

## Wan Catering Company: A Humanised Approach to Business

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**Abstract:** *Wan Catering Company has been in food catering and event management for more than 15 years in Puchong town, Selangor, Malaysia. It is a family business. This family business practices a humanized approach. Wan Catering emphasized collaboration, empathy, social responsibility, and humanity in its food catering and event management services. It balances economic responsibility and other responsibilities. The company experienced business volatility during the strict movement control order due to the pandemic of covid-19. The Company performed its humanitarian initiative by distributing food to the poor and needy within its neighbourhood and other places. While engaging in social work, Wan Catering Company also received orders from other non-governmental organizations to supply food for distribution to the needy.*

**Keywords:** Humanised Business; Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR); Small Business Management; Business Ethics

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## INTRODUCTION

Wan Catering Company is a family business in food catering and event management. It is located in Puchong town, Selangor, Malaysia. Puchong is a Malaysian parliamentary constituency No. P103 represented by Member of Parliament Gobind Singh Deo together with two State Legislative Assembly constituencies of Selangor N28 Seri Kembangan (Assemblyperson Ean Yong Hian Wah) and N29 Sri Serdang (Assemblyperson Dr. Siti Mariah Mahmud). According to the Department of Statistics Malaysia (DOSM) (2012), the total population is 356, 125. The *Bumiputera* comprised 141, 051 (39.61%), Chinese 133, 043 (37.36%), Indian 50, 843 (14.27%), and others 1,935 (0.55%). The total number of registered voters for the Puchong parliamentary constituency together with its two state constituencies is 96, 437 (SPR, 2018). There are 15 national primary schools with the Malay language as the medium of instruction. Apart from the Malay national primary school, there are five Chinese national primary schools and three Tamil national primary schools. There are also nine private primary schools and two private secondary schools. There are 13 public secondary schools in the Puchong. Interestingly, the constituency also has four private higher education institutions, namely Mahsa University, RIMA International College, Binary University College, and Putra Inteltek International College.

Wan Company is a sole proprietorship owned by Wan Faisal Wan Hassan. Wan Faisal started this food catering business more than 15 years ago after working as a cook at a few hotels for more than 10 years. Wan Faisal observed that many of his siblings, relatives, and friends were unemployed. He could not tolerate the plight. He decided to resign from his comfortable work with huge remuneration to set up a catering business with his family and friends.

### **MAKING MISTAKES**

At the beginning of the catering business, Wan Faisal incurred losses due to mistakes in costing and uncontrollable expenditure. He relied solely on his savings to manage the business for more than 6 months. He had to sell his apartment to absorb the losses.

Wan Faisal was clueless about the reasons for not making a profit after 6 months in operation. He approached his former boss, an executive chef, to get advice on costing and expenditure management. During his hotel days, Wan Faisal was never involved in costing and managing the expenditure of food and beverages of the hotel. The executive chef is the top personnel in the kitchen. An executive chef is considered a managerial position, involving costing and sales. He spent more than 20 years through the rank and file before becoming the executive chef

During his tenure as a cook at different hotels, he used to work under an American chef. He did ask him about the education system in the United States and specific training to be a chef. His American chef supervisor said to him that there is not much difference between American, British, and Australian education systems. Even though he is an American, he is familiar with the education system of the three countries.

There are three levels of education in the United States, namely elementary or primary, middle and high (also called secondary), and post-secondary (college or university). In general, free education in the United States started from age 4 or 5 for kindergarten until 12<sup>th</sup> grade (at the age of 17 or 18). In the past, secondary schools offered vocational courses like home economics, carpentry, and auto repair. Due to a funding cut, the courses have been discontinued. After 12<sup>th</sup> grade, American students choose their career paths. Some may further studies at the tertiary, and some may just join the workforce. Students who attended vocational courses at private institutions have internship arrangements with private companies.

As for the education system in the United Kingdom (UK), there are primary education, secondary education, further education, and higher education. All children in the UK are legally required to attend primary and secondary education until they reach 16 years old. In general, they studied English, Mathematics, Science, humanity, and modern language. In addition, they can enrol in optional subjects like art, music, drama, Latin, sports science, computer science, and other subjects that interest them.

