Women’s Empowerment Programme

A BLUEPRINT FOR BETTER BUSINESS & VODAFONE GROUP PLC

Making Business Mutual
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Authors’ note: This is a descriptive case study, based on publicly available materials as well as on the information shared by the company described. The views are the authors’ own, as are errors or omissions.
Case Name: A Blueprint for Better Business & Vodafone Group Plc: Women’s Empowerment Programme

Vodafone Group Plc is one of the world’s leading mobile communications providers. As of 31 December 2016, Vodafone has 470 million mobile customers and 14.3 million fixed broadband customers.

Registered as a charity in London, England, in 2014, A Blueprint for Better Business is a trust that challenges business to be a force for good.

Ecosystem Pain Points: Women’s empowerment and gender equality are multifaceted problems that need tackling on all societal levels. GSMA, an international trade body for mobile phone providers, estimates that more than 1.7 billion women in low and middle-income countries do not own a mobile phone, and that women are 14% less likely than men to own a mobile phone. This translates to a 200 million gender gap in the mobile market. Increasing access to mobile technologies in emerging markets has the potential to transform women’s lives by connecting them to resources, friends, commerce, and information. Basic information on, for example, children’s health or weather forecasts can have a positive impact on women’s well-being and sense of empowerment.

Business Strategy: In 2015, inspired by Blueprint’s transformational principles and framework, Vodafone refocused its sustainable business strategy to work towards three transformational goals in the areas of energy innovation, youth skills and jobs, and women’s empowerment. By 2025, Vodafone aims to bring the benefits of mobile to an additional 50 million women living in its emerging markets using targeted commercial programmes, engaging an under-served segment.

Vodafone’s focus on women’s empowerment builds on existing customer initiatives exemplified in the Women First Programme in Turkey. Launched in 2013, the programme connects women in rural Turkey, giving them access to mobile phones and the internet. The Women First Advertisement Service uses SMS to enable women to advertise their products on one of Turkey’s largest e-marketplaces. This enables women to reach a wider community of potential customers thereby growing their businesses and improving their income; the programme also successfully recruited new subscribers.

Performance: The focus on female empowerment has seen social and business successes. For example, the Women First programme achieves this dual purpose by increasing sales of mobile subscriptions while connecting women to new economic and social opportunities. Approximately 640,000 people have subscribed since the launch and more than 20,000 advertisements have been generated through the service (as of March 2016).

Prognosis: More commercial initiatives focusing on empowering female subscribers will be launched across Vodafone’s emerging market footprint, running in parallel with internal programmes. Internal programmes include Vodafone’s global maternity policy and the recently launched ReConnect programme, which bring talented people back into the workplace after career breaks. Vodafone’s ambition is to be the world’s best employer for women.
A Blueprint for Better Business & Vodafone Group Plc: 
Women’s Empowerment Programme

Case Background
This case looks at the relationship between A Blueprint for a Better Business and Vodafone, and how Vodafone has focused its strategy on areas of potential business and social impact, namely energy innovation, youth skills and jobs, and women’s empowerment. This case is particular looks at Vodafone’s work expanding its engagement with women.

Vodafone
Vodafone is one of the world’s largest telecommunications companies and employs more than 100,000 people. The firm, as of 31 December 2016, had 470 million mobile customers and 14.3 million fixed broadband customers. Vodafone has fixed broadband operations in 17 markets, mobile operations in 26 countries, and partners with other mobile networks in an additional 49 countries.iii Vodafone’s emerging market businesses have an estimated 125 million female customers (as of March 2016).iv

Given that Vodafone is a publicly traded company, bringing purposeful transformational change to the company means balancing the pursuit of positive societal outcomes with business performance. In 2015, inspired by A Blueprint for Better Business’ transformational principles and framework, Vodafone refocused its sustainable business strategy to work towards three transformation goals in the areas of: energy innovation, youth skills and jobs, and women's empowerment. One of the programs discussed in this case study, The Women’s First programme in Turkey, contributes to the ambition to bring together social impact and business performance.

