sense from inside the career than they might on paper. Moving among different kinds of organizations has taught him how to communicate with specialists who do not necessarily speak the same professional language. An engineer may approach a problem one way, a finance executive another, while marketing, information technology (IT) and design bring their own terminology and priorities. Faris sees

part of his job as understanding enough of each world to connect them. “I would say a critical part of my responsibilities that most people don’t see is being the ‘connector’ behind the scenes,” he says. His current work at Tamdeen Group can involve coordinating across companies, departments and sectors as ideas move toward actual projects.

That breadth is deliberate. Faris describes himself as an “active lifetime learner” and says he has worked his way through more than 800 books, in addition to lectures and other educational material. His interests listed on his CV range from behavioral psychology and neuroscience to artificial intelligence, futurism, ecology and cryptocurrencies. He even listens to books at the gym, “between sets and EDM (electronic dance music) tracks.” The point, for him, isn’t collecting disconnected facts. It is being able to enter a room containing architects, marketers, engineers or other specialists, understand what each is trying to accomplish and see where their interests intersect.

His appetite for learning has also taken him repeatedly to programs supported by the Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences (KFAS). Since 2023, Faris says he has participated in six: the Harvard Kennedy School custom program on navigating change, decision-making, negotiation and leadership strategies; UC Berkeley’s Equity Fluent Leadership in Kuwait; Artificial Intelligence & Leadership for Executives through HEC Paris in Kuwait; AI-Driven Marketing Strategy at Columbia Business School in New York; the Digital Leadership Program at HKUST

“KFAS as an institution is like an iceberg,” he says. “Its academic and business network spans deeper than what is visible on the surface”

Business School in Hong Kong; and, most recently, Leadership in a Technology Driven World at Imperial College Business School in London. He regularly checks the executive education opportunities offered through KFAS, looking for programs that can broaden his perspective or strengthen an area he wants to develop. What stayed with him most was not a particular certificate or lecture. It was what happened when people from different backgrounds were put around the same table. Faris particularly valued the group exercises that followed the academic material, when participants had to draw on their different experiences to solve a problem together. He describes the result, characteristically, as gaining access to a “collective hive mind.” For someone whose daily work already involves connecting different professional languages, the attraction is obvious. He worries that people who become deeply specialized can retreat into departmental silos; the KFAS programs repeatedly pulled him in the opposite direction, putting him in contact with professionals he might otherwise never have encountered.

The network has occasionally resurfaced in unexpected places. This summer, while vacationing in Marbella, Faris happened to encounter a Saudi participant he had met through the Imperial College program in London. For him, the chance meeting illustrated something larger about the relationships KFAS can create. “KFAS as an institution is like an iceberg,” he says. “Its academic and business network spans deeper than what is visible on the surface.” He has met peers through both its international and Kuwait-based programs and would like to see more professional development programs connecting participants across the Gulf.

Technology is another reason Faris believes that kind of cross-disciplinary thinking is becoming increasingly necessary. He had already been following automation during the fintech boom more than a decade ago, and the rapid development of artificial intelligence (AI) led him to apply for the Imperial College program. But despite his fascination with AI tools, he is wary of vague claims about what it can accomplish. In conversation, he gives the example of someone walking into a company promising to “apply AI.” His response would be to start asking questions: What kind of AI? What exactly is being sold? What problem does it solve? Is the technology genuinely sophisticated, or is expensive language being wrapped around something readily available elsewhere? Specificity, he says, matters.