In Australia, school education (primary and secondary) is compulsory for age 6 to 16 (Year 1 until Year 9 or 10). Tertiary education includes higher education (including universities) and vocational education and training (VET). After Year 10, students can attend TAFE college. (TAFE stands for technical and further education and is common in English-speaking countries in Oceania for vocational education, as a part of tertiary education). Certificate III in Commercial Cookery is an example of TAFE education. The students are trained to plan menus, estimate food costs, estimate labour costs, and order food and supplies. In addition, the students are guided to monitor the quality of dishes at all stages of preparation and

presentation and discuss food preparation issues with managers, dietitians, and kitchen and waiters.

### **CAREER IN KITCHEN**

Wan Faisal and his siblings are helpful at home. They have been trained by their parents to cook, wash cloths manually, wash the dish, and clean their house (indoor and outdoor). His father also brought them to *surau* (a small mosque) and *jamek* (territorial mosque) to perform solat (Islamic prayers) and also involved in activities. His father Wan Hassan is a retired government school clerk. Since his retirement, he has been appointed as *imam* (prayer leader) of the *surau* and also a *Quranic* teacher. (The *Qur'an* is a Holy Book in Islam. It contains Revelations in Arabic from Allah, the Universal God of mankind). Even though he worked as a school clerk with his LCE (Lower Certificate of Education) qualification, he used to study at a traditional Islamic school or *Pondok* (in Malay). At *pondok*, the students were taught to be independent.

Wan Faisal acquired good skills in cooking especially for Biryani with the curry. Besides studying traditional Islamic courses like *Sirah* (Islamic history), *Fiqh* (Islamic Law), *Quran* (studies about the Holy Book in Islam), *Hadith* (studies about the Sayings, Characters, and Commandment from the Prophet Muhammad), *Akhlaq* (studies about morality and ethics), *Tasawur* (studies about worldview from Islamic perspectives), *Tasawuf* (studies about spirituality and soul) and so on, the students were also trained in vocational courses such as carpentry, cookery, and entrepreneurship.

In those days, there were two streams of education. One was in general education. The other was the Islamic traditional education. The general education stream offered instruction in Malay and English, respectively. After completing primary school, with a Standard Six certificate, one could apply for a job in the public as well in the private sector.

For those who continued their education in secondary school, there were lower secondary and upper secondary schools. The lower secondary education started from Form 1 (age of 13) until Form 3 (age of 15). At the end of Form 3, students sat for the Lower Certificate of Education (LCE) examination. The LCE qualification was renamed *Sijil Rendah Pelajaran* (SRP), the translation of LCE in Malay. If students passed the LCE or SRP, they could continue at the upper secondary school, from Form 4 (age of 16) until Form 5 (age of 17), and sit for the Malaysia Certificate of Education (MCE). Later MCE was renamed to *Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia* (SPM), the translation of MCE in Malay. Students who completed their MCE/SPM may continue for Lower Form 6 (age of 18) and Upper Form 6 (age of 19). At Upper Form 6, students sat for High School Certificate (HSC), and later renamed *Sijil Tinggi Pelajaran Malaysia* (STPM), the translation of HSC in Malay.

Some students chose to join the workforce after completing LCE/SRP. Previous Malaysia's Employment Act 1955 (or Act 265) under Sections 45-56 defined employment of children and young persons. Those sections have been deleted. The Children and Young Persons (Employment) Act 1966 (Act 350). Act 350 defines a child as a person under 14 years old and a young person as under 16 years old. Since the LCE/SRP students completed their school at 15 years old, they are considered young employees. Act 350 allows for children and young persons to be employed in light work within the family, apprenticeship, and work sponsored by the government. The Act forbids them from night work and employment poses no threat to the life, limb, health, or morals of the employees.

