

Why RMG sector needs a change of mindset



MOSTAFIZ UDDIN

“CHANGE will not come if we wait for some other person, or if we wait for some other time. We are the ones we’ve been waiting for. We are the change that we seek.”

— Barack Obama

As the RMG industry in Bangladesh experiences its most challenging trading period for several years, the above words from the former US president are quite appropriate. Our industry needs to change, we keep being told. It does not innovate enough. It is too commodity focused. It needs to invest in sustainable production. All these things have been said for a great many years, and I have sat in more meetings and attended more conferences where such issues have been highlighted than I care to remember.

I believe there is a more fundamental issue at play here: one of mindset. As humans we are creatures of habit and we are naturally resistant to change. Indeed, whole books have been written on the subject of change management, with a great many reasons offered as to why people within businesses and organisations—including business leaders—resist change.

I believe this is where the problem lies with the RMG sector in Bangladesh. In fact, as I will argue below, I believe this is where the problem lies with the whole apparel value chain.

Few people would disagree that we need to change as an industry to remain relevant in global markets. But, as Barack Obama’s quote above highlights, we are often guilty of waiting for another person instead of

making changes happen ourselves. It’s so much easier to let somebody else take the first steps, and this same argument goes for both RMG factories and their customers, brands and retailers.

Let me start with manufacturers. Are the prices paid by brands too low? Yes, they often are. Is Bangladesh unfairly treated by the international media and is there a lot of inaccurate reporting which paints a negative picture of the RMG industry? There is certainly truth in this. Is a lot of onus being placed on us as suppliers to invest in sustainable solutions which brands get the credit for? Again, there is truth in this.

But the point is that we know all of this. It might not seem fair but then life never is. The above are simple examples of market forces at play.

What we all need to understand is that none of the above issues will change at a fundamental level so the only thing we can do is get on with things and, as Barack Obama says, become the change that we seek.

That means going out and making the investments we need to become competitive. Invest in technology. Invest in R&D. Invest in sustainability. Invest in people.

Moreover, the mindsets of both the employers of our RMG sector and of the employees need to be changed. The apparel industry is not a new industry in our country. But still the level of professionalism among many of the employees in the sector are not up to the expectation. The employers, on the other hand, in the past used to employ underprepared people for this industry who learned through their experience. But now we have a workforce who has education on this industry related subjects. Their talents need to be nurtured and they should be given the opportunities

to unleash their potential. As man is certainly more important than machine, the employers should have the mindset to invest in people.

And very importantly, invest in story-telling—stories about success, stories about change-making, stories about struggle and spirit, stories about progress, stories about innovation and ingenuity.

I mentioned brands and retailers above, and I truly believe they face the same conundrum as suppliers. Many are under huge pressure right now as competition is stronger than ever, while at the same time customers expect ever cheaper clothing.

Again, I believe retailers require a huge change of mindset as much as anything else and this change has to start right from

the top. The business model many of them follow is not sustainable—we can’t keep producing clothing that is cheaper and cheaper. It is also not sustainable either because it is fundamentally bad for the planet.

What I read into all of this is that, firstly, there is a need for the whole industry to recalibrate its mindset—to almost start from scratch. Why are we in business, and what are the limits to the whole value chain from a sustainability perspective? How do we start getting back to value as an industry?

Secondly, we need to collaborate and work together, and this will mean a broader change of mindset. The problems we face are in many cases, shared problems. Lower and lower prices and the need to better conserve

The challenges we face are too large and complex to tackle as individual businesses and, in many cases, they require closer working relationships across the supply chain.



PHOTO: STAR

precious resources are common industry issues, and they should be addressed collectively.

Adversarial supplier-customer relationships need to become a thing of the past. The challenges we face are too large and complex to tackle as individual businesses and, in many cases, they require closer working relationships across the supply chain.

Collaborative approach among the peers within Bangladesh apparel industry is also the need of the time now. It is also time we share our knowledge, skills and success cases with each other—because it’s an industry that has to compete not locally, but globally.

With open minds and a willingness to forge new alliances with customers—and in some cases competitors—there is no reason why we would not be able to successfully tackle all of these challenges if we work together.

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Policies to protect privacy and data

MD ABDUL BARI

THE first industrial revolution was triggered by the steam engine, whereas the second and third ones were driven by mass production and the microprocessor, respectively. Each of these revolutions brought about massive transformation in the economy by upending the prevailing production, distribution and consumption systems of that time and in society by revoking and redefining many rules and norms once taken for granted.