He is equally wary of becoming so dependent on technology that people lose skills of their own. Faris believes excessive reliance on AI can weaken



communication and cognitive habits, and argues for a hybrid future in which human judgment develops alongside increasingly capable machines. His metaphor this time comes from Greek mythology: the centaur, except the creature he imagines is “half human, half artificial intelligence.” In real estate, he expects that combination to become increasingly tangible as AI and Internet of Things

technologies—networks of connected sensors and devices that collect and exchange data—allow properties to generate live data about how they are functioning. He compares the possibility to viewing the vital signs, functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) and electroencephalography (EEG) of a building simultaneously on a tablet. The same instinct—to connect things

**“Be nimble, be humble,
be aware, be ready”**

that initially appear unrelated—also shapes the way Faris thinks about Kuwait. He sees particular potential in food and beverage, fitness and wellness, and health care, sectors he believes can reinforce one another as parts of a wider leisure economy. His own work already places him inside one version of that convergence. To Faris, a modern Gulf mall is no longer simply a collection of stores. Climate and changing consumer habits have helped turn such developments into mixed-use environments where people can eat, exercise, work, meet and access other services. At Tamdeen’s Al Khiran Mall, he points out, someone can arrive by speedboat at the marina and then walk inside to access government services. There is, perhaps, something fitting about a man with such an eclectic career spending his working life connecting different pieces of large, mixed-use destinations. Faris does not pretend to know exactly where his own path will lead next. He is still, as he puts it, in the middle of the journey, with the way forward unfolding “choice by choice and project by project.” His advice to young Kuwaitis is considerably shorter than his explanation of fractals, galaxies or artificial intelligence. “Be nimble, be humble, be aware, be ready.”



Leadership in Evolution

From Experience to
Governance: Leading
with Impact

On the first day of Harvard University's Program for Leadership Development (PLD), Mona Al-Duaij surprised even herself. "I need to learn how to delegate," she told the instructors. "I need to trust my team more. I need to give them more confidence and more freedom, allowing them to learn and even correct themselves." For someone who had spent two decades steadily climbing through the ranks of Boubyan Bank, the admission was deeply personal. Al-Duaij already held one of the institution's most senior executive positions. Yet rather than arriving at Harvard believing she had mastered leadership, she arrived convinced there was still something fundamental she needed to change. The same mindset shaped two leadership

“AI offers enormous opportunities—from detecting suspicious transactions efficiently to strengthening compliance, monitoring and improving operational performance”

“When I see someone who started with me years ago becoming a manager or a leader today, it gives me much more satisfaction than receiving another promotion”

programs supported by the Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences (KFAS). Al-Duaij's leadership journey began much earlier. After graduating with a degree in Finance from Kuwait University in 2005, she joined Boubyan Bank in November of the same year, at a time when the institution itself was still taking shape. Over the following two decades, she moved through roles spanning the branch network, operations and control, branch support, retail channels and executive management before being appointed Group Chief Compliance and Governance Officer in January 2021. Rather than changing employers every few years—a career strategy often recommended to ambitious professionals—Al-Duaij built her career by moving horizontally across very different functions within the same organization. “I joined Boubyan while it was still in its establishment phase,” she recalls. “In a way, we all grew together.”

That experience exposed her to almost every aspect of the bank, from customer-facing operations to back-office support, governance and eventually regulatory oversight. Each move required learning an entirely new discipline while building on the experience gained in the previous one. But her greatest professional transition came in early 2021, when the bank's CEO asked her to leave the operational side of the business and take responsibility for Compliance, Governance and Anti-Money Laundering. Accepting the position meant stepping into one of banking's most technically demanding and highly scrutinized functions. “It was a difficult decision,” she says. Yet she accepted immediately.

Today, as Group Chief Compliance and Governance Officer, Al-Duaij oversees one of the bank's most independent functions. Her

team ensures compliance with regulations issued by the Central Bank of Kuwait, monitors anti-money laundering controls, reports directly to the Board's Risk and Compliance Committee on governance matters, and serves as the bank's official liaison with regulators. The role demands independence as much as technical expertise. Compliance, she says, is often misunderstood as a department whose purpose is simply to say “no.” Her own appointment reflected a different philosophy.

When offering her the position, the CEO explained his reasoning. “I don't want someone whose background is only in regulation and who simply says ‘No’ to everything,” he told her. Because she had spent years working across the bank, she already understood its business, products and people. That broader perspective enabled her not only to interpret regulations but also to help business teams find practical ways to comply with them while continuing to innovate. That balance between regulation and innovation would later become even more relevant as AI began reshaping financial services.