Besides the mainstream general education system, there is also a traditional Islamic education system also known as *Pondok*, *Maahad*, and *Madrasah*. There is no proper certificate issued by the traditional Islamic education system. Later, the government intervened to integrate the teaching and learning of the special schools mentioned earlier into mainstream education. The students of the traditional Islamic education system were awarded a certificate. For example, students who have completed 5 years of secondary school education are awarded *Fourth Thanawi*, which is equivalent to the Malaysia Certificate of Education (MCE) or *Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia* (SPM). A graduate who wants to work in the government sector is required to have both certificates. A graduate may be appointed a religious school teacher if he completed *Fourth Thanawi* together with MCE or *Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia* (SPM).

Wan Faisal's father, i.e., Wan Hassan is also an activist in humanitarian activities. He acquired humanitarian exposure during his *Pondok* days. The *Pondok* students were required to do community work. They built an orphanage and raised funds to operate the orphanage. Apart from fundraising, they were also involved in entrepreneurship to earn some income for the orphanage. Even after marriage and having many children, his father continued with the humanitarian work together with the children. Such exposure has influenced Wan Faisal to be a humanitarian activist besides pursuing his occupation.

Wan Faisal developed his interest in cooking through his involvement in the community. He volunteered as a kitchen helper. He showed interest in culinary. The chef and his associates encouraged him to study culinary. Even though his parents enrolled him in the accounting stream in his secondary school, he had no passion for accounting and economics.

His parents expected him to further his studies to the highest possible level within their means. They hoped their children could work in the public sector as teachers, soldiers, or government officers. In terms of Islamic education, his parents have done their part to educate their children with knowledge and practical aspects of *fardu 'ain* (obligatory knowledge like *solat*, fasting, *zakat*, *hajj*).

Wan Faisal did seek the opinion of the congregational members at the *surau* about a career in the kitchen as a professional cook or chef. He also obtained the advice of those in the field. He concluded that anyone can join the kitchen workforce in Malaysia with their school certificates.

After receiving his *Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia* (Malaysia Education Certificate) results, Wan Faisal applied for a culinary course in a college. This is the entry requirement besides a strong interest and passion for cooking. Anyone is eligible to apply for a position in the kitchen of any hotel as long as one has a certificate in culinary. The career path in culinary would be as follows. The first post will be *commis* chef or junior chef, then *chef de partie* (station chef), *sous chef* (deputy chef), and *chef de cuisine* (head chef).

Wan Faisal spent five years as a *commis* chef. His primary role was to assist the *chef de parties* in the hotel kitchen. He performed various kitchen duties mostly assisting chef de parties such as preparing a meal, receiving deliveries, and stock taking. His first salary was just RM900 per month. After a year, he obtained RM1200 per month. His last pay as *commis* chef was RM1800 per month; that was in 2005. The monthly salary did not include payment for overtime, weekend, and festive days allowances. He could earn up to RM4000 a month. Later, Wan Faisal has promoted to *chef de partie* or station chef. His monthly income was in his first year. As *chef de partie*, he had the opportunity to manage a Malay food section. His

immediate supervisor was the *sous chef*. He spent five years as *chef de partie*, but his monthly salary just reached RM3500. With 10 years of working in the kitchen, he could earn RM3500 per month only. He had had to be realistic about the income since he had more dependents. If he could wait for another two years, he could be promoted to be the *sous chef* with a monthly salary of RM4500 per month.

### **HANDS-ON COSTING**

When working as a subordinate, Wan Faisal's former boss (an executive chef) discovered that Wan Faisal had underestimated his cost. He suggested Wan Faisal enroll in an entrepreneurship workshop.

Wan Faisal still remembers the advice of his former boss: "Wan, costing is very important. Cash flow is the nerve of any business. You cannot make mistakes in costing and cash flow management. You will never have enough cash in your business when you continue to make mistakes in costing and cash flow. You should enroll in an entrepreneurship workshop. Many government agencies offer entrepreneurship workshops."

As suggested by his former boss, Wan Faisal attended an entrepreneurship workshop. He used his business as a sample in the workshop. The participants and instructors of the entrepreneurship workshop helped him to develop a business plan with realistic costing and cash flow. During the workshop presentation, he received a lot of constructive comments from other participants. He incorporated all the comments into his business plan. Wan Faisal was not dealing with a dummy business, but rather a real business that had suffered financial losses for 6 months.

