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NEXT STEP

FOURTH INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION SURVIVAL GUIDE FOR THE AVERAGE BANGLADESHI

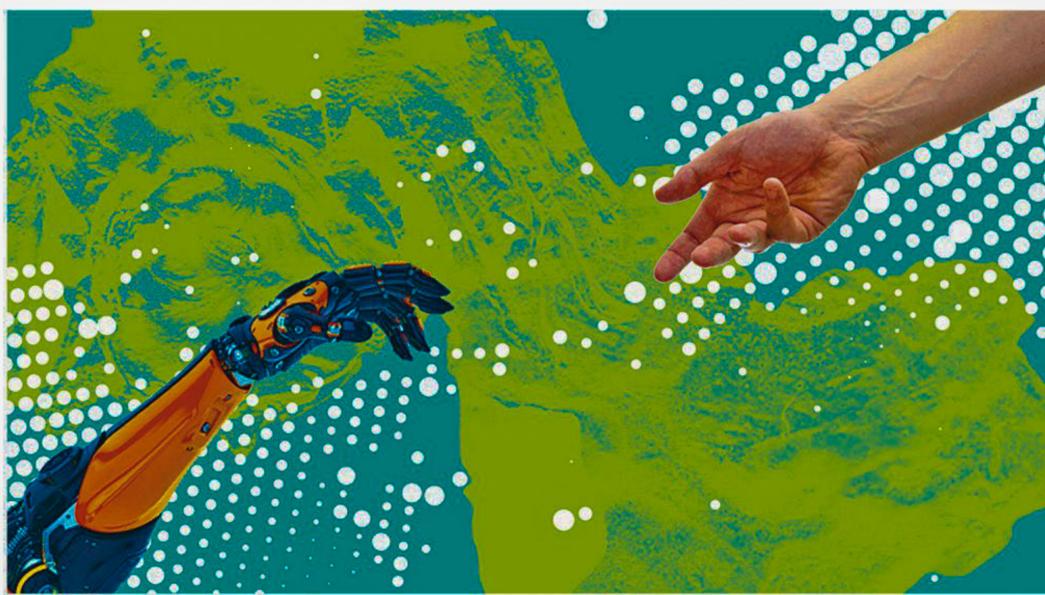


ILLUSTRATION: AMIYA HALDER

From the booming, age-old readymade garments industry to exporting active pharmaceutical ingredients to Eastern European nations, Bangladesh has had tremendous success in attaining a steady economic growth for some time now. There is no doubt that this high level of consistent growth is tied to the large number of people that make up the labour force – both skilled and unskilled. With the buzz around Bangladesh becoming the next Asian Tiger economy, here are some of the skills crucial for Bangladeshis to remain competitive in the days to come.

1. Emotional intelligence

With the age of booming artificial intelligence (AI), surging machine learning, and robots replacing physical labour as part of the arrival of the fourth industrial revolution, human beings need to remind themselves about what makes them humans in the first place: emotions. A friend of mine recently started reading Dale Carnegie's classic: How to Win Friends and Influence Others. He must have taken into account that the next popular and in-demand jobs will not be those that require a high amount knowledge, rather those which require emotional intelligence (EI).

EI can be loosely defined as the ability to effectively navigate social interactions and be aware of and adapt to various social situations. The key quality to possess and control when it comes to EI is empathy. Empathising with people will slowly become a key skill to harness. In a time when AI is not just something you watch on television, human inter-

actions will become key for us to take our already hospitable reputation as a people to the next level.

2. Creativity

Have you ever heard the saying, every Bangladeshi is a poet or every Bangladeshi can sing? So creativity is something you cannot do without. Creativity, by definition, means the process of generating new ideas. Generating fresh ideas can be quite challenging because most people find it difficult to get beyond the obvious, incremental solutions. We are all naturally creative, but, like every other skill, some people have more natural talent than others.