Vodafone Ecosystem Pain Points
In focusing on addressing women’s empowerment, and more specifically the gender gap in mobile phone ownership, Vodafone identified a social issue with the potential to be mitigated through private sector initiatives, thereby also building the business. Women’s empowerment and gender equality are multifaceted problems that need tackling on all societal levels and through a range of approaches. GSMA, an international trade body for mobile phone providers, estimates that more than 1.7 billion women in low and middle-income countries do not own a mobile phone, and that women are 14% less likely than men to own a mobile phone, which translates to a 200 million gender gap in the mobile market.v

Strong connections to resources, information, friends, and commerce are important relationships for many women trying to improve their lives. Mobile phones have the potential to transform the lives of many women in emerging markets. The technology can improve women’s social lives, health and wellbeing, economic security, physical security, and ability to find employment opportunities. Equal access to mobile technologies is important and gendered differences in mobile phone usage may signal gender inequality.

Barriers to access and ownership are multiple and include cultural norms that prohibit women from owning a mobile phone, financial circumstances that exclude women from purchasing a mobile, and technical literacy levels that exclude women from using mobiles effectively. Low confidence levels in one’s own ability to use a mobile can also deter ownership.
A Blueprint for Better Business

The idea for creating the organisation A Blueprint for Better Business came about in 2012 when a group of business leaders approached the Archbishop of Westminster, Vincent Nichols. Charles Wookey, CEO of A Blueprint for Better Business, says:

_The leaders felt that rebuilding trust between business and society needed an initiative that came from society and drew on the wisdom found in different faiths and philosophy – as well as empirical and social sciences – to challenge the dominant view of business purpose and the motivation of people._

_From its inception, Blueprint has been focussed on addressing real business needs, and acting as a catalyst for change to help businesses realise their true long-term potential: to serve society, respect people, rediscover their purpose and thereby earn a fair and sustainable return for investors. Key to this transformation is acknowledging that people are not solely self-interested and that business is not only driven by profit._

Blueprint was established as a limited company and registered as an independent charity (the Blueprint Trust) in 2014. Its work is not funded by business but by charitable foundations and individuals, and it is also independent of any faith community. Charles Wookey, CEO of A Blueprint for Better Business, describes the charity as follows:

_It is not a compliance body or Kitemark, but seeks to stimulate a different way of thinking and behaving in business. Blueprint has an influential advisory council chaired by Sir Mike Rake and works with prominent companies including EasyJet (transport), Anglo American (mining), Flood Re (insurance), and, as described here, Vodafone. A number of major businesses acting together can help change the conversation about the role and expectations of business in society._

Vodafone can, with its global reach and 470 million mobile customers, bring scale to Blueprint’s vision of sustaining purpose and changing behaviour in business.

**Blueprint’s Five Principles and Framework**

Two key elements of A Blueprint for Better Business’ approach to business transformation are the _Five Principles of a Purpose Driven Business_ and _A Framework to Guide Decision Making_. Together they are meant to provide a route map to a new mindset and behavioral change in business.

The five principles for purpose driven business can be applied at both the organizational and personal level:

1. Be honest and fair with customers and suppliers
2. Be a responsible and responsible to employer
3. Be a good citizen
4. Be a guardian for future generations
5. Have a purpose that delivers long-term sustainable performance.

Each principle includes several illustrative sub-points as outlined in the figure below. The fifth and central principle—i.e., that one should have a purpose which delivers long-term sustainable performance—is positioned at the heart of the figure. Charles Wookey explains that: _“It is at the centre as a unifying purpose which benefits society both inspires and depends on all these relationships.”_
The framework for guiding decision making consists of two main parts: a call to define organisational purpose and a guide to build character and to achieve purpose. The call to define purpose puts emphasis on the dignity and value of people, as well as the importance of serving society by delivering value to the common good. The guide to build character and to achieve purpose is framed around five specific behavioural aspirations: solidarity, subsidiarity, reciprocity, plurality, and sustainability. Charles Wookey clarifies that: “Taken together these are designed to encourage and sustain a change of mind-set and behaviour based on respect and co-creation, which emphasises the need to move beyond self-interest to create the quality of relationships needed to deliver purpose.”

Focusing on the journey of organisational transformation rather than the end point, the framework and principles can help companies in redirecting their strategy and business practices to unlock discretionary effort and align activities to a shared goal. The resources’ deep societal roots, together with a growing business case for purpose, are meant to catalyse boardroom discussions about purpose and people, and promote behaviour change.

