



College of Business Administration

Department of Management

## COURSE TITLE

**CREATIVE THINKING AND PROBLEM SOLVING FOR MANAGERS**

Course Code

**0302363**

**Individual Case Assignment (Report)**

**Ramadan Sharing Fridges: Keeping A Non-Profit Afloat – Due Date: March 26<sup>th</sup>,  
2020**

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*Gita Bajaj, Bernard Buisson, Samidha Singh and Nikita Verma wrote this case solely to provide material for class discussion. The authors do not intend to illustrate either effective or ineffective handling of a managerial situation. The authors may have disguised certain names and other identifying information to protect confidentiality.*

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## Synopsis

In June 2016, Sumayyah Sayed, a resident of Dubai, United Arab Emirates, decided to donate food to those who needed it through a sharing fridge for the full month of Ramadan. When she noted the extent of the need for more help, she turned to social media. What followed demonstrated the power of social media campaigns and the collective management of supply chains and perhaps initiated a new entrepreneurial venture. Within one month, the Facebook Inc. group Sayed had created to support her Ramadan Sharing Fridges initiative had 22,000 members, 165 donating fridges had been set up, and the story was creating waves in international media. What kind of entrepreneurial style was this? Was it sustainable? Was it an alternative model that could be adopted by others who aspired to set up business ventures, or was it a fluke?

## Learning Objectives

After discussing and analyzing the case, you will be able to do the following:

- Anticipate implications of uncertainty for effectuating a project or venture.
- Describe different entrepreneurial approaches to decision making and recommend the most suitable approach for a specific venture.
- Apply effectual logic to the maintenance of non-profit organizations.

## Description

June and July 2016 had been the most exciting time in Sumayyah Sayed's life—far more exciting than she could have anticipated when she offered to feed the needy during Ramadan through the community initiative she founded, Ramadan Sharing Fridges. Her heartfelt calls for collaborators had caught the attention of many, and the news media had become aware of her work. It started with coverage of the initiative by Gulf News, Khaleej Times, and other national news dailies in the United Arab Emirates (U.A.E.), followed by stories on Arabian Radio Network (ARN) and a host of other radio and television news channels (see Exhibit 1). Within 15 days, the news had caught the attention of the international press. "Volunteers in U.A.E. Stock 90 Ramadan Fridges," the article in the June 22 Washington Post reported. Fox News, Al Jazeera, ABC News, the French-language Oumma news site, and media outlets from Italy and India had covered their

initiative. It was incredible that their work, which had been initiated just a month before, had become so successful and so well recognized.

After the excitement waned, Sayed's only concern was sustainability. She had no experience championing movements or running organizations. Would she be able to brave this challenge? How should she steer the movement after Ramadan? She recalled her father telling her as a child, "If you have the will, you have the way." Was that right? Did one just need a will, or would the future ask for more? These anxieties and more clouded her mind.

## **HOW IT ALL BEGAN**

It had all started toward the end of May 2016, a week before Ramadan, which was to commence on June 6. A resident of Sayed's residential community had given her refrigerator to Sayed. The resident had been using it for three years to donate food to the needy and now wanted someone else to take responsibility. The concept was simple: As a donor, the owner of the refrigerator would ensure that it was stocked with food and drinks throughout the month of Ramadan. The refrigerator would be placed outside Sayed's villa, and posters on it would invite anyone who needed food or drinks to help themselves.

During Ramadan, Muslims followed a rigorous routine of doing regular work while abstaining from food and drinks, including water, until sunset. The routine was particularly difficult for manual labourers such as construction workers, gardeners, plumbers, painters, and electricians, especially if they worked outdoors in the scorching heat.

The fridges were a blessing, as they made it possible for many to break their fasts at Iftar time without having to buy or cook food after a long day of fasting and work. Instead, they could take food and drinks from the fridges and carry this with them. However, the offer was not limited to those who were fasting. There were others who certainly needed the help. For Sayed, the joy of giving was tremendous, but the task of maintaining the supplies for the fridge was overwhelming.

## **THE INFLECTION POINT**

On the first day, Sayed stocked the fridge with water bottles and juice. She also supplied some cooked food, and it was all consumed in the first hour. She refilled the fridge three times throughout the day, and each time, the items were gone within about an hour. Sayed realized that she would not be able to sustain the effort on her own. "I need help or donations to

continue,” an exasperated Sayed told her husband, and she wondered what she could do. How could she connect with people who may want to donate?

