

Since 1991 **LUBCON**®

2023

**32ND  
ANNUAL  
FOUNDERS' DAY  
LECTURE**

**Delivered on Tuesday, August 08, 2023  
At NOCBUL Hotels & Tourism  
29, Aderemi Adeleye Street,  
GRA, Ilorin, Kwara State, Nigeria**

**LUBCON:  
Innovating from Adewole,  
Ilorin, Kwara State to Africa**

---

**Muritala Awodun, PhD**

Professor and Director

Centre for Enterprise and Human Capital Development  
Crown-Hill University (now Ojaja University) Eiyenkorin  
Kwara State, Nigeria

# **LUBCON:**

## **Innovating from Adewole, Ilorin, Kwara State to Africa**

### **Introduction**

Sometime in the first quarter of the year 1992, as a young assistant banking officer at Guaranty Trust Bank, and a member of a three-man corporate banking team that was made up of George Ardo (the Boss), Segun Agbaje (the immediate past Managing Director) and myself, we met a gentleman, in his early thirties (30s), on a scheduled marketing visit.

The man in question was, then, the Managing Director of Stallion Properties Development Company, a subsidiary of Unipetrol Plc. The purpose of our visit was a follow up to an earlier letter of introduction sent to him about Guaranty Trust Bank, soliciting that he approves the opening of an account of the company with our bank. The marketing visit, led to the eventual opening of the company's account with our bank, and an addition to our list of corporate clients.

I became the account officer, and therefore, had cause to interact regularly with this relatively young Managing Director. Thus, I had the privilege of interacting with him often. At every interaction, I always marvel at the level of intelligence, confidence and astuteness of this man sitting at the apex of such a company at a relatively young age.

I played my role for almost a year and a half until internal posting moved me to banking operations from corporate banking. While relating with him, I never knew where this young MD is from, nor thought our ways will, years after, cross again. I strictly only discharged my duties without any sentiments, as we were ethically required to do.

When, some seventeen years after, specifically in 2009, I was bestowed with the responsibility of searching for successful entrepreneurs of Kwara origin that could serve on the board of the KWASU Centre for Entrepreneurship, established by the newly created Kwara State University, Malete, under my directorship, I stumbled on him again, without any iota of knowledge that he is the brain behind the organization I had heard so much about, since I arrived Kwara, and penciled down to visit at their location in Adewole Industrial Estate, Ilorin, to meet the owner and founder.

The man I have copiously described above, is no other person than Engineer Jani Ibrahim, as he loves to be called.

The story of Lubricating Company of Nigeria (LUBCON) Limited is one of the cases of the entrepreneur, his enterprise and his entrepreneurship drive that I have used severally in teaching upcoming entrepreneurs in the entrepreneurship education programme at the Kwara State University (KWASU) Centre for Entrepreneurship which Jani Ibrahim, along with some others played foundational roles in its successful establishment.

With evidences that could be related with, the KWASU effort has made this man, and his company, mentor several young entrepreneurs that have today established their own enterprises, based on insights and encouragements received from the case of the LUBCON Story.

I am therefore more than delighted to quickly accept the invitation of the Company to be the 32<sup>nd</sup> Annual LUBCON Guest Lecturer of this indigenous oil lubricating company in Nigeria. The competition and stiffness of the environment notwithstanding, this company has stood the test of time in a country where records from the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) and the Small and Medium

Enterprises Development Agency of Nigeria (SMEDAN) shows that more than 50 percent of start-ups fold up within the first five years of their establishment.

This was not just a start-up, but a company that dared to venture into the lubricating business that was then dominated by multinationals in Nigeria. Jani Ibrahim did not just venture into this field, but also passionately brought the firm down to Kwara State, when all the business forces in the Oil and Gas Industry favours the establishment of such a firm in Lagos or its environ.

Surviving for more than three (3) decades in this industry, operating locally and extending the tentacles of the company globally, is a good enough reason to make a case of, for others to learn from, and I am must say, unequivocally that I am proud to be associated with LUBCON and its Founder/Chairman. I have been most privileged to interview him and his team, in the course of trying to write the story of the LUBCON of his dream, and how he has passionately, with a very committed team, built the LUBCON Group that we have today, over the years.