Today we are witnessing another remarkable inflection point in the history of humankind that was first coined by Professor Klaus Schwab, founder of the World Economic Forum, as the fourth industrial revolution, which is being shaped by the confluence of physical, digital and biological worlds. This is fundamentally disrupting the way we live, work and connect each other.

Although the fourth industrial revolution is flourishing upon the previous three, it is distinct in terms of scope, size, scale, speed, complexity and intensity.

The major drivers of the fourth industrial revolution are several frontier technologies, such as artificial intelligence, big data, internet of things, quantum computing, 3D printing, renewable energy and biotechnology, to name a few.

According to a study by McKinney Global Institute, big data alone has the potential to create an additional USD 3 trillion worth of value in only seven industries. Big Data is not only a distinct domain, but it also provides the basis for many other branches like AI, deep learning, natural language processing, bioinformatics and so on.

For instance, an autonomous vehicle can be put into practice only with enough learning through variety and volume of representative data.

Big Data is often described in terms of 5Vs: volume, velocity, variety, veracity and value. According to IBM, “Every day, we create 2.5 quintillionbytes of data—so much that 90 percent of the data in the world today has been created in the last two years.” Such a big volume of data comes from a plethora of different sources like hundreds of millions of interconnected sensors, smart devices and online transactions, and in a variety of formats, such as social media posts, photos and videos, meteorological records, health data, e-commerce transactions and so on.

In this backdrop, it is no surprise that the volume of business data

doubles every 1.2 years. Consequently, the data volume is so large, format is so diverse, and response time is expected to be so prompt, that the traditional computing tools, techniques and algorithms are often falling short to process them. As a result, new algorithms and techniques are being developed by the data scientists to discover interesting and insightful patterns and predict future events from the ocean of data leading us to a new paradigm of data-driven decision-making (DDDM). Like its predecessors, the fourth industrial revolution is either engulfing or redefining many previously successful business models as well as the jobs involved, while creating opportunities for new ones. One good example can be the ride-sharing platforms like Uber or Didi globally and Pathao or Sohoj

in Bangladesh. By and large, these are data-driven applications matching demand and supply data in real-time.

The big question is, who is going to succeed in this revolution? Unfortunately, the answer is not very straightforward and simple, but it can safely be assumed that those who will adapt to this new reality and adopt a data-driven approach in the decision-making process, will remain ahead of the others. Again, only those organisations will win, who will master designing, developing and applying quick, innovative and proficient analytics algorithms. Thus, it is no wonder that businesses are enthusiastically incorporating DDDM to bolster their competitive edges.

However, improving accuracy of the decision is only a part of the game that must be complemented with the process, which is scalable, interoperable, robust and capable of delivering concurrent, on-demand and impactful results. Benefits of this new paradigm include extracting useful insights and patterns hidden in raw data, applying new knowledges to boost performance, introducing novel approaches in the business processes, deep diving into complex agenda and exploring previously unconsidered problems.

The next question is whether big data has anything to offer for the public sector. As a matter of fact, many governments across the world are harnessing DDDM approaches in a variety of sectors to optimise resource allocation, framing impactful public policies and streamline business processes. Australia, like many other countries, has even established a whole new set of institutions like the Office of the National Data Commissioner, promulgated new

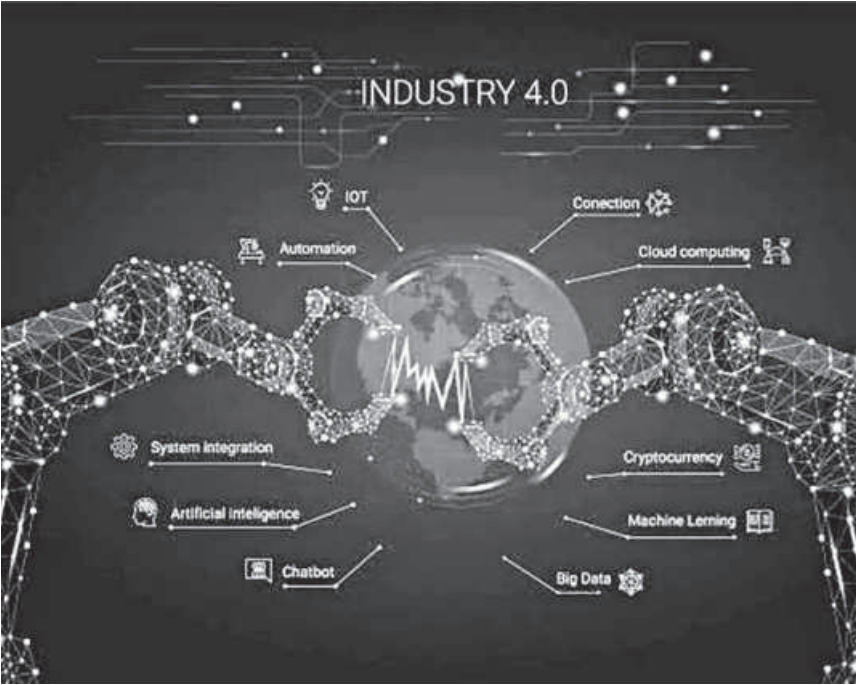
legislations and revisited existing ones such as privacy act and formulated new policies like open data directives in order to cope with the age of incredibly fast and frequent data proliferation and motivate all concerned towards the sensible use of big data. The primary objective behind such reforms are to foster transparency and openness in government activities, augment reproducibility of science and technology and facilitate innovation by disclosing anonymous data in large volume and reusable format.