Sayed decided to take advantage of social media and posted a message on the “Meadows, Springs, and Lakes (MSL)”<sup>1</sup> Facebook page. Within minutes, she received more than 100 personal messages from people who wanted to donate food and drinks. It was unbelievable. Sayed realized that this would create a challenge for the MSL community Facebook manager. She decided to create a Facebook page of her own, called “Ramadan Sharing Fridges,” and she invited everyone in the MSL group to connect on this new page. Within minutes, people started responding, and within three days, the group had grown to more than 1,000 members. The number of people who could donate grew exponentially because the page was now available not only to MSL but to the entire United Arab Emirates. Sayed was getting countless inquiries about how much, when, and where people could come and donate. She received so many donations within one day that she had to vacate a room in her home just to accommodate them. Because this was far more than Sayed had expected or needed, she decided to share the collection with other fridge owners.

Besides Sayed, four other fridge managers within the community joined the Facebook page and connected with Sayed to seek donations for their fridges. Sayed happily shared the collections. Soon, fridge managers from other areas began connecting to this page; they, too, were seeking supplies. Within days, the number of fridge managers who were connected to the page grew from four to 20, and the task of collecting and sharing donations became a full-time activity.

On June 12, when Khaleej Times, a leading national newspaper, covered the story, the fridge count was 20 in Dubai and one in Sharjah; two more fridges were being set up in Abu Dhabi and even more elsewhere. The story of opening hearts and fridges for the needy became a widely covered story in local, national, and international media. Print, online, and radio news outlets covered numerous stories of people donating food, labour, time, and effort (see Exhibit 1). Nadia Sarie, a member of the “Ramadan Sharing Fridges” Facebook page, contacted Sayed and volunteered to manage public relations and media communication for the page.

Sarie was a Masters in International Relations graduate and was employed with a marketing and events team in Dubai. She also owned a small business in event staffing. With Sarie’s efforts, media coverage increased, and this in turn increased the number of members and large donations. Truckloads of corporate donations now had to be managed. For instance, someone from the public relations department of Agthia Beverages (Agthia) who was a member of the “Ramadan/Sharing Fridges in the UAE” Facebook group pitched a donation initiative within her

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<sup>1</sup> Meadows, Springs, and Lakes were three residential communities that housed the upper-middle class and wealthier communities of Dubai in hundreds of villas.

company. Agthia management decided to get involved and donated a bulk quantity of water and Capri Sun juice. As the media celebrated these efforts, an increasing number of companies approached Sayed to contribute. These companies were eager to donate in kind and in large quantities. Sayed and her self-appointed administrators were then faced with the challenge of storing and managing the goods.

The team divided the United Arab Emirates into regions, depending on the number of fridges in close proximity. One home in each region was identified as a nodal centre for receiving and storing the donations, and this nodal centre became the point for collecting and dispatching items to homes in its region. The number of homes in the region and the quantity of supplies consumed were considered when deciding on the quantity of donations to be stored at the nodal centre.

Next, volunteer drivers offered to deliver goods to fridge managers who were running short on supplies. Mustafa Koita did six to eight runs in his truck to deliver supplies from nodal centres to fridge managers. Then there were kitchens, where people got together to cook and pack meals. These were all stories of compassion in the making. Janine Bensouda, one of the founding members of the movement and a brand consultant by profession, offered to capture these moments. Short videos documenting these initiatives and their effects on children, the community, and the needy were shot and shared on YouTube.<sup>2</sup> The videos captured ways the initiative was breaking down barriers: affluent residents were now conversing with community workers, and children were sharing and caring.

A little over a week into the initiative, it was already a movement—a movement created through the power of social media. By June 17, there were more than 15,000 members on the “Ramadan Sharing Fridges” Facebook page, and the numbers were growing. Companies were donating fridges, and people were waiting to take responsibility as fridge managers to set them up. By June 22, the number of fridge managers had increased from 20 to 50.<sup>3</sup>

## **BEHIND THE SCENES: ADMINISTRATION**

Within two days of starting the Facebook page, Sayed received a call from Sarie and Fikra Boukouayel, who were concerned about the load Sayed was facing because of the huge volume of traffic on the page. They volunteered to help by responding to the queries that were pouring

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<sup>2</sup> Voices of Ramadan Sharing Fridges—Story 1,” YouTube Video, 2:10, posted by “Bensouda Consulting,” June 22, 2016, accessed March 3, 2019, <https://youtu.be/R3VUlqeSg-Y>.