**Vodafone’s Global Sustainable Business Strategy**

In 2015, Vodafone gathered its top-40 leaders in one room, placed the Blueprint principles on a wall, and started discussing how Vodafone’s practices and strategy compared.

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“We believe a commitment to enhancing lives and livelihoods should be integral to our duty to maximise returns to our shareholders.

That belief has been informed in part by the concepts and insights of the Blueprint for Better Business – an initiative that Vodafone has supported since its inception”

Group Chief Executive
Vodafone Group Plc
Vodafone Group Director of Corporate Affairs Matt Peacock described the experience by saying “it was a very honest and sometimes quite painful conversation.”

In particular, Vodafone used the Blueprint Principles to conduct a gap analysis both internally and externally to understand how they measured up to the principles, identifying where they needed to make improvements and also where they displayed strengths. This review was a part of a larger effort that went before the launch of Vodafone’s Global Sustainable Business Strategy, which included a larger materiality assessment, as described on page 86 in Vodafone’s 2015-16 Sustainable Business Report.

On the backdrop of these discussions and analysis of a breadth of data including employee feedback, customer feedback, and external stakeholder research, Vodafone then decided on ten future priorities. The ten priorities are: customer relationships; digital rights including privacy, data protection and security; the socio-economic benefits that arise from the firm’s products and services; management of supply chain risks; health and safety; business conduct and ethics; corporate taxation and total economic contribution; public concerns regarding electromagnetic frequency emissions; employee equality and diversity; and, energy consumption and carbon emissions.

The results of this analysis helped to provide the building blocks of a new long-term sustainable business strategy to drive social transformation and at the same time enable economic growth. The new global sustainable business strategy revolves around three global transformational goals over a ten-year period:

1. Energy innovation
2. Youth skills and jobs
3. Women’s empowerment

Sustainable Business Strategy

Purpose

“We connect everybody to live a better today and build a better tomorrow”

2025 Transformation

Women’s Empowerment Energy Innovation Youth Skills and Jobs

Transparency

Tax and Total Economic Integrity Contributions and Safety Mobiles, Masts and Health Digital Rights and Freedoms

Principles and Practice
These three global transformational goals fit within Vodafone’s larger purpose: “We connect everybody to live a better today and build a better tomorrow.” Within this broader framework, the global transformational goal on women’s empowerment is divided into two sub-goals:

- **Connecting women:** by 2025, Vodafone seeks to connect 50 million women living in emerging markets to help improve their lives and livelihoods.

- **Increasing diversity:** by 2025, Vodafone’s ambition is to become the world’s best employer for women. The medium-term goal is to increase the proportion of women managers globally to 30% by 2020.iii

The first sub-goal of connecting women is external as it speaks to Vodafone’s existing and future female customers. The second sub-goal is internal and relates how Vodafone attracts and retains female talent within the company. The Women First Programme in Turkey is one of the many different external programs run by Vodafone and Vodafone Foundation. It particularly speaks to the ambition of connecting more women to improve their lives and livelihoods.

**Business Example: Women First Programme, Turkey**

Vodafone Turkey launched the Vodafone Women First Programme in 2013. The programme makes it more attractive and relevant for women to buy a mobile phone subscription. The programme offers advertisement services, which allows women to post ads on one of Turkey’s biggest e-marketplace sahibinden.com, using only an SMS texting function. Vendors send information about their products via SMS to a third party, which then verifies the information and posts the ad on their behalf.

Women First subscribers can also participate in business and technology training. The training is conducted by the Women Entrepreneurs Association of Turkey and the Turkey Informatics Foundation. Users additionally have the option to receive SMS-based information services. The areas of information include wellbeing, lifestyle and children’s health.