### **PRODUCTS**

In general, Wan Catering customers ordered wedding catering to serve 100, 200, 300, and 500 guests. The 500-pax package is priced at RM11,600. The package provides a complete itinerary of the wedding. The detailed menu and services in the wedding catering are according to the norms of Malay Muslims. *Doa* (Islamic prayers) recitation is included as the opening slot of the wedding event. Sometimes, the hosts might invite *nasyid* (Islamic singing) or *hadrah* (Islamic musicians) groups to recite *salawat* (some sayings to honor Prophet Muhammad) upon the entering of the bride and the groom into the wedding hall for dining and meeting with the guests. The main reason for the *doa* is to seek blessing from Allah. Nevertheless, *doa* recitation is not mandatory. The *salawat*, *nasyid*, and *hadrah* are also not required in Islamic teachings. However, Muslims should recite *doa* individually before doing anything or eating. Muslim hosts and guests should observe the *ikhtilat* (socialization and distancing) between males and females. Since the wedding event is held between 11 am and 4 pm, Muslim hosts and guests are expected also to observe the *solat* (Islamic prayers) time (especially *Zuhr*, afternoon prayers between 1 pm and 4 pm). Some hosts provided a dedicated space for the *solat*. If the wedding is held in a hall, or the wedding is near to the *surau* (a dedicated small building with the capacity of 200-500 people to perform *solat*) or *masjid* (a dedicated building with the capacity of 500-2000 people to perform *solat*), the host could remind the guests. Certain hosts would stop any music or announcement during the *azan* (calling for prayers) from the *surau* or *masjid* or sometimes just from the national radio announcement. Figure 1 shows the detailed menu and services for Wan Catering's affordable premium package.

Figure 1: Affordable Premium Package

<b>AFFORDABLE PREMIUM PACKAGE FOR 500 PERSONS. Just RM11,600</b>	
<p>Menu:</p> <p><i>Wan Flavoured Biryani Rice</i>            White Rice            Red Chicken/Fried with spices  <i>Wan special Black Meat/Rendang</i>            Mixed Vegetable (Dalca)            Papedom            Fruit Pickle            Fruit (Watermelon &amp; Oranges)            Drink (syrup/orange cordial)            Mineral water            Green bean porridge (as dessert)            Tea (bubble tea)  <u>If the function is at home /outdoor</u>            With Arabian Canopy            VIP 1 set            Guest 3 sets            Bridal 1 set            Banquet chairs with covers            Special for VIP chairs</p> <p>Inclusive of PA System &amp; Dee Jay            Plus Doa recitation, Salawat Nasyid Group,            Malay martial art            Photo booth for guests            Photography: custom sticky album 13 x 13            (100 pieces 4R size. 1 Frame). DVD unlimited            Plus outdoor photography on the same day.</p>	<p>The catering included            Buffet tools, plates, glass cups, tissues            General serving personnel with uniform – 10 persons            VIP serving personnel with special uniform – 6 persons            Bridal special dishes (1 dome) and for VIP (2 domes)</p> <p>If function at the hall:            20 round tables (for 8 persons per table)            2 round tables (for 10 persons)            Banquet chairs with cover            Banquet chairs for VIP</p> <p>Bridal decoration &amp; accessories            Cakes, table for the cakes, table for gifts, and table for goodies</p>

If the customers ordered food only without wedding tools and accessories, the price of the package will be different. For a package of 400-900 persons, the price will be RM12/pax. Figure 2 shows the menu and services.