One thing that has been established in my interactions with him is that, it does not really matter what and where you are, presently, on your entrepreneurship journey, you can, and will, still make it to your dream land, if you remain passionate and committed to the course of the venture. In the words of Jani Ibrahim, *“entrepreneurship is not a race, but a journey that entails some unique virtues and characters”*. These virtues and characters, you will find in the person of Jani Ibrahim.

### **Can We Talk Innovation?**

Now, enough about Jani, let's talk innovation. Needless to say, that innovation is a key component of economic growth and success, and therefore, of utmost importance in manufacturing. The reason for this is not far-fetched, because it is capable of leading easily to higher productivity, efficiency and progress.

Typically, innovation means, to be on the lookout for something better, to see flaws and find solutions, to take an existing method and streamline it. Since LUBCON operates in the manufacturing industry, which is constantly undergoing changes; from the emergence of new production technologies, to content mix, to packaging and delivery. This continuous transformation, means that to succeed in the manufacturing industry, there is the need to keep innovating, to stay relevant and ahead of competition.

One other reason why innovation is so important is because it is the driver of manufacturing. We understand how challenging it can be to do something new or to test something new without being 100% certain of the results. However, the risks of not innovating, on the other hand, are just too significant to be ignored. It is also clear that innovation will not only help businesses to evolve and grow, but also affects the industry as a whole, as it is capable of making leaders out of the innovative firm, with ground breaking areas of success, thus bringing about the transformation of the manufacturing process and the entire industry.

### **Let's Talk Some Theories**

Theoretically, we are told that companies that innovate get competitive advantage, which allows them enter markets faster, and easily stand out from the crowd. However, when you offer the same products or services as other businesses in your sector, you can easily be swallowed by stiff competition. Regardless of your industry, running a small business is certainly challenging. Besides the financial constraints, manpower requirements, and operational difficulties, one of the biggest challenges you have to face is competition.

However, as they always say, business is a competition and competition is in itself a business. The big players in the market, with their massive marketing budgets and unmatched purchasing powers, make it hard for smaller companies to compete with

them. While rivalry might seem like a negative thing for your business, it has its own share of advantages.

Although it is true that competition makes getting customers and sales difficult, on the flipside, it encourages you to strive harder and push yourself to the limits in order to be able to manage your business well. Additionally, it forces you to stay focused, and persevere, on improving the quality of the products and services you offer.

Innovation may be by simply taking products that are already popular and making them better, thus standing them out in the sector, and giving them the capacity to generate more sales, than the ordinary products. In this wise, innovation can facilitate and improve the growth of a business, irrespective of the size of such business.

Since the customers' needs are ever-changing, being able to adapt to changes in the sector and innovate becomes the most reasonable option to keep a company competitive and relevant in its industry. It is obvious that businesses that remain stagnant will not succeed in the long-term, as they may lose market share to competitors, loose important staff, see a decrease in productivity, and see their margins and profit fall.

Innovation is also a precursor to improved productivity and reduced costs, since it allows a company to be more flexible and adaptable to market changes.

### **Specific Innovative Efforts of LUBCON**

How did LUBCON offer better and more innovative products and services to meet the needs of her customers which, in turn, led to consistent and higher sales, and profits?

At LUBCON, the company believes in the importance of manufacturers nurturing innovation, in order to benefit from improved efficiency, and remain relevant in an ever-changing industry. At all times, the company take steps such as putting processes in place to accept employee suggestions, encouraging risk-taking, rewarding innovation, celebrating success stories, looking for soft skills, such as, creativity from new employees, and many more, to encourage and promote innovation

LUBCON, as a company, is constantly reviewing her processes, as she gives innovation a top-most priority. The company invested in eco-friendly processes, casting processes, new technologies, paperless systems, and people, in her innovation drive, and consistently review her capital expenditure, and invest to keep up with the industry, and to develop industry leading manufacturing techniques. These are efforts to ensure efficiency, and keep her people and technology ahead of the industry.

Concerning Product Innovation, LUBCON has remained at the forefront in product innovation in the country, from being the first indigenous company in the Oil and Gas Sector to be ISO Certified in 2002 as a result of the introduction of Nano technology in lubricant formulation in Nigeria. Her flagship product Nano Adrenalin is the only product that lubricates and renews the engine every time it is used. Her expansion projects and the innovations the company have introduced in her system earned LUBCON the 2015 National Productivity Order of Merit Award, making it the first company in the Nigerian Oil & Gas Sector to be so honoured.

