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Rebuilding culture through transformation

SUMAN SAHA

CORPORATE culture is at the foundation of any business success. It guides employees on how they should think, act, react and feel. So, each organisation focuses on building a desired culture for transformation.

However, it does not ensure success unless senior leadership demonstrates full commitment to the culture change management process, say experts.

"Culture is the right arm for transformation because it is the root cause of any business success or failure," says Saood Bin Masood, managing director of HR Kites, a leading human resource solution provider in Bangladesh.

"The senior leadership team must demonstrate commitment to the culture change process for transformation."

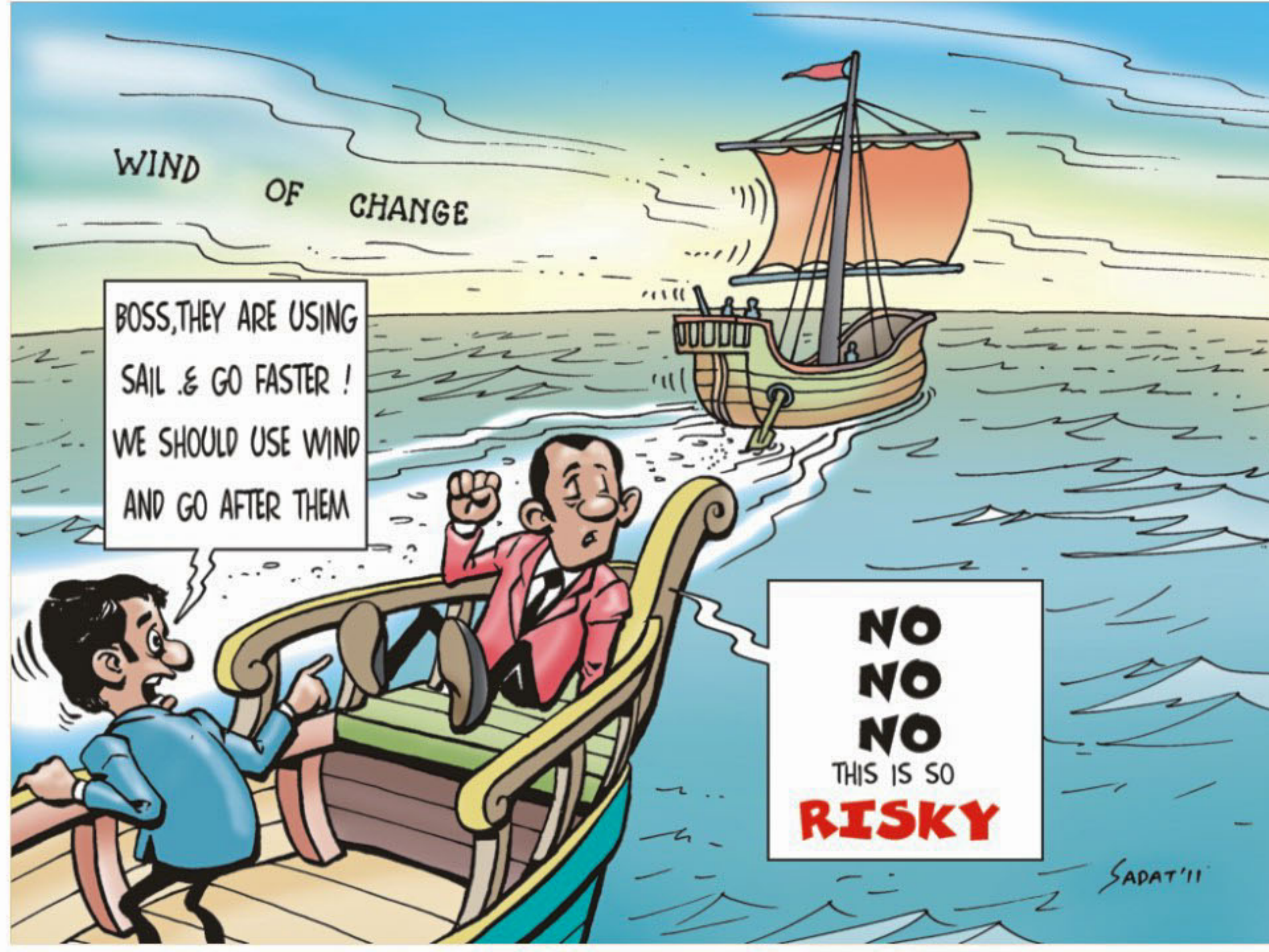
Masood says the transformation process must be embraced and championed by the entire senior leadership team. They must lead this effort with "one heart, one mind, and one voice".