In his book, *The Fourth Industrial Revolution*, Professor Schwab defines the tipping point for big data as the replacement of census with big data sources that is predicted to take place by 2025. Ironically, as digital data is getting bigger and posing huge promise, concerns are also looming large regarding privacy of individuals and the security of sensitive information. We have already fallen victim to privacy breaches by some of the Internet’s giants, that harvest sensitive and private data in the name of free services and use such data unethically. Cambridge Analytica’s alleged meddling in the US presidential election in 2016 is a vivid example of irresponsible usage of big data.

Thus, privacy is under a greater threat now than ever before. In keeping with the emerging reality, our government is formulating a data policy, which is certainly a timely and praiseworthy move. As such, it is highly desirable that this policy will draw an appropriate, yet flexible, balance between data disclosure requirements and protection of data privacy and security.


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Md Abdul Bari is a civil servant who is currently pursuing his Master’s degree at the University of Queensland, Australia.





QUOTABLE
Quote



NIKOLA TESLA
(1856-1943)

Serbian American inventor and engineer who discovered and patented the rotating magnetic field, the basis of most alternating-current machinery.

I don't care that they stole my idea. I care that they don't have any of their own.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

1 Sound system

5 Papas' partners

10 Parting words

12 Musical set in Argentina

13 French "thanks"

14 Scout shelters

15 Baseball's Mel

16 Spanish "thanks"

18 Hawaiian "thanks"

20 Compete

21 Answering machine sound

23 Linking word

24 "Apollo 13" org.

26 Ages and ages

28 Distant

29 Plant with fronds

31 Umbrella part

32 Chinese "thanks"

36 Japanese "thanks"

39 Letter holder:

40 Car part

41 German "thanks"

43 Critic Roger

44 Blacksmith, at times

45 Begets

46 Mayberry sheriff

DOWN

1 Athlete's TV greeting

2 "... - man who wasn't there"

3 Back's opposite

4 "Portlandia" network

5 Self-referential

6 Opposite of "sans"

7 SUV's cousin

8 Gets

9 Was pert with

11 Eden attire

17 Fish eggs

19 Sit-up targets

22 Sentence enders

24 Kenya capital

25 Strike mediator

27 Low number

28 Picture holders

30 Work phone No.

33 Odorless gas

34 Signed

35 Each

37 Candidate of 2000

38 Liberal study

42 Cry of insight

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11-28

YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS

A S S E T S H I S S
L O A D U P O N T O
A N G I N A M A Y S
C A N C A N
S L A T E E G Y P T
H I T S I D E C A R
U M A A C E A P E
T I N G L E D S E A
S T Y L E P E R T
R O M A N O
P E A S L O S E R S
O A T S A V E N U E
T R E Y S A D D E N

BETTE BAILEY

by Mort Walker

NOW FOR SOME RECENT INVENTIONS

THE WORLD CHANGES SO FAST! NOTHING IS LIKE IT USED TO BE

BUT SOME THINGS NEVER CHANGE

WHAT'S HE SMILING ABOUT?

GREG+ MORT WALKER

BABY BLUES

by Kirkman & Scott

THIS HOME IS PROTECTED BY CLOSED-CIRCUIT CAMERAS

THIS HOME IS MONITORED BY ARMED PATROL

MO-O-O-M-M!

THIS HOUSE IS WATCHED BY A BIG FAT TATTLETALE