**Public Sector Future WWPS Podcast Series**

**Episode 53**

**Olivia Neal (host), Her Excellency Ohood Khalfan Al Roumi (guest)**

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**OLIVIA NEAL:** Hello and welcome to Public Sector Future. This is a show for anyone who cares about using digital approaches in the public sector to deliver better outcomes. I’m your host, Olivia Neal, and together we explore stories from around the world, where public servants have been successful at delivering change. Throughout the series we discuss technology and trends, as well as the culture aspects of how to make change happen.

I’m joined today by Her Excellency Ohood Al Roumi, the Minister of State for Government Development and the Future in the United Arab Emirates. In addition to this role, she’s also responsible for the development of human resources within the UAE government. We’re going to be discussing the approach Her Excellency and her team and her team have been taking to developing digital skills, the platform they’ve built, and why she believes it’s important to start from the top. We’re also going to look at how she’s been using partnerships to scale the impact of their work.

Your Excellency, thank you again so much for doing this with us.

**H.E. OHOOD KHALFAN AL ROUMI:** My pleasure.

**OLIVIA NEAL:** So could we start by asking you to share with us a little bit about your role and the team that you work with?

**H.E. OHOOD KHALFAN AL ROUMI:** So Thank you, Olivia, for hosting me. I’m really honored with this opportunity.

I wear two hats in the UAE government. I am the Minister of State for Government Development of the future. My Portfolio ensures that our government, the UAE government, is ready for the future. I am also the chairperson of the Federal Authority for Government Human Resources, which looks after the human resources and talent in our government. Our aim is to be among the best governments of the world. And therefore, it’s very important for us to have the best also talent in our government.

**OLIVIA NEAL:** So those two things come together really well, I think, thinking about the government of the future, and the people that create that government of the future. That’s a very powerful combination.

**H.E. OHOOD KHALFAN AL ROUMI:** Yeah, and I think being ready to the future, one main component is being ready with our talents. That’s very important for our talent to be ready in terms of their skills, and hence upskilling and investing in skilling our people is very important.

**OLIVIA NEAL:** What types of skilling are you focusing on? How has skilling become such a priority for the government and for you?

**H.E. OHOOD KHALFAN AL ROUMI:** So talking about skills, I was reading a report for the World Economic Forum talking about the importance of skilling in general, that investing in skilling will increase the global GDP by 6.5 trillion

As government, we are facing today many challenges that were not there even five years ago. If we talk about AI adoption, we talk about recovering from pandemics, we talk about economic shifts, we talk about climate change, these challenges are new for us.

And amid these challenges or changes, we need to develop the right policies and laws and regulations. Then for having the right understanding of these topics, having the right skills will really help us stay ahead of these changes, utilize the opportunities that they offer and avoid any negative consequences.

If we don’t understand these topics, , we might over-regulate them or under-regulate them. And this might create maybe negative consequences in our societies or hinder our economic progress. Therefore, I think investment in upskilling is very important for us as government and we need to start at the very top.

**OLIVIA NEAL:** I think what you’ve said there is so fascinating because you’re – what you’re talking about is thinking about skilling across the whole of government. And often when we hear people talking about digital skills or technology skills, they’re focusing on the people who are operating services, , but actually, you’re tying that much more broadly to the ability for a government to operate in the future, to create the right legislation, the right policy, the right regulation, to drive economic growth, to drive prosperity,. And I think that’s such an important broad view that you’re bringing to this conversation.

**H.E. OHOOD KHALFAN AL ROUMI:** I think it’s crucial for us as a government there. And when we talk about upskilling or skilling, we’re talking about all levels of government

Therefore, we started a program last November aimed at upskilling all levels of employees in the government. The name of this platform is called Jahiz. Jahiz in Arabic means ready, reflect our commitment to the investment and future then of our talent in the government.

Jahiz is customized, a digital platform that offers modules and master classes, both in Arabic and English, in key areas that we think are crucial for our government. And to develop that platform we worked with partners to have the right content. We want the content to be timely, relevant and practical.

So right now we’re working with 18 international and national partners. And actually, our first partner was Microsoft. And I would like to thank Microsoft for believing in our vision, because I think working with Microsoft was crucial for laying the credibility and success of this platform.