Regarding performance, the programme attracted 75,000 women customers during the first nine months; 15% were new customers for Vodafone. During this time frame, 4,700 adverts were placed, which were viewed by over 240,000 people and generated sales averaging $51 per user.xii The programme was not evaluated using a multi-capitals approach. In the current model, Vodafone compensates the third-party provider for verifying and posting the users advertisement on sahibinden.com. It is also not reported whether programme is financially sustainable for Vodafone, or if it runs at a loss. The Women First programme has, since its launch, gained approximately 640,000 subscribers and generated more than 20,000 advertisements (as of March 2016.xiii

**Prognosis**

Looking forward, more commercial propositions will be launched across Vodafone’s emerging market footprint running in parallel to internal initiatives. Some of these initiatives are mentioned in Vodafone’s Sustainable Business Report 2015-16:

In April 2015, Vodafone became one of the first companies in the world to offer a global minimum maternity policy to employees at all levels of the company and in every country in which we operate. Under our global minimum maternity policy, all women who are employed by Vodafone, in any role anywhere in the world, are entitled to at least 16 weeks fully paid maternity leave plus full pay for a maximum 30-hour week for the first six months after their
return to work. [In the 2015/2016 financial year] over 1,700 of our employees went on maternity leave and were eligible to benefit from our new global maternity policy.\textsuperscript{xiv}

Vodafone also commissioned a KPMG study to estimate the financial effects of implementing similar policies at a scale: “KPMG estimated that businesses globally would reduce overall costs by around $19 billion annually if more new mothers were retained rather than lost to the workforce.”\textsuperscript{xv}

Following on from this in March 2017, Vodafone launched Reconnect, a new programme to bring talented women in 26 countries back into the workplace after a career break.\textsuperscript{xvi} The programme includes flexible working options, training, coaching and induction programmes to help women prepare for re-entry to the workplace and progress their careers.
Endnotes


vi Citations are based on discussions and e-mail correspondence.

vii Citations are based on discussions and e-mail correspondence.

viii In discussion 17 March 2017 in London Central London. Available online: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6y_2EcgPPmA


xvi Reconnect website. Available online: https://vodafonegroup.avature.net/ReConnect
Saïd Business School

Saïd Business School at the University of Oxford blends the best of new and old. We are a vibrant and innovative business school, yet deeply embedded in an 800-year-old university. We create programmes and ideas that have global impact. We educate people for successful business careers, and as a community seek to tackle world-scale problems. We deliver cutting-edge education programmes and ground-breaking research that transform individuals, organisations, business practice, and society. We seek to be a world-class business school community, embedded in a world-class university, tackling world-scale problems.

Mars Catalyst and the Economics of Mutuality programme

Mars’ approach to business has been guided by Five Principles – Quality, Responsibility, Efficiency, Freedom and Mutuality for a long time. Together they inform and guide the actions of all Mars associates every day as they do their jobs and interface with the outside world. The origins of the Mutuality principle go back to 1947 when Forest Mars Snr who led and grew the business through the 1920’s to the 1960’s, wrote a letter to all the then 500 associates of the company that said that the sole purpose of the company was to create a mutuality of benefits with all stakeholders that the company touched from suppliers to customers as well as governments and competitors and naturally associates and shareholders. This far-sighted thinking, that the company could only be successful if everyone around the company was being successful, has been a cornerstone of our business philosophy ever since.

Mars has therefore always been interested in how it can best live up to this principle and find new ways to drive mutuality with all stakeholders it touches. This led, a number of years ago, to Mars leadership tasking Mars’ economics research unit, Catalyst, to start new work into unexplored territory for business to identify critical drivers of mutuality and to develop and test through business pilots new metrics and management practices that can help boost mutuality in business situations. This work has been called the Economics of Mutuality. This work has established promising links between increasing social, human and natural capital (that can be measured with simple & stable metrics) and thereby increasing financial capital – demonstrating how a company can do both good and well at scale. A number of pilots have now been completed in the area of micro-distribution, the employees of Mars and in agricultural development that suggest that these relationships are true in different places and situations.

The Oxford Mars partnership

On the back of these promising findings, a multiyear partnership with Oxford University’s Said Business School was established in 2014 to focus on the development of a business management theory for the Economics of Mutuality with corresponding teaching curriculum, new management practices, and case study research. The research programme has combined the pursuit of normative questions – what is mutuality and how should it be enacted? – with grounded, ethnographic research on current thinking and practices. This has led to the development of field experiments and case studies examining how large corporate actors conceive of and pursue responsible business practices, and how these relate to their financial and social performance. The broader idea being to demonstrate that businesses based on mutuality, that look to ensure all stakeholders are successful, can be more successful than businesses that focus on just their shareholders.

The intent going forward is to continue to research this topic and create a broader platform where other companies and academic institutions can share their learnings and experiences to advance the collective understanding of how to drive mutuality in business.

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