### **How has LUBCON Innovated and Competed?**

LUBCON has tried to capitalize on the positive side of competition and use its advantages to make that start up in 1991 a successful business, by all ramifications, today, spreading across the east, central and west of Africa. Some of the things that

have been done over the last thirty-two years have helped the company stand the test of time.

Let's put these things in perspective, as the five (5) pillars of LUBCON innovation.

### 1. LUBCON Picked her Niche and Promoted her Strengths

As a small business, in 1991, LUBCON was aware that it was practically impossible to compete and win against the multinationals that were the biggest rivals within the industry. However, the company started slowly by choosing a market segment, and gradually built its own brand within the oil lubricating market.

LUBCON learnt early that in whatever industry you find yourself, the classification of the industry is very vague, and there are always untapped areas waiting to be discovered. Finding your niche can be daunting and time-consuming, but you have to do so if you want to succeed. However, recognizing the right market, and selling to the correct customers allows for business growth beyond strict competition. This they were able to do so well to survive competition.

At the same time, LUBCON capitalized on the strengths of her products and service delivery, by trying to create relationships with the association of consumers, and this made her stand out from the crowd almost immediately, with her product offer that was made better than the rest. The company also introduced exclusive product packages that were difficult to find anywhere else. The key element here was the ability to identify LUBCON's competitive advantage and use it quickly as a leverage for the business.

So, instead of imitating the competitor's strategy, the company focused on her own competitive advantages. LUBCON also used her unique selling points to highlight her brands, and attract and keep her customers. More importantly, LUBON did not concentrate on having a broad range of clients, but targeted smaller and more specific patronages which became very sustainable.



## 2. LUBCON focused on her unique customer service and connected with her audience

Another important step the company took to overcome the suffocating competition in the oil lubricating business was to provide impeccable customer service at all times. Even if you have the greatest products and the most affordable services, without immaculate customer service, no one will stay loyal to your business.

So, LUBCON made customer service her top most priority, and had the determination to always exceed customer expectations, by solving their problems in the fastest time possible, responding to their queries, and listening to their suggestions.

Unlike the big multinationals who do not have the time to incorporate feelings when giving customer service, LUBCON was quick to differentiate herself as a small oil lubricating company. As much as possible, the company was quick to develop a more personal and stronger connection with the wholesalers (clients) and associations of consumers.

She showed regular appreciation for their patronage and presence, and engaged with them through different platforms, by reaching out to them instead of waiting for them to come. Therefore, she was able to easily connect with her audience as one sustainable way to increase and maintain her customer base. The company personalized relationships with her clients, thereby building friendships out of her business relationships.

## 3. LUBCON continuously innovated her business processes

Due to the fact that competition is one thing that no company can run away from, in business, particularly in the oil industry which is dominated by multinational companies, LUBCON knew that she must be on our toes to survive.

To outsmart and outshine her competitors, the company focused on her business processes, to make them as smooth and efficient as possible. The sure way to accomplish this was (and still is) continuous innovation.

While the multinational companies have the luxury to build a new platform or spend thousands (or even millions) of dollars just to try out a new technology, LUBCON, as a small, local oil lubricating business have no such luxury of huge resources. The company was, therefore, constantly learning new things and trying them out to keep afloat and ahead.

LUBCON learnt enough theories to realize that innovation need not be big, bold and glamorous, but can be as simple as improving the existing processes and introducing new twists to make the structure suitable for the business. Additionally, the company learnt that you can use tools that can make daily tasks run faster and more efficiently.

#### 4. LUBCON kept an eye on her competitors

While focusing on building her own brand, sales and marketing strategies, the company did not disregard her competitors, but kept an eye on them. LUBCON was actively in touch and involved in the industry, so as to be the first to know about changes and reforms in her segment of the business. The company did not take for granted current market announcements and the latest innovations of her competitors, as they helped her understand where opportunities existed.

LUBCON use, to her advantage, the fact that small businesses are not always considered a threat by the top companies working in the sector, so they paid less attention to what they were planning and doing, allowing them to forge ahead easier than expected.

Thus, the company was able to take some markets from these top companies without much ado, and beat them silently in specific target battles. The LUBCON strategy to beat her competition was that she never paid too much attention to them to affect her operations, and at the same time, she never ignored what they were doing from time to time.