An organisation has to focus on transformation management because change is the only constant for business organisations and anything else in the world. In addition to that, technology is constantly changing and the business organisations need to be at par with that as well, says Masood.

In an ever-changing world, the saying, 'survival for the fittest' is the most apt, says Kingshuk Das, human resource manager, international business group of Marico Bangladesh. In this scenario, the survival of any organisation is dictated, not only for internal needs but also for the rate of change outside that must be matched, he adds.

Masood says an organisation should focus on transformation management because it is the core to streamline organisation vision, mission, and values for internal and external stakeholders' satisfaction in a structured way and to achieve a common business target.

But change or transformation man-



agement is not an easy task. The change agent has to focus on managing resistance, generating stakeholder commitment and growing the organisation's capability and capacity, say management practitioners.

M Habibul Basit, chief operating officer of Rahimafrooz Accumulators Ltd, says employees generally resist change to think that they have to do more work for the same pay.

"One of the corner stone of a company to invite change management process is first to think about the enterprise's ethical issues, its compliance and corporate governance records. These are prerequisites to setting up a change management system. The idea is to let open Pandora's box," says Muallem Chowdhury, executive director for finance and planning of ACI.

Masood from HR Kites says senior leaders cannot delegate the responsi-

bility for culture creation, maintenance, or refinement to chief executives and human resources personnel only. All staff members have to be involved in culture transformation at every phase. This process is not about "managing by announcements", where leaders tell everyone what the new expectations are but do not invite thoughts or hold people -- including themselves -- consistently accountable.

"To build a desired culture, any initiative must be linked with the transformation needed. A strong culture of rebuilding or sustaining the momentum of transformation becomes the best tool for the desired culture," says Das.

Masood, who held several senior roles successfully in top fast moving consumers goods brands in Bangladesh and the US, says a survey by HR Kites of 320 people from freshers to

senior levels of corporations in Bangladesh shows a benchmark corporate culture is the top priority for the employees to choose an organisation. So it gives a message for sustaining or rebuilding an environment of learning and career aspiration with a good boss preferred by people at all levels.

He suggests organisations need to rebuild their culture by asking three simple questions to employees: "Do I know why I am here? Am I being taken care of here? Do I have a future here?"

If the reply to all three is a yes, then it will sustain. If not, then take a step to rebuild your culture before your competitor does.

Organisation cultures cannot be easily changed in an environment that supports freedom of speech and open inquiries. Culture cannot be managed by a small group of people. Google and Apple represent opposite business

models, fully open versus completely closed. So, their corporate cultures must be very different, but both of them are very successful, says Shah Sultan Ahmed, advisor of HR Kites.

"Transformation is not restructuring flow charts, diversity programmes, and team-building exercises. In reality, organisations are filled with old cultural norms that are as tough as rubber, which makes new and innovative ideas difficult to embrace," says Basit of Rahimafrooz Accumulators Ltd.

Transformation, like oil on water, can live comfortably on the surface of an organisation, resistant to penetrating the fibre and makeup of the culture. When transformation initiatives are implemented, the rewards surpass the fear of change, he adds.

Masood says organisations take some steps to build a desired corporate culture for transformation.

Firstly, senior leaders have to develop a listening attitude because it is the first syndrome of positive change for the desired culture.

Secondly, they need to focus on addressing the emotional issues found in the listening process and dig out the common threads through a third party or a mix of people.

Thirdly, they should assign coaches and mentors to assist the dissemination and implementation of information into the work processes because a good coach is an in-house consultant for a winning culture.

Finally, senior management must be committed to the 'result' and not to their own egos or hard and fast way of doing things.