**OLIVIA NEAL:** I know that with the team in the UAE, we’ve been really pleased to then host some of the material that you’ve been working on, on our platforms as well, to benefit people in other countries too. So I think these partnerships are bringing a real broad benefit, not just to the UAE, but to the international community who are building digital government and digital transformation as well.

And I’m interested in within the Jahiz platform and within your skilling programs, are there particular types of skills that you’ve been focusing on that you see the need for staff and employees to build?

**H.E. OHOOD KHALFAN AL ROUMI:** Thank you, Olivia. I think this is a very important question. So we designed the skills in Jahiz platform according to the UAE’s vision. So these skills are crucial for our future readiness.

We have four categories of skills. We have the new economy skills. We have the digital skills. We have AI and data skills. And then we have the 10x skills. And let me share some examples with you, Olivia.

We have a very ambitious economic agenda. We would like to provide the best quality of life for people living here in the UAE, to creating a resilient, dynamic, sustainable, diversified economy. Our target is to double our GDP by 2030.

So one main category focuses on the new sectors that we would like to develop in the UAE, like, for example, the digital economy, the circle economy. Also green skills are very important for us because you know that sustainability, climate change is the agenda right now globally. We will host COP28 in November this year, and we were the first country in the Middle East and North Africa to commit to a net zero agenda by 2050. So therefore, we’re focusing a lot on sustainability and green skills.

Now, talking about digital skills, we know that the future will be very much digital, and the powers of nations will not be limited to their economic or political powers, but also to their digital powers. And we have a very ambitious digital agenda. Therefore, we’re focusing a lot on the AI, on metaverse, on blockchain, all the digital skills.

And also, we have the 10x skills because if we have this ambitious agenda, we need to 10x the effort and the speed of our delivery. And we have a range of skills, of new skills that we need to boost our efforts, which is for example, imagination, creativity, growth mindset and boosting productivity.

**OLIVIA NEAL:** So you have a set of very technical skills, but then also, these 10x skills are much more about creating new mindsets, creating new approaches to develop those new opportunities.

And with these skills, you talked about using this opportunity to build skills across the whole of the government and starting from the top and looking at all those different roles.

Are you taking it one piece at a time or are you rolling this platform out to the whole government from the beginning?

**H.E. OHOOD KHALFAN AL ROUMI:** We’re rolling the skills by category. So we started with a digital skills first because they think they are the most important for us right now. But we’re focusing on all levels.

For me, Olivia, every leader needs to be a digital leader. We are a government with AI strategy, with blockchain strategy, with metaverse strategy, with a very ambitious digital plan. Therefore, digital skills are very important for us. They are not nice to have.

A couple of weeks ago, we had the pleasure to host Brad Smith, the president of Microsoft, who delivered an excellent Master Class on generative AI to more than 700 government leaders.

It’s very important for us to start with the leaders, because if you are not digitally savvy, or if you are at least digitally aware, you become outdated, and it’s very dangerous if we have outdated leaders of the government.

**OLIVIA NEAL:** And so, as you’ve been rolling this platform out, and you’ve been developing your skilling programs, are you starting to see any outcomes from your work yet?

**H.E. OHOOD KHALFAN AL ROUMI:** So we have around 40,000 employee actively engaging with the platform right now. We have launched 10 skills since November. And also, we have the 185,000 achievement badges for employees, and around 260,000 hours of learning.

But also, we are seeing also good outcomes from our partners, as you mentioned, Olivia. So our partnership with Microsoft has led to the collaboration with the Public Sector Center of Expertise where we are providing some of the content of Jahiz to be available globally for government employees worldwide, and which we are very excited about.

**OLIVIA NEAL:**

If somebody from another country is listening to this and thinking that they are inspired and interested by what you’ve been talking about, and they wanted to replicate your approach within their own country, do you have any advice that you would share for somebody from another government?

**H.E. OHOOD KHALFAN AL ROUMI:** I would say focus on partnerships. You know, we as a government, we don’t understand everything, we don’t know everything, we can’t do everything by ourselves. So it’s very important to bring on partners who share the same vision, who can give the credibility of the platform. You know, Olivia, I am a firm believer of creating meaningful partnerships. Because these partnerships will bring positive impact and a greater impact.

Second, I would say going digital is very important. If we want to reach a large number of employees in a relatively short time, then going virtual is the way. And also, it gives the flexibility to employees to learn at their pace, anytime and anywhere.