Al-Duaij believes AI offers enormous opportunities—from detecting suspicious transactions more efficiently to strengthening compliance monitoring and improving operational performance. At the same time, she says, AI introduces new risks. Cybersecurity, data privacy, governance, and ethics all become part of the compliance agenda. “We need to understand those risks first and then develop the right controls.”

Long before AI became central to banking, Al-Duaij had already invested heavily in her own development through executive education. With support from KFAS, she participated in UCLA's leadership programme in 2018 before completing

Harvard University's Program for Leadership Development (PLD), graduating in January 2026. The bank nominated three executives for the Harvard programme, and KFAS selected her to participate. Although regional instability prevented her from returning to campus later that year as originally planned, she intends to continue building her relationship with Harvard and its alumni community when circumstances allow.

"They gave me confidence," she says.

"They gave me exposure. And they gave me relationships."

Those relationships remain active today. Even after completing the programmes, she remains in touch with fellow participants from different organizations and industries. The network they built, she says, continues to expose her to new ideas and different perspectives beyond the banking sector. Before Harvard, Al-Duaij says she arrived at the office each morning and immediately immersed herself in work. After Harvard, her routine changed completely. She now closes her office door for a few minutes at the beginning of each day, organizes her thoughts, writes down priorities and mentally prepares for the day ahead. The change extended beyond personal habits. She deliberately gives her team greater responsibility, encourages independent decision-making and resists the perfectionism that once made her reluctant to delegate. "Those may sound like small changes," she says, "but they've genuinely changed my life and the way I work every day." Leadership, she believes, also requires constant self-awareness. People who



believe they have nothing left to learn often become trapped by their own ego. Every leader—even a chief executive—has areas that require improvement. For women in particular, she believes leadership requires balancing professional responsibilities with family life. Without that balance, she says, many talented leaders eventually find themselves forced to make difficult choices. Looking back over twenty years at Boubyan Bank, Al-Duaij says her proudest achievement is not a title. It is watching people she once mentored become leaders themselves.

"When I see someone who started with me years ago becoming a manager or a leader today," she says, "that gives me much more satisfaction than having another promotion."

Sure, becoming Group Chief Compliance and Governance Officer remains an important milestone in her career. Yet when she thinks about success, her mind goes elsewhere. "When I see someone who started with me years ago becoming a manager or a leader today," she says, "that gives me much more satisfaction than another promotion."

From Managing People to Leading the Future

Continuous learning transforms HR into a strategic business partner

When Omar Al Bassam returned to Kuwait after graduating from the University of Portsmouth in 1999, he had no grand plan to build a career in human resources. He joined M.H. Alshaya, one of the Middle East's largest retail franchise operators, through its HR Management Trainee Program almost by chance, expecting little more than an opportunity to begin his professional life. Nearly three decades of progressive HR leadership experience across Retail, Banking, Aviation, and Telecommunications.





He currently serves as Chief Human Resources & Administration Services Officer at Ooredoo Kuwait. In retrospect, he sees that unexpected first step as the beginning of a much broader journey. “I understood that HR isn’t only about policies or hiring people,” he says. “It’s also about enabling business success.” In those early years, Al Bassam immersed himself in the fundamentals of the profession, determined to understand every aspect of labor law, recruitment, HR operations and people management. Yet the longer he worked, the more his perspective evolved. Human resources, he realized, was far more than a support function operating behind the scenes. At its best, it became a strategic partner capable of helping organizations solve business challenges through their people rather than simply managing them. That shift in perspective became unmistakable around nine years ago when he joined Ooredoo Kuwait’s Executive Leadership team as Chief Human Resources & Administration Services Officer. Sitting alongside the CEO and the rest of the Executive Committee fundamentally changed the way he viewed his own role. “I realized that I was no longer simply solving HR or people problems,” he says. “I was helping solve business problems through people.” Executive education played an important role in preparing him for that transition. Throughout his executive career, Al Bassam completed a series of KFAS-supported programs at some of the world’s leading business schools, including London Business School, Harvard Business School and Imperial College Business School. KFAS facilitated the application process, but admission itself remained highly competitive, with participants selected directly by the universities. “My first London Business School program was in 2010,” he recalls. “The Harvard Business School program in 2015–2016 played a major role because, in 2017, I was appointed as a Chief Human Resources & Administration Services Officer. The six-month program gave me many

of the skills that helped prepare me for that position.”