In this case, management needs to have commitment through a proper 'buy in' for change to sustain or rebuild the culture.

"To start culture change, all we need to do is two simple things -- make small and big examples of leading the change that represents the culture you want to create. Then let other people tell stories about it because a word of mouth campaign works effectively over a crest," says Masood.

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'Can-do' attitude, a must for the job

SUMAN SAHA

YOUNG talents in Bangladesh need to focus on exposing their strengths and success stories through self-marketing to climb up the corporate ladder. The world is an extremely busy place and nobody has the time for anybody else, says a senior official of Standard Chartered Bank.

"Bangladeshi people are very modest," says Madhavi Lall, regional head of human resource for India and South Asia of Standard Chartered, at an interview with The Daily Star on a visit to the country.

Job aspirants should make a two-minute self-summary of themselves to share their strengths and capabilities to interviewers, says Madhavi. By identifying key priorities and putting them into sentences, they can later repeat the summary in an interview, she adds.

Madhavi, who holds an MBA in human resources management and a master's degree in Mathematics, says, "The youth must have a very strong 'can-do' attitude and dedication to succeed in their working lives."

Standard Chartered in Bangladesh, which is ranked one of the top fifteen countries by investment commitment and financial performance across the entire Standard Chartered network, employs nearly 1,400 local staff.

The bank essentially follows the 70:20:10 mode of learning: which means, 70 percent learning should happen 'on the job', whereas 20 percent through other people and interaction and 10 percent through classroom or e-learning, says Madhavi.

At Standard Chartered Bank the thought process is that learning and development is more than just classroom inputs because an adult learn more by doing than the classroom work. Employees learn and develop through short-term assignments, cross-functional busi-



Madhavi Lall

ness exposure, reading books and projects assignments, says Madhavi.

Employees at the bank are also required to generate an online 'Individual Learning and Development' plan with input from their supervising managers. They can choose from a variety of learning courses mentioned on the online database or alternatively, consult the Organisation Learning Department for any specialised training. This helps to generate greater ownership and accountability of the plan, says Madhavi.

"We usually spend 2 percent of our payroll cost across-the-board for training and development purposes," says Madhavi.

"Our main HR objective is to empower line managers because they ultimately impact people,"

says Madhavi. "We always try to empower them so that they are motivated and engaged to work."

The company introduced a "cultural guardian" programme last year where a senior member eases the entry of a newly joined into the cultures, norms and functions of the organisation, says Madhavi.

The bank follows a leadership and team management framework called KFCI (Know Me/ Focus Me/ Care about me/ Inspire me) -- an approach that helps in interactions with staff to build engagement and enable high performance within teams. This helps in providing people with a sense of direction and involvement. It is a tool that creates a strong bond among the teams, says Madhavi.

Madhavi, who has been with the bank for over 10 years, says the retention and engagement of talent will be the main challenge for the corporate world in the near future. So, the bank always strives to retain talents by providing 'total rewards'.

"If you want to retain people, you have to make their lives happy and easy."

The bank's employee turnover rate in Bangladesh is nearly 10 percent, which is significantly lower than industry standards, says Madhavi.

The employees of Standard Chartered in Bangladesh are also highly engaged in their work as the Gallup study, which surveys employee engagement, shows it gets a score of 4.25 on 5.

The bank also runs various schemes, particularly at entry levels, to build its leadership cadre. One such scheme is the International Graduate Programme. MBA holders from premier colleges are recruited and put through a structured 18 to 20 months programme. The purpose of the programme is to "build generalist and leadership skills". With time, as the young graduates realise their strengths and develop organisation maturity, they may opt for specialist roles than generalist ones.

Standard Chartered in Bangladesh also recruits freshers for officer level positions, like customer service, credit risk and priority banking, by publishing circulars on its web page and going campus.

"But our first priority is to recruit internally for mid and senior level positions."

The regional head of Standard Chartered says over 30 Bangladeshi professionals are currently working outside, across the entire standard chartered network. And more Bangladeshi talent will be given foreign assignments in the near future because of their fabulous performance, she assures.

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