And lastly, I would say create incentives. So for us, we created Jahiz race where government entities, they compete against each other to win an award on future readiness, based on the speed and rate of completion of their employees in each skill.

**OLIVIA NEAL:** So focusing on partnerships where that partner shares your vision, using digital approaches to scale this and to provide flexibility for staff, and then, as you say, creating incentives, creating a bit of competition, a bit of healthy competition between teams and agencies to incentivize them to take this up and drive forward. Thank you.

And we’ve talked a little bit in this conversation around how you’re seeing technology awareness and digital skills as being very important to help shape the right legislation, policy and regulation.

I’m interested in where you see opportunities for these new types of technology to help support some of the government operations in the future. Is there anything that you’re particularly excited about?

**H.E. OHOOD KHALFAN AL ROUMI:** Well, Olivia, I think the opportunities, the future opportunities are big and exciting. And while I don’t think we all need to be a technologist; I think we should know how to use technology as a tool to better serve our people. I think technology provides excellent tools for us as government to reduce our costs or improve our efficiency, and ultimately provide better services for our people.

Let’s take, for example, AI. AI is a tool that is massively disrupting the way we work, the way we live, the way we interact. But we need to remind ourselves that it’s just a tool. What matters is how do we use it.

And what excites me most about technology, honestly, is its ability to augment our capabilities. So with the right skills, and with the right tools, we can use technology as a tool to strengthen our capabilities, to amplify our strength and unlock greater potential from humans.

**OLIVIA NEAL:** So that opportunity to augment capabilities, amplify strength, and really get the best out of the people who are so committed and passionate about working in public service.

You’re clearly very open to looking outward to making partnerships and really looking for best practices all around the world and contributing back to those.

Things are moving so quickly. How do you make sure that you’re up to date, and where do you look to for inspiration?

**H.E. OHOOD KHALFAN AL ROUMI:** You know, Olivia, I’m not a technologist. I am economist by training and by profession. So it’s very important for me to stay updated with technology, both personally and professionally.

So what I do, I set aside a time in my schedule every Friday. I call it Future Friday, where young members of my team – and honestly, they are more tech savvy than me – sit with me and teach me about the recent technologies. And I really, really enjoy these sessions to stay updated with the recent technology.

I also, Olivia, chair the Higher Committee on Government Digital Transformation in the UAE. And this committee acts as a platform or a catalyst for digital transformation in government entities and encourage collaborations among them. And this also committee helps me stay updated with the digital trends and their implications on government.

And I think lastly, Olivia, the UAE is a platform for inspiration. UAE is a magnet for talent, for businesses, and for visitors. And we host many conferences, talking about a technology and future. So this makes also the UAE an excellent platform, a great platform for networking, learning, collaborating with some of the most brilliant minds worldwide.

**OLIVIA NEAL:** That’s a great set of examples. So the inspiration from young people in the organizations and keeping an open mind to that, not just being stuck in what you already know. the learning across government, and then that openness to international learnings and best practices and bringing that together from all around the world in the UAE. Thank you.

**H.E. OHOOD KHALFAN AL ROUMI:** Yeah, I just would like to thank you for giving me this opportunity. I would like to thank Microsoft for their support to the government in all fronts. We can see the fruits of this collaboration and partnership from the Jahiz platform, and also from the work that we are doing now with the Public Sector Center of Expertise.

**OLIVIA NEAL:** That’s fantastic. Thank you I think that partnership between public sector and private sector is what helps us all move forward.

**H.E. OHOOD KHALFAN AL ROUMI:** Thank you, Olivia. I mean, we started this program in the UAE. I’m really happy that Microsoft is taking it to the global scene, because I think this will amplify the impact. It’s not just the UAE; I think governments all around the world needs upskilling, and if we can contribute to that, that’s a great honor for us in the UAE government.

**OLIVIA NEAL:** It really is. Thank you.

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**OLIVIA NEAL:** Thank you to our guest, Her Excellency Ohood Al Roumi. And thank you for joining us today on Public Sector Future. As we discussed, you can now find content from the Jahiz platform on the Center of Expertise website. Visit us at wwps.microsoft.com to find this and more insights and material to help you on your own digital skilling journey.

Our goal is for you to learn something new and to be inspired to think differently. We hope you found that in this episode. Please do send us your questions and feedback, you can find me on LinkedIn, or you can email us at ask-ps@microsoft.com. Thank you and see you next time.

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