<sup>3</sup> Malak Harb, “Volunteers in UAE Stock 90 ‘Ramadan Fridges’ for Workers,” Washington Post, June 22, 2016, accessed March 3, 2019, <https://apnews.com/8c9a80f9894d4591b9075fc36d71cd3c>.

in. With the number of fridges increasing and the spread of donors also widening, calls for help in finding the location increased. The following day, Sophie Desplaces, a page follower, noticed the many messages asking for information about fridge locations and offered to send maps to people and provide the information on the Facebook page.

By this time, Sayed and the others were spending endless hours encouraging individuals on the Facebook page to keep donating and to keep up the momentum by telling stories, showing that anyone—old, young, rich, or poor—could help. Many people shared brief accounts of their days and told stories about their discussions with the labourers.

The next logical step was taken: clusters were created. Seven regions were demarcated, and regional managers were identified to help manage the logistics in their respective areas. Logistical questions about how many supplies were needed, who needed them, where they could be sourced, and who would deliver them were all handled by volunteers. Alison Vickery, who was one of the first four fridge managers to join this initiative, took charge of managing the logistics.

By the end of June, the initiative was running like an organization. There were 22,000 members, 165 fridge managers, seven regional managers to manage logistics, and a coordinator for overall logistics. There were coordinators for public relations and media communication, sponsor relations, and documentation. There were also members managing the Facebook page and keeping the group excited and united. From an operational perspective, the main tasks were to collect food, store it so that it remained fresh and edible, and then distribute it to fridge managers and on to the labourers and others in need.

## **THE DILEMMA**

On July 3, 2017, two professors from the Institute of Management Technology Dubai approached Sayed to learn more about the initiative. They were considering including Sayed in their forthcoming book on leadership. Initially, she was quite excited, but their questions began to trouble her. “What’s your vision post- Ramadan?” one of them had asked. The other drew her attention to organizations like HelpAge International, Child Care Foundation, and the Red Cross, which started small but were now doing exemplary work and making a big difference in the world. “Are you considering creating such an organization?” the other professor queried. “It’s been organic, and I’d like to keep it like that,” Sayed responded, not sure whether the task she envisioned was doable or whether she had the capacity to do it. In fact, she was reflecting on how she and the others involved had made a point of pulling back from becoming an official organization. She explained:

In an organization, there is more control and uniformity, but our team is striving to ensure that people maintain their independence. What is most fascinating is that this is a community initiative; it is grassroots. Everyone treats the fridge as his or her own project and tweaks it according to his or her own wish. If we make it an organization, it may take away the independence and flexibility.

But the questions raised by the professors kept bothering her, and concerns kept cropping up in her mind throughout the night. The next day, she approached Bensouda and shared these new expectations that they could soon be facing. Bensouda was very positive about the power of the group: “With 22,000 members and a hundred nationalities now connected for a common cause, I am sure there is much we can achieve.” What followed was an animated discussion about possibilities. “The most exciting thing is that we can make it a global movement. We have members who can take it to their countries while we guide them and also create global awareness of the same,” she said.

Ideas were plentiful, but Sayed was still worried. One idea was to make it a year-round initiative. But would people donate in a similar way after Ramadan? Why or why not? The donors were actually from all religions. Would the fridge managers be ready to donate so much time every day, day after day, for no return? Persuading them to continue could be a bigger challenge. Would the sponsors continue to donate year-round to the same organization? Some might, but many might like to donate elsewhere the next time. Besides, how would Sayed and her team ensure regulatory compliance? They had pursued this activity based on trust; what if someone supplied unsafe food? “What would it take to make this movement sustainable?” she wondered. Sayed had no experience in championing movements or running organizations, but she recalled the professor’s comment that neither Mark Zuckerberg nor Bill Gates had any idea of what he had been stepping into. Their experiences had been organic for them as well, but the things they had in common were complete conviction in the product or service they were offering and the full determination to make their businesses happen. Did Sayed and her team have the determination needed? Would their will to continue this initiative be enough? Should they take Ramadan Sharing Fridges to the next level? If so, what should Ramadan Sharing Fridges look like in the future?

