



Dana McDaniel Sumpter
Mona Zanhour

Margaret Huebner: Building the Human Resources Function at Oman's Port of Salalah

"The ocean is first and foremost our place of business, which we look upon as the lifeline and the future. Our people are the heartbeat that drive operations and the power to grow."
– Port of Salalah website, 2020

Margaret Huebner sat on a Salalah Public Park bench in late 2002, enjoying the warm breeze in her face. Several women in long dark hijabs and abayas reached up and pulled aside their veils, revealing smiles. Huebner loved visiting the park for the Wednesday "Ladies Only Nights," which allowed veil removal and free-flowing conversation.¹ As she watched women stroll the park, she reflected on her last two years as an American working in the Sultanate of Oman.

Huebner had arrived in Oman for a one-week intensive consulting project in 2000. She had been tasked with assessing human resources needs for the Port of Salalah, a promising new port located on the deep waters of the Arabian Sea. The Port had the potential to be world-class, but it first needed to address its nearly non-existent human resources (HR) procedures. The firm's rapid growth was outpacing its administrative structure, and key new employees were needed.

Huebner's one-week project soon grew into a two-year expatriate assignment. An American woman with three decades of HR experience, she had been recruited by the Port to establish a professional HR function from the ground up. She quickly discovered she had a lot to learn about applying her experience to an organization in Oman.

Huebner made countless critical strategic decisions during her two years working for the Port, continuously employing creative ways to work with local cultural norms. As she neared the end of her expatriate assignment, she hoped opportunities for local nationals and Omani women would continue to increase and the Port's heavy dependence on expatriates would continue to decline. Given all she had accomplished and *how* she had done so, she needed to determine how to ensure the organizational culture she helped foster would endure.

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