His learning priorities changed as his career progressed. Earlier in his executive journey, he deliberately invested in strengthening his leadership capabilities. Once those foundations had been established, he shifted his focus towards technology, organizational transformation and the future of work, recognizing that leadership itself requires constant reinvention.

“I’ve already invested heavily in leadership. Now let me focus on different areas,” he explains it. Then he adds, “You have to keep learning. The workforce changes. The business environment changes. The world changes. If you don’t stay on top of those changes, you’ll become outdated.”

For Al Bassam, those programs were never really about adding prestigious names to his résumé. Their value lay in acquiring ideas and practical tools that could immediately be applied back home. Harvard, in particular, left a lasting impression—not only because of what it taught him, but because of the intensity of the experience itself.

Participants travelled to Boston twice during the six-month program, spending weeks living on campus and immersing themselves in case discussions, team projects and classroom debates. Days began at seven in the morning with breakfast meetings before classes started and often continued well into the evening as teams worked through business cases together. “It was constant,” he recalls. “If someone slacked off or didn’t do the work, they were confronted immediately. People would say, ‘You’re not here to waste time.’”

The classroom, however, was only part of the experience. Just as valuable were the relationships forged with executives from around the world—connections that have endured for well over a decade. “I know people in Brazil whom I met in 2010,” he says. “I know people across Europe, China, Korea and many other places. Those relationships have stayed with me.”



That international outlook has proved especially valuable at Ooredoo, whose operations extend across Kuwait, Qatar, Oman, Iraq, Algeria, Tunisia, Palestine, Maldives and Indonesia. Working within a multinational telecommunications group has also reinforced another lesson: technological change never stands still. “Technology will always continue to evolve,” he says. “We had 4G, then 5G, now 5G+, and we’re already talking about 6G.” The implications, he believes, extend far beyond faster internet speeds. “Imagine you’re

sitting in San Diego and, through high-speed internet and robotics, you’re able to perform surgery on someone in Kuwait.” Yet despite the rapid pace of innovation, he believes the greatest challenge remains human rather than technological. Organizations must equip people with the confidence and skills to embrace new technologies rather than fear them. “We need to improve their technological literacy and reassure them that AI itself will not replace them,” he says. “AI won’t replace someone who is willing to learn, willing to explore and willing to adapt.”

For Al Bassam, HR begins long before an employee walks through the office door. It starts with the very first conversation with a candidate and continues through recruitment, onboarding, mentoring during the first hundred days, development planning, performance reviews, career progression, succession planning and, eventually, even an employee's departure from the organization. Every stage, he believes, is part of the same continuous journey.

Among the initiatives he is most proud of is Ooredoo Kuwait's approach to succession planning. Today, five of the company's six C-suite Executives—including Al Bassam himself—were promoted internally, reflecting years of deliberate investment in developing future leaders.

Another initiative reflects a different side of organizational culture. Around six years ago, Ooredoo introduced birthday leave, giving employees a paid day off to celebrate with family and friends. "On your birthday, don't come to work," he says. "Stay with your family. Stay with your friends. Celebrate. The day is on us."

Those values were tested most visibly during the COVID-19 pandemic. When Kuwait closed its borders, many employees found themselves stranded overseas while on annual leave. Rather than placing them on unpaid leave until they could return, Ooredoo continued paying their salaries. "It demonstrated to our employees that we were committed to them," Al Bassam says. The decision had a lasting impact on trust within the organization. Employees witnessed first-hand how the company supported them during the crisis; this increased employee loyalty significantly, with around 80 percent

of employees becoming promoters of the organization in Ooredoo's internal Net Promoter Score survey.