### Assignment Questions

1. What were Sayed’s resources at the beginning of the Ramadan Sharing Fridges journey? Do entrepreneurs need a minimum level of resources to launch a new venture?
2. Which of Sayed’s personal qualities helped her set up and grow the community initiative?

3. Identify the main challenges that Sayed would face in maintaining Ramadan Sharing Fridges.
4. What decisions should Sayed make next?
  - a. If Sayed were to adopt a planned approach to growing Ramadan Sharing Fridges, how should she proceed?
  - b. Would you recommend this approach for Ramadan Sharing Fridges? Why?
  - c. Prioritize the issues that Sayed would have to face and suggest how she should address these.



## EXHIBIT 1: MEDIA COVERAGE

### Print Media

Sarakshi Rai, "Opening Hearts, and Fridges, for the Needy," Khaleej Times, June 12, 2016, accessed March 14, 2020, <http://khaleejtimes.com/dubais-community-fridge-feeds-hundreds-in-ramadan>

Anjali Bisaria, "Dubai Residents Are Stocking Refrigerators to Feed Those Who Can't Afford Food This Ramzan," India Times, June 21, 2017, accessed March 3, 2019, [www.indiatimes.com/news/india/dubai-residents-are-stocking-refrigerators-to-feed-those-who-can-t-afford-food-this-ramzan-256950.html](http://www.indiatimes.com/news/india/dubai-residents-are-stocking-refrigerators-to-feed-those-who-can-t-afford-food-this-ramzan-256950.html)

Malak Harb, "Volunteers in UAE Stock 90 'Ramadan Fridges' for Workers," Washington Post, March 14, 2020, accessed August 8, 2017, <https://apnews.com/8c9a80f9894d4591b9075fc36d71cd3c>

### TV and Online Videos

"News Reports: Ramadan Sharing Fridges," Video, 3:11, Dubai1 News, June 20, 2016, accessed March 3, 2019, <http://awaan.ae/video/26722623/News-Reports:-Ramadan-Sharing-Fridges->

"MEEEX UAE: Ramadan Fridges," Video, 3:09, Associated Press, June 21, 2016, accessed March 14, 2020,

<http://www.aparchive.com/metadata/MEEEX-UAE-Ramadan-Fridges/99f1ac4ef370a41f66e0c6ce42e51a40?query=ramadan+fridge&current=1&orderBy=Relevance&hits=4&referrer=search&search=%2fsearch%3fquery%3dramadan%2520fridge%26allFilters%3dAP%2520TELEVISION%253ASource&allFilters=AP+TELEVISION%3aSource&productType=IncludedProducts&page=1&b=e51a40>

### Radio

"June 20th—Ramadan Fridges Interview," Radio interview, 4:23, The Kris Fade Show, Virgin Radio, June 20, 2016, accessed March 3, 2019, <https://omny.fm/shows/krisfadeshow/june-20th-ramadan-fridges-interview>

## Details of the Report – Report Structure

Students are expected to analyze a case study in written form (approx. 2500 words), including:

- Introduction
- Identification of key issues, with reference to concepts and theories (include references as appropriate)
- A thorough analysis of the case. Discussion of questions 1 – 4.
- Conclusion

Each of these components will necessarily be brief and concise. The analysis may be submitted the week after the relevant discussion and will be assessed on the following criteria (with again the level of engagement in the discussion in the tutorial playing an essential role):

- Solid understanding of the case (i.e., issues, argument, data)
- Quality of the analysis (i.e., depth, logical structure, coherence)
- Link to relevant concepts and theories
- Support for proposals (i.e., the resolutions or solutions proposed)
- Quality of the written communication (i.e., clear, concise and incisive writing)

### Grading:

This project is worth a maximum of 20% of your course grade.

Check the assessment criteria document (rubrics) for details.

**The submission deadline is March 26<sup>th</sup> (midnight). Please submit the report via BlackBoard (Assignments).**