### 5. LUBCON attracted and retained the best of employees

The company's concern for engaging and keeping a well-motivated workforce was based on her understanding that the people are the fundamental forces upon which a successful organization can be built. So, for LUBCON to ever think of overcoming her competitors in this line of business, she needed to build a powerhouse team of employees.

From serving customers, to facing clients, and creating marketing plans, her hardworking employees became the face and backbone of the company, and contributed specially to the success of the past thirty-two years. The quality of her employees, and not the quantity has made all the difference for LUBCON.

### Concluding Remarks

In concluding, let me make copious reference, once again to some other golden words of Jani Ibrahim about branding, innovation and quality products at LUBCON; *“We have built a strong sense of belonging with the LUBCON brand, that we are not only visible in the market, but counted as a force to reckon with in terms of innovation and quality products.”*

Jani Ibrahim is an advocate of entrepreneurship for development, and throughout his LUBCON journey, he has vigorously pursued this without looking back. Setting up Lubricating Company of Nigeria (LUBCON) Limited, with its registration in 1991, was the beginning of that journey that has seen LUBCON through thick and

thin, and that small venture, located in the suburb of Ilorin, called Adewole Industrial Estate, is now a conglomerate/multinational with presence in the east, central and west of Africa.

The capacity to endure the odds, and continuously plough back her profits into expanding the scope of operations of this business, has taken him this far, particularly, with the right team that believes in the LUBCON dream. He has built a strong force of stakeholders that he proudly refers to as the 'LUBCON People' and this cuts across five (5) strata; the staff, the management, the customers, the suppliers and the community as investors.

He has built a strong sense of belonging with the LUBCON brand, that is not only visible in the market, but counted as a force to reckon with, in terms of innovation and quality products. The brand Jani Ibrahim dreamt of building, has gradually surfaced for all to see. The LUBCON that he, only, could see in 1991, is now that LUBCON that all can see and associate with 32 years after, all because he believed that the way to get started is to quit talking and start doing.

The great Albert Einstein has said that 'imagination is everything'. He further established that imagination is 'the preview of life's coming attractions'. True to that position, Jani Ibrahim's LUBCON that was imagined in 1991, has become what all the stakeholders could proudly call “Our LUBCON”.

In closing, let me leave with some other honest and encouraging words of Jani Ibrahim;

*“We made our mistakes and learnt from them, knowing fully well that if we are not making mistakes, then we are obviously not taking risks, and that means we are not going anywhere. So, we imbibe in our people this fact that making mistakes is not a crime, as far as they are genuine mistakes, and we*

*can recover faster from them than the competition, learning and winning in the process. Almost everything worthwhile carries with it some sort of risk, whether starting a new business, riding from home to work, getting married, or flying in the air; because nothing ventured, nothing gained”.*

As I join in celebrating 32 years of Lubricating Company of Nigeria (LUBCON), it is important for us to be reminded of what Winston Churchill said about success and failure;

*“Success is not final, failure is not fatal, it is the courage to continue that counts.”*

To the LUBCON People, please permit me to say that we should be emboldened by the fact that 'character cannot be developed in ease and quiet' but through the 'experience of trial and suffering, the soul can be strengthened, ambition inspired, and success achieved'.

The success of LUBCON today is a result of the collective experience of trial and suffering of those Jani Ibrahim called the LUBCON People, and my words of encouragement to strengthen, inspire and encourage them is that greater success lie ahead of them tomorrow, if only they remain committed to the vision.

I thank you for the opportunity of this platform of LUBCON 32<sup>nd</sup> Annual Founder's Day Lecture, as I say to the Founder, Happy Birthday!

**Muritala Awodun, PhD**

Professor and Director

Centre for Enterprise and Human Capital Development

Crown-Hill University (now Ojaja University) Eiyenkorin

Kwara State, Nigeria

# JANILUBE 20W/50

API: SJ/CF

EXTRA HIGH PERFORMANCE TECHNOLOGY



**LUBCON**

**XHP 20W/50**

EXTRA HIGH PERFORMANCE TECHNOLOGY  
API: SJ/CF  
JANILUBE XHP 20W/50

**4L**

**JANILUBE**

JANILUBE XHP 20W/50 API SJ/CF is recommended for highly accelerated gasoline and diesel engines of passenger cars, light vans and



ISO 9001:2015 CERTIFIED



Lubricating Africa!

**4L**

08AUG23

[www.lubconinternational.com](http://www.lubconinternational.com)