

An interview with RLB's Head of Project Management in UAE & Qatar

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In an exclusive interview with Rider Levett Bucknall (RLB)'s Head of Project Management in the UAE and Qatar, Project Management Global explores [Alyaa Salah Ali Alwahab's](#) remarkable career journey to senior leadership in the field of project consultancy.

A regular contributor at industry forums and a prolific content creator on the LinkedIn platform, Alyaa articulates many of the challenges facing those seeking to progress in a tough and often unforgiving industry. With her early upbringing split between London and the UAE, Alyaa has endeavored to balance her role as a wife and mother of two, with her ascent to the top of a male-dominated profession, embodying grace, determination and resilience.

Alyaa's affinity for project management emerged early in her academic career, where despite initially pursuing medicine in the UK, a series of unexpected circumstances led her to divert to civil engineering, taking up a one-in-a-lifetime opportunity to study at the American University in Sharjah.

Graduating a full year ahead of her peers, Alyaa's innate talent for engineering was evident from the outset. And not long after her graduation her first job, as a Structural Design Specialist led her into the male-dominated realm of construction. Recounting her formative years with candor, Alyaa reflects on the numerous challenges she faced, attributing her success throughout her career to unwavering determination and a practical, results-oriented approach.

Attracted by the fast moving pace of project management, and the opportunities to work on transformative legacy-driven initiatives, Alyaa never tires of the huge adrenaline rush, when solving what seem like insurmountable problems and resolving complex issues for her client.

Joining RLB has marked a turning point in Alyaa's career. Tasked with spearheading a new project management division in the Middle East for the renowned consultancy, Alyaa's leadership style and commitment to fostering a conducive work environment have been instrumental in attracting top-tier talent. Embracing RLB's culture of output-driven performance, Alyaa emphasizes the importance of providing her team with the necessary support and resources to excel, facilitating both success for the individual and for clients.

Balancing the demands of a high-powered career with motherhood posed significant challenges for Alyaa in the past. Recalling grueling work hours and sacrifices made for her profession, she acknowledges the toll it took on her home responsibilities. One particularly difficult role saw her regularly sleeping in her car in order to achieve the tough shifts she had been rostered to cover.

Alyaa said: "Although it was challenging at the time, it was all worth it, and I was simply doing what was expected of me." I asked how she felt about the challenges of working in the overwhelmingly male dominated field of construction, she said: "The hardest part was the constant requirement to prove my competence and demonstrate my level of experience." She explained how tough it was being constantly challenged and reviewed by her seniors – her contributions to the team were often held for additional scrutiny, to her male counterparts, based purely on her being a young woman. However, she never doubted herself, and let the results of her work shine through.

Her transition to RLB, however, afforded her a newfound equilibrium, enabling her to be fully present for her family while thriving in her professional endeavors. Here she has had the opportunity to be fully supported and recognised for the value that she has brought to her team and the wider business. In recalling a heartwarming moment with her daughter not long after joining RLB, Alyaa said she had questioned as to why 'mummy' was spending so much time at home with her. Her young daughter was worried that she had been fired from her job. After reassuring her that 'mummy' had most certainly not been fired, Alyaa couldn't help but reflect that in her past PM roles, she had not always been as present as she had wanted to be for her family, and that without ever saying so, this was something that her children had noticed, even if they had not articulated it to her directly. It is a situation that she is relieved is now behind her.

Resilience, Alyaa asserts, is paramount for success in project management. Drawing from her personal journey, she underscores the need for tenacity and self-belief in navigating the inevitable setbacks encountered in the field. Rooted in her upbringing and nurtured through life experiences, Alyaa's resilience serves as a guiding force in her leadership philosophy.

Looking ahead, Alyaa is impassioned about advancing project management practices in the Middle East. Amidst a landscape where currently 90% of projects are currently reporting delays, she sees an opportunity for transformative change, advocating for enhanced standards and accountability within the industry. With RLB's ambitious growth plans and the region's burgeoning infrastructure projects, Alyaa envisions a pivotal role for project professionals in driving successful project outcomes and leading organizational prosperity.

In parting advice to aspiring project managers, Alyaa implores them to embrace challenges and to persevere in the face of adversity – being willing to lead with unwavering passion and conviction. She says

that people shouldn't take no for an answer and to know their own worth as a professional, before they let others impose their estimation of personal value. She believes that people should put themselves forward for the big roles that will provide them with the opportunity to grow and not to be afraid to fail; although things will and do go wrong, if the worst does happen, they'll both learn and recover to fight another day. Finally, she says always maintaining a positive mindset, especially in periods of adversity is essential and that in times of difficulty team members will look to their leaders to guide them through.

Alyaa Salah Ali Alwahab stands as a beacon of inspiration and advocacy within the project management world, exemplifying resilience, leadership, and unwavering dedication to her clients and her profession.

For more insights from Alyaa and information on opportunities at RLB, visit her [LinkedIn profile](#) or explore [RLB's website](#).

An article written by Nicola Benjamin, CEO of Project Management Global.