

Staying ahead of the employability curve

Dr Ajay Kela, President & CEO, Wadhvani Foundation, on the importance of upskilling



ILLUSTRATION: ZARIF FAIAZ

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SHAMS RASHID TONMOY

Dr Ajay Kela is the President & CEO of Wadhvani Foundation, a non-profit organisation that offers training modules in upskilling and entrepreneurship for graduates and young startup founders. Wadhvani Foundation has recently launched new AI-powered tools in Bangladesh which aims to impart crucial employability skills to Bangladeshis seeking a competitive edge in the modern job market.

With a Bachelor of Technology from IIT Bombay, India, and PhD from University of Rochester, USA, Dr Ajay Kela is a tech industry veteran who has been responsible for multi-million-dollar products at multinational firms such as General Electric and Autodesk, alongside years of experience in Silicon Valley and international software companies. In an interview with The Daily Star, Dr Ajay Kela shared the goals of the Wadhvani Foundation, what kind of skills a modern employer looks for, and the importance of upskilling for modern graduates.

What is the mission of the Wadhvani Foundation? What makes Bangladesh an ideal country for your foundation?

Our mission is to empower as many families around the world with at least one individual who can support their family with their living wage. Our primary targets are countries with large, growing youth populations, as well as countries with emerging economies; because that's where the vulnerability is high. Bangladesh is an excellent example of that. With a population of around 170 million, a huge percentage of it is youth. Yet, enough job opportunities are not there. As such, this is an ideal country for us to work in.

How does the Wadhvani Foundation help aspiring professionals with necessary upskilling for the modern competitive job

market?

In this day and age, to earn enough to support a family of four, the skills demanded by employers are substantial. In the past, you could pass 12th grade and get a job that could support your family. But you can't do that today. This is because technology and innovation are moving at an alarming rate. With jobs gradually getting automated and AI reshaping the industry, lots of low-end jobs are getting killed. However, new high-end jobs are being created in place, for which you need higher-end skills to compete in the job market.

This is why we entered the space of upskilling - teaching everyone to 'learn to learn'. It's not enough if you just go to college and get a degree. You have to reinvent yourself every three to five years. While many technical skills are dying because of the rise of automation, evergreen skills such as communication, teamwork, problem-solving, and critical thinking, etc. will always remain. We are putting together these skills in a package and delivering them to graduates so they can learn these skills and apply them their whole life.

While employers call you for an interview for your technical skills, the decision to give a job is primarily based on your communication skills, attitude, teamwork, etc. As such, soft skills drive the decision to employ you or not. Even a potential promotion depends on your ability as a team player and your collaborative skills.

What about hard skills? What is the hard skill modern employers value the most?

Rather than 'soft skills' or 'hard skills', we call them 'employability skills', a combination of both. While we have modules on teamwork, collaboration, and critical thinking, we also have modules on digital literacy, which, nowadays, is being transformed into AI literacy.

Over the next 10 to 15 years, the key skill that will be required is how to communicate

with the likes of ChatGPT and Google Bard to get the response that is relevant to you. Prompt engineering, which we are introducing a module on, will be an important skill that future employers will be looking for.

In your experience, which particular employability skill do Bangladeshis tend to lack the most?

Not just in Bangladesh but in almost every emerging economy country we have worked with, we have seen that the youth are barely exposed to the necessary employability skills for the modern job market. This is because no college or school is teaching them communication skills, teamwork, attitude, team-building, etc. This is the case in countries like India, Brazil, Mexico, the Philippines, and Indonesia, as well.

How do you think this gap in employability skills for modern youth can be fixed?

The curriculum needs to be changed. When we decided to provide modules on upskilling, we went to 2,000 employers around the world and asked them, "When you hire someone, what do you look for?" 30% answered 'hard skills', but the remaining 70% responded with various types of 'employability skills'. Most academic institutions are only focused on passing students. They aren't connected with what the industry wants, despite the fact that every student is going through 12 to 16 years of education to ultimately look for employment. In my recent discussion with the Bangladeshi government and the UGC equivalent bodies, I requested them to look into changing some of the courses in the current curriculum. The defunct ones should be dropped in favour of lessons that help students move at the pace of the industry.

What kind of skills should a young entrepreneur develop to expand their startup's growth?

They used to say entrepreneurship is an inherent trait. But that's not true. Being a successful entrepreneur is like being an Olympian athlete. You need to have solid discipline and be resilient, persistent, and keep a singular focus on your end goal. You need to know how to embrace failure and never give up despite challenges. Focus on customer centricity, and adopt the necessary mindset changes.

What is your advice to young startup founders aiming to seek investment? What should they look out for?

That's a chicken and egg situation. For example, in Bangladesh, among 170 million people, you can identify many problems that need a solution. If you get the best and brightest minds to focus on solving those problems and in turn create products and services to enable those solutions, you can address the problem and create jobs in return.

No one is going to invest in you unless you have that entrepreneurial mindset and hunger. An investor will be interested in you once they see that you have understood the market, understood the problem you want to address, designed a scalable solution to address the problem, and the solution is something people are willing to pay in money for.

How to file your income tax online

FAIRUZ TAHASIN ANIKA

According to NBR, you must file an income tax return if your income exceeds certain thresholds. The default limit is BDT 3,50,000, but for women and senior citizens over the age of 65, it is BDT 4,00,000. For war-wounded gazette freedom fighters, the tax-free income threshold is BDT 5,00,000.