But there is a widespread misconception that creativity is inherent. It is not. Creativity can be learnt, and there are several models or frameworks that say just that. One of them is design thinking. The regular innovative process consists of four stages: ideate, define, design, and develop. On the other hand, design thinking has five stages: empathise, define, ideate, prototype, and test. With frameworks like this, a so-called not-so-creative person can tap into his creative potential.

Another myth is that you can compensate creativity with other skills. You cannot. With dealing with people and making decisions being the new norm, a Master of Fine Arts is now regarded as the new MBA. This is to recognise the importance of creativity and the benefits of artistic training. There are essential lessons an MBA can learn from an MFA, e.g. taking criticism, motivating the workforce, engaging with the audience, and

learning to let go of good ideas.

3. Cognitive flexibility

Do you see these common requirements in vacancy announcements: ability to work in a dynamic environment, ability to survive under pressure, etc? Even though these have turned into buzzwords by now, there are actually people who meet these requirements, and they are the ones who are significantly more successful than others in their respective fields. The special skill they possess is called cognitive flexibility.

Cognitive flexibility represents someone's ability to shift thoughts and adapt his or her behaviour to an ever-changing environment. The level of cognitive flexibility depends on how an individual is able to disengage from a previous task and respond effectively to another task – essentially multi-task. The greater someone's cognitive flexibility is, the higher the chance he or she has to optimise or maximise his or her human potential. The reason these people are special is because they are open to self-development. They are learning how to learn all the time.

One of the major ways to strengthen cognitive flexibility is to read and learn as they keep the brain interested and stimulated, requiring several regions to work together at the same time.

4. Synthesise data into information

Even a few years back, the important management skills you needed were critical thinking and complex problem solving. Now in this age of big data, everything is data driven and all these skills and traits result into data driven decision making. Data is out

there right now to be properly utilised.

The revolution of AI has started as well, but there is a gap between it and the existing big data. This gap is filled with the wonders of data science. Data science is the complex job of realising the opportunities presented by big data. Data scientists bring structure to the unstructured big data, find compelling patterns in it, and advise executives on the implications for products, processes, and decisions.

Data scientist has been mentioned as the sexiest job in the last few years and we are pretty sure the hype is only going up. Bangladesh is slowly adopting the data culture. The companies are getting used to enterprise resource planning and customer relationship management software. There are even home-grown business intelligence and analytics firms coming up to make sense of your enterprise data.

In the 47 years of our existence, we as a nation and as a people have come a long way in terms of consistent economic growth and political stability, having snatched over 60 percent of China's low-end garment manufacturing. We are slowly moving on to more sophisticated tertiary industries while exporting higher-end products, but in order to take our country to the next level and compete with the skilled labour forces of Europe and the US, we need to go back to developing our core human values and look back to what makes us human.

ZUHAYR REAZ

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THE BOSSMAN

BY E. RAZA RONNY



FIVE KEY LEADERSHIP LESSONS FOR MANAGERS

Mahtab Uddin Ahmed is the first Bangladeshi CEO of a foreign-owned mobile operator in Bangladesh. He visited Bangladesh Youth Leadership Centre (BYLC) on March 13, 2017, to have a conversation on leadership with BYLC graduates. What follows are five leadership lessons from his talk that resonated with me the most.

1. Seize the future

To be effective in the practice of leadership in the 21st century, one needs to be able to visualise and seize the future. In a rapidly changing world with no clear roadmap of which path to take, a manager needs to be able to use both his own and the team's creativity to foresee the future. Mr. Ahmed illustrated this idea with the examples of once successful companies like Xerox and Kodak which lost their relevance in the market for not being able to understand how their industries were being disrupted by new competitors. While it is useful to collect and interpret data from consumers, it is equally important for managers to be able to understand shifts in trends and technology and how they could affect their companies.

2. Abandon the past

To be successful in today's world, managers cannot just depend on past practices and ideas that brought success to their organisations. While managers should honour their past, they must also be open to introducing new ideas and experiments in their teams because what may have worked in the past might be the exact same reason for failure in the future.