Undoubtedly, the lessons Al Bassam absorbed through executive education have also shaped the way he leads his own team. Around 2015, he established what he calls his "consultancy board"—his senior HR leadership team.

Rather than making major decisions alone, he deliberately brings them into the discussion, encouraging debate and shared ownership.

"When people contribute to a decision, they become committed to making it succeed," he explains. The same philosophy underpins his succession planning. Whenever he is away from the office, he rotates leadership responsibilities between two potential successors rather than relying on a single deputy. "I never want to rely on just one person." Some leaders hesitate to prepare future successors because they worry about eventually being replaced. Not Al Bassam. "I do not see it that way. I believe your success is ultimately a reflection of the strength and performance of our team".

That belief also shapes his day-to-day interactions with managers. These days, when a manager walks into his office with a problem, Al Bassam rarely reaches for the answer. Instead, he reaches for another question, nudging people to analyze the situation, weigh their options and arrive at their own conclusions. "What do you think? What options have you considered? What would you recommend?" For Al Bassam, developing leaders means resisting the temptation to provide every answer yourself.

"If I simply give them the answer every time, they won't grow," he says. At the end, his goal isn't to build followers who depend on him, but leaders who no longer need him.

"AI won't replace someone who is willing to learn, willing to explore and willing to adapt"

"I never want to rely on just one person. I believe success is ultimately a reflection of the strength and performance of our team"



Understanding the Problem Before Solving It

True Innovation Begins with
Understanding the Right Problem

Few careers illustrate the breadth of modern banking better than Saleh Al Mansour's. He began by serving customers at a bank branch. Today, he helps shape business performance, digital transformation, and strategy at Boubyan Bank. Yet Al Mansour does not identify a single dramatic turning point behind that rise. "Honestly, there wasn't really one defining moment," he says. Each role taught him something different, gradually taking him from working directly with customers to focusing on strategy, planning, and executive leadership. Al Mansour began his banking career at Gulf Bank in 2007 as a Customer Service Representative. He subsequently became a Senior Customer Service Representative and Relationship Officer before moving into Learning and Development and then SME Banking. In 2011, he joined Boubyan Bank as Manager in its Project Management Office. He was promoted later to Senior Manager in 2013, Executive Manager in 2016, and Assistant General Manager in 2020 within the Business Performance and Planning Department. For him, beginning in a branch was not merely an entry-level stage to leave behind. It formed the foundation of how he understands banking.

"I think it was the best place to start because it taught me a lot about not only banking and products and services and numbers. It's also about how I deal with people," he says. Every customer entering a branch, he learned, carried a different story. Understanding those stories helped him see that sound financial decisions and human understanding were not competing priorities. Today, his responsibilities span consumer banking, retail, customer channels, products, services, sales, finance, customer experience, innovation, and partnerships. No two days, he says, are alike. One may revolve around business

performance and key performance indicators; another may focus on customer propositions, AI, or the bank's long-term efficiency.

His role is less about supplying every answer himself than bringing together the right people and perspectives. "A lot of people sometimes think these projects are driven more by one person, but that's never the case," he says. He credits talented cross-functional teams and sees his own responsibility as removing obstacles while balancing immediate priorities against investments that must continue producing value several years into the future.

He also credits senior leaders with giving him unusually significant responsibility early in his career. "One main thing that I'm genuinely grateful for is the trust my leaders gave to me," he says. As one of the youngest among his peers, he was entrusted with leadership opportunities that placed him under pressure but accelerated his development.

That openness to development eventually brought him to two internationally recognized institutions with support from the Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences (KFAS). His CV records his participation in the KFAS Innovation Challenge at the University of California, Berkeley, in 2015, followed by an executive development program at Harvard University in 2016.

The Berkeley program appealed to him partly because it did not resemble conventional classroom learning. Al Mansour readily admits that he is "not a big fan" of sitting in a classroom and absorbing theory. The Innovation Challenge instead exposed participants to real problems, practitioners from different industries, and ideas grounded in practical experience. One lesson stayed with him. Before racing

"I think it was the best place to start because it taught me a lot about not only banking, products, services and numbers, it is also about how I deal with people"



toward an innovative solution, leaders must first understand the problem.