In addition, previous tax assessment, urban residence, car ownership, specific professional memberships, running a business, and participation in tenders or elections also require tax filing. This applies to registered companies and NGOs as well.

Also, remember that having a 12-digit taxpayer identification number (TIN) certificate means you must file your tax return every year (for non-taxable income, you can file zero return) or you may be subject to fines and penalties under the law.

If you're a Bangladeshi citizen with a Taxpayer Identification Number (TIN) certificate, you need to file an income tax return every year. First, get your TIN, and it's a must for every adult above 18. When you apply for a TIN, you'll be assigned a specific zone or region for tax purposes. Once you've gathered all the necessary documents, it's your responsibility to report your income to the government. Submit your tax return to the relevant regional or zonal tax office either in person or through a representative.

When filing taxes, provide essential documents like eTIN, NID copy, address details, and the previous year's return. Employees need salary certificates, bank statements, and other relevant documents. For different income sources, submit certificates or documents as required. Include investment details, property information, and tax-free income certificates.

Registering with the e-return system

To submit an e-return online, you must

register or sign up for the e-return system using your TIN and mobile number registered in your name. Follow the steps below to register in the e-return system. Visit the official website of NBR and register in the e-return system.

Enter your TIN in the first box. Then enter the mobile number that is biometrically registered with your national identity card (excluding the first zero). Then enter the captcha code correctly and finally click on the verify button. Verify your phone using the provided OTP and set a password to log into the e-return system in the future.

Step 1: Enter the e-return system and log in

Visit the official website of NBR and click on the second option 'eReturn' on the left. You can also visit the online income tax return filing system (www.etaxnbr.gov.bd). Then put your TIN, password, and captcha then click on 'Sign in'. After signing in the portal, you will get a dashboard and click on the 'Return submission' option on the left side.

Step 2: Tax assessment information

At the beginning of the e-return form, you will be given 'Tax Assessment Information', where information related to income tax such as return scheme, year of income, and source information must be provided. In addition, if your income is tax-exempt, fill in the appropriate amount in the box as well as the resident status.

Step 3: Income details

In this phase, select your various revenue streams from Heads of Income. Head of Income includes salaries, interest on securities, income from house property, agricultural income, income from business or profession, capital gains, and income from other sources.

For example, if your salary is your only

source of income, select 'Salary'. If you receive money from sources other than your wage, select 'Income from other sources' and select the source from the dropdown menu.

Then go to the next step by clicking the 'Save and continue' button.

Step 4: Additional information

In this step, you will specify the location of your primary income source from a dropdown menu, which includes options like Dhaka North City Corporation, Dhaka South City Corporation, Chittagong City Corporation, Other City Corporation, or Any Other Area.



Additionally, you can indicate if you're a war-wounded gazette freedom fighter, a person with a disability, or if you're claiming benefits as a parent/legal guardian of a person with a disability. You'll also select whether you're eligible for tax rebates due to investments and if you're a shareholder director of a company, answering with 'Yes' or 'No' in this section.

Step 5: IT10B requirements

If your entire assets are BDT 40 lakh or more,

you must fill out the expenditure section of the statement form. For this, the 'IT10B form' must be filled out. If your total assets are less than BDT 40 lakh, you do not have to complete IT10B. In this case, your annual personal and family expenses must be included in full.

Then go to the next step by clicking the 'Save and continue' button.

Step 6: Income details

Give income details from other sources, foreign income, or tax-exempt income. When reporting income from sources other than salary or taxable investments, you'll find various options in the dropdown menu.

For instance, if you choose 'any other income', you'll need to provide details like the income source, payment authority, date of the latest income received, the income amount, and associated expenses. This information will then calculate your net income, which will be displayed on the screen automatically.

Then go to the next step by clicking the 'Save and continue' button.

Step 7: Investment category

If you are currently investing in any category like life insurance premium, deposit premium service (DPS), approved saving certificate, general provident fund, benevolent fund and group insurance premium, approved stocks or shares, or other, select one of them.

For instance, if you have DPS and then select that option then you have to provide the Bank's name, account number, and deposit amount. After this, you will be able to see your total allowable investment for rebate.

Then go to the next step by clicking the "Save and Continue" button.

Step 8: Expenditure

In this section, you can review your spending

JOBS SPOTLIGHT

**Robi Axiata Limited-
Solution Manager, ICT
Solutions Product**

Deadline: N/A

● Bachelor Degree in CSE, EEE, ETE, ICE.

● Prior product design and documentation experience including flow and pricing from internal stakeholders.

● Knowledge in product ideation, requires generating new solution concepts and latest market trends.

Minimum experience: 4 years

Apply through the official LinkedIn page of Robi Axiata Limited.



**United Group -
Marketing Executive**

Deadline: 24 December

Eligibility:

● Bachelor degree in BBA or MBA.

● Excellent content creation skills to design and copy writing for digital ads and related marketing collaterals.

● Expertise in planning and implementing ATL & BTL activities such as promotional activities, print advertisements, and events.

Minimum experience: 2 years

Apply through the Careers section of United Group's website.

**HSBC- Client Services
Manager, Global
Payments Solutions,
Wholesale Banking
(WSB)**

**Deadline: 18
December**

Eligibility:

● Bachelor's degree from a public/private university.

● In-depth knowledge of the local clearing and payments framework and ongoing automation/financial inclusion initiatives of the central bank