Managers should have an experimental mindset and be open to stepping out of their comfort zone.

3. Embrace diversity

In the context of the current challenges faced by communities and countries, Mr. Ahmed emphasised on the need for embracing diversity. He stressed that managers should invest in building wider networks with diverse groups of people. This has two distinct advantages. First, collective wisdom and creativity is more likely to lead to better outcomes than individual creativity and having a diversity of viewpoints on an issue adds more value. Second, managers today are not competing in only the local market – with free flow of resources across borders, managers need to compete internationally, and the ability to seamlessly work across cultures will be the norm in the future, not the exception.

4. Develop multifaceted competence

Managers should prioritise on being generalists, not specialists. Drawing on his own experiences of working in finance, Mr. Ahmed spoke about how working in sales, marketing, and strategy pushed him out of his comfort and made

him grow as a manager. While functional knowledge and expertise is important, any manager aspiring to grow into a senior leadership role must be open to learning and experiencing other functional areas to broaden their knowledge and perspectives.

5. Encourage team performance

Managers need strong team players. In an organisation, the performance of a team does not solely depend on the individual performance of a manager. Rather it depends on the productivity of the entire team. It is therefore imperative that managers focus more on team goals instead of personal goals and build trust and a sense of shared responsibility in teams. Mr. Ahmed further added that managers should come out of the 'taker' mindset and be a 'giver' to the organisation. Focusing on one's own performance will only take someone so far, but to rise up and grow in responsibility, one must put the team first, and himself or herself second.

FARAH CHOWDHURY

The writer is an Assistant Manager, Office of Professional Development, at BYLC.

Making a DIFFERENCE

Bangladesh is rapidly moving towards middle income status by 2021. Our businesses definitely offer immense opportunities for the growing economy and this diversity needs a stage for the stories untold. See Bangladesh make its mark on the global map as Making a Difference brings you our proudest success stories from across the country.



3 THINGS THAT KILL MANAGERS AND LEADERS

People don't leave companies, they leave bad bosses. If you're in a leadership position and people around you are muttering behind your back, you have a problem. If they are grumbling, complaining and throwing laptops out the window before they walk out without saying goodbye, you are the problem. So what kills a good manager or leader who has otherwise excellent skills?

1. Not knowing your team

You cannot be a great leader if you do not know about your employees. And the most important bit comes with knowing who they are and what they do.

Market Basket is supermarket chain in Massachusetts. When the board ousted the president Arthur Demoulas, 7,000 people showed up to protest. He eventually bought back the company. You know why people love him? He ensures better better-than-average pay and benefits as well as profit-sharing. But more than that, workers say he remembers their names and asks about their families. He has more than 25,000 employees.

2. Being deaf

Did you give them your time and attention when they needed help or guidance even if you were really busy?

Shonda Rhimes is founder of Shondaland and head of the production company for Grey's Anatomy and Scandal. She prides on being accessible to anyone on her staff. And being accessible means listening and giving the team opportunities. She offers first-time writers opportunities they would not get elsewhere in this competitive market.

3. Being the scary HR executioner

Early on I had to work with someone who called together the team when things went wrong and would analyse where we failed. But we were never told of what we did well or even how to improve. It was like an unexpected funeral setting that left us wondering who died and if it was contagious. People rarely stayed with him for long. At the same time I had to report

to another head who would also call upon us when things went wrong. But then he would discuss how to rectify. And he would work with us till we got it right. We did not want to repeat the mistake – not because we were afraid to fail, but because we wanted to impress our boss.

Employees, especially the dedicated and smart ones, do not often leave because of salary, as commonly expected, but because of leadership issues in the organisation.

EHSANUR RAZA RONNY

The writer is Editor of the career, tech and automobile publications of The Daily Star. He is also an entrepreneur of a baby clothing business and previously worked in advertising as a Senior Copywriter.