“One of the main things that we discussed is spending more time understanding the problem before trying to solve it,” he says. In fast-moving organizations, teams can easily jump directly to solutions, particularly when innovation has

become a catch-all term attached to almost every corporate discussion. Berkeley taught him to slow down and ask two questions: What exactly are we trying to solve, and is it the right problem to solve? The shift may sound modest, but Al Mansour says it changed the way he approaches discussions at work. Innovation, he

realized, does not necessarily mean deploying the newest technology. Sometimes, the most innovative answer is also the most practical. Harvard offered a different curriculum, focused on leadership, problem-solving, and becoming a better leader, but the broader purpose was similar. KFAS, he says, enabled Kuwaiti professionals to learn from leading global institutions and bring those perspectives back to their organizations and country. “KFAS plays a very important role because it invests in people and in talent,” he says. Such opportunities benefit the participant, but the effects extend further: ideas acquired abroad can influence teams, organizations, and ultimately Kuwait’s wider economy.

That investment in people is especially important as banking confronts AI.

Al Mansour expects AI to become part of almost everything banks do, helping employees make better decisions and eliminating repetitive tasks. Nevertheless, he rejects the idea that it will entirely replace people. Banking, he argues, is built on trust. A chatbot may become increasingly sophisticated, but it cannot reproduce the warmth of sitting with a public relations manager, branch manager, or colleague who understands not only a customer’s request but its emotional context. Technology can strengthen banking, but “there is this emotional part that cannot be replaced.”

His preferred projects reflect that way of thinking. He is most energized by initiatives that improve customer experience, develop new propositions, or create lasting transformation—not projects undertaken merely to “check the box.” One example was a savings account allowing customers to work toward goals such as buying a first car or paying for a daughter’s wedding while also entering monthly prize

He credits talented cross-functional teams and sees his own responsibility as removing obstacles while balancing immediate priorities against investments

draws. The concept was simple, but the engagement and feedback were strong. Not every project succeeded, however. Al Mansour also recalls spending almost a year developing what was intended to become Kuwait’s first wallet for the underbanked. The project was ultimately ditched after the team acknowledged that it had underestimated both the effort it required and the poor odds. It was a reminder that a good idea alone is never enough. Timing, communication, commercial reality, and coordination all determine whether innovation reaches the customer.

Al Mansour believes Kuwait possesses the ingredients to become a major international player in financial services: a well-regulated banking sector, high digital adoption, an educated and technologically comfortable young population, and institutions such as KFAS that invest in talent. What is still missing, he says, is stronger collaboration among banks, the private sector, government, and universities.

Kuwaitis themselves bring another advantage. Al Mansour sees an entrepreneurial mindset among many of the country’s strongest professionals—people determined to push boundaries and turn promising ideas into reality. With sustained investment in those people, he believes Kuwait can convert that ambition into long-term leadership.

When Courage Changes the Course

A Career Change Took Her from Numbers to Empowering People's Growth

When telecommunications company stc's Chief Human Resources Officer suggested Sarah Al-Khamees might belong in Human Resources, she was stunned. After earning a bachelor's degree in Accounting with a minor in Finance from Kuwait University, she began her career as an accountant before joining stc as an Investor Relations Junior Analyst, where she coordinated financial disclosures, annual reports, and communications with stakeholders. Everything about her education and professional experience pointed in the same direction. Human Resources simply was not part of the plan. "I've spent my whole career in finance," she remembers telling him. In hindsight, she describes what happened next as "the biggest turning point" of her career. "I think many people find that transition surprising, and maybe even a little interesting," she says. There is a backstory to making that decision, however, and it began months earlier, through a Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences (KFAS)-supported Innovation Challenge. In 2024, Al-Khamees was one of only five stc employees nominated to participate in the Innovation Challenge at IE University in Madrid. The three-month program brought

together professionals from different industries—including telecommunications, banking, and oil and gas—to develop innovative solutions to real-world problems. Each month included several days of activities before participants traveled to Madrid for the program's final module.