Figure 2: Affordable Food Only (400-900 persons)

<p><b>AFFORDABLE FOOD ONLY Menu with serving of 6 personnel:</b></p> <p><i>Wan Flavoured Biryani Rice</i>            White Rice            Red Chicken/Fried with spices  <i>Wan special Black Meat/Rendang</i>            Mixed Vegetable (Dalca)            Papedom            Fruit Pickle            Fruit (Watermelon &amp; Oranges)            Drink (syrup/orange cordial)            Mineral water            Green bean porridge (as dessert)            Tea (bubble tea)</p> <p>Inclusive of buffet tools, plates, glass cups, tissues plus            Doa recitation</p>
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If the customers ordered food only without wedding tools and accessories, the price of the package will be different. For a package of 100-300 persons, the price will be RM11/pax. Figure 3 shows the menu and services.

Figure 3: Affordable Food Only (100-300 persons)

<p>AFFORDABLE FOOD ONLY Menu with serving of 6 personnel:</p> <p><i>Wan Flavoured Biryani Rice</i></p> <p>White Rice</p> <p>Red Chicken/Fried with spices</p> <p><i>Wan special Black Meat/Rendang</i></p> <p>Mixed Vegetable (Dalca)</p> <p><i>Papedom</i></p> <p>Fruit Pickle</p> <p>Fruit (Watermelon &amp; Oranges)</p> <p>Drink (syrup/orange cordial)</p> <p>Mineral water</p> <p>Green bean porridge (as dessert)</p> <p>Tea (bubble tea)</p> <p>Inclusive of buffet tools, plates, glass cups, tissues plus</p> <p><i>Doa recitation</i></p>
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Wan Catering also accepts orders for small events at the home, office, and outdoor (such as family day, sports day, and so forth). The menu can be customized according to the requirements such as kampong food, Western barbeque, hi-tea, and so forth.

### **DELIVERY FOR MULTIPLE ORDERS**

Wan Catering receives multiple orders with different requirements. For example, two orders from the corporate office, three orders for a small feast at night, five orders for a wedding, two orders for outdoor, and 10 orders for free food programs. Wan Catering has limited capability to meet all the orders at a time. When the company receives multiple orders, Wan Catering would make arrangements with close associates among relatives, former trainees, and close friends who are in the catering business to deliver the order. Wan would ensure in each order had his signature dish and drink.

### **MUTUAL COOPERATION**

Wan Faisal started to recognize the need to collaborate with others in sustaining his business. He started to collaborate with raw material suppliers, food distributors, event management companies, non-governmental organizations, entrepreneurship trainers, food and beverages practitioners, government agencies, schools, colleges, and community associations. He managed to get food catering orders from various organizations. While doing his business, Wan Faisal donated food to the poor and needy through non-governmental organizations.

In any catering event that Wan Faisal is contracted for, he never forgets to include the poor and needy as beneficiaries of the food he prepared for his customers. He employed the poor and needy among his family, friends, and neighbors as his catering crew. Wan Faisal himself trained his employees on entrepreneurship in the food business. Besides him, he also invited his former boss, his entrepreneurship trainers, and supply chain networking partners to provide training to the poor and needy. He offered his business space as incubation for them. The majority of his associates had their catering businesses. They also emulated his model by employing the poor and needy among family, friends, and neighbors; just like Wan Faisal. As a facilitator, Wan Faisal also offered financial assistance to the deserving trainees.

One of his friends said to Wan Faisal. "Wan, I do not understand you. You hired them as your employees. Then you trained them with entrepreneurship skills and offered them seed capital to venture into the catering business. Aren't you creating competitors for your own business? How could you grow your business with your method? After many years in catering, your business remains small and you still wake up at 3 in the morning to cook. I noticed that those that you trained already expanded their business and earned a huge income. It is insanity, Wan!" Wan Faisal responded to his friend's remark with a smile.

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is your comment on the entrepreneurial inclination of Wan Faisal in managing Wan Catering Company?
2. What could be the reasons for Wan Faisal not to undergo costing and budget management during his 10 years as a chef? Other than costing and budget knowledge and skill deficiency in the early 10 years of his catering business, what skill do you think that Wan Faisal seemed to be lacking? Why do you say so?
3. If you were asked to be an adviser to Chef Wan Faisal, describe your mentoring approach for Wan Catering Company to sustain the business.
4. Do you think Wan Faisal should remain a sole proprietorship? Take a position and justify your choice.

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