Before attending, she says she was always confident in the quality of her work. She trusted the work she produced. What she found much harder was speaking up. She tended to stay quiet until she felt completely prepared and she was more comfortable listening than voicing her own ideas, particularly when senior leaders were in the room. After returning from Madrid, that changed. "I found myself participating much more actively in discussions at work," she says. "Previously, I would have listened more than I spoke. Now, I contribute my own ideas and perspectives." She noticed the difference most clearly when speaking with senior executives. "In corporate environments, there are always hierarchies," she says. "When you're young, you sometimes hesitate to speak directly with senior executives." After the program, she found herself speaking confidently even in the presence of the company's CEO. "My confidence had grown tremendously."



Asked what made the biggest difference, she points not only to the classroom, but also to the experience of taking her first independent journey outside Kuwait. Before Madrid, she had never traveled abroad alone. “I had always traveled with my family,” she says. Traveling independently, meeting people from different companies, and adapting to a completely different environment all helped strengthen her self-belief. Just as importantly, working alongside professionals from different industries changed the way she approached problems. “You realize that everyone approaches problems differently,” she says. “There isn’t just one correct answer.” The program also reshaped the way she thought about innovation. Before attending, innovation largely meant technology. Today, she sees

it differently. “The real question is whether you’re solving a genuine problem,” she says. “Sometimes the solution is technological. Sometimes it isn’t.” During the program, participants repeatedly returned to one principle: understand the problem before trying to design the solution. That lesson continues to shape her work today. Not long after returning to Kuwait, another unexpected opportunity emerged. As she began speaking more confidently with senior leaders across the company, one conversation with the Chief Human Resources Officer took her career in an entirely new direction. He asked her what she enjoyed most about her work. Eventually, he said, “I actually think you’d fit HR.” At first, she was stunned. But he suggested she should spend time shadowing different

“You realize that everyone approaches problems differently, There isn’t just one correct answer”

“They expose you to different ways of thinking. They introduce you to people from different backgrounds. And they challenge you to step out of your comfort zone”

HR departments before making up her mind. She visited several teams, observed how they worked, and spoke with managers across the function. It was then that she realized how broad Human Resources actually is. “It isn’t mostly recruitment,” she says. “It includes leadership development, organizational development, learning, succession planning, and many other areas.” Little by little, she realized talent development suited her personality far more than finance. “I enjoy helping people grow,” she says. “That’s what gives me energy.”

She describes that period with a metaphor that still makes her smile. “I felt like a bee moving from flower to flower.” Moving between departments, speaking with different people, and learning something new everywhere she went never felt confusing. Every conversation offered another perspective until she eventually found the place where she felt she belonged. Today, she still draws on many of those lessons. Innovation, she believes, also applies to the way organizations help people learn. “Every employee learns differently,” she says. “Not everyone enjoys traditional classroom training. Some people prefer workshops. Others learn through coaching, and others need practical experience. The goal isn’t simply to organize training sessions. The goal is to create real development.”

AI has become one of the tools she uses in that work. She leverages AI to brainstorm ideas, organize information, and structure her thinking, but she does not believe it can replace the essence of Human Resources. “Human Resources is fundamentally about people,” she says. Communication, empathy, listening, and building trust, she believes, are the skills that will continue to matter.

Looking back, Al-Khamees says the achievement that makes her proudest is not a promotion. It is having the courage to change careers. “I think many people stay in careers that don’t really fit them because they’re afraid of change,” she says. “For me, making that transition required courage.” Today, she knows she made the right decision. “Helping people grow gives me much more satisfaction than working only with numbers.”

Her advice to young Kuwaitis considering a KFAS program reflects her own experience: don’t wait until you think you’re ready. “These programs are built to unlock your full potential,” she says. “They expose you to different ways of thinking. They introduce you to people from different backgrounds. And they challenge you to step out of your comfort zone.” When asked what she ultimately brought home from Madrid, her answer came immediately. “To speak up. To share my ideas. To believe that my perspective has value.” The confidence she found there would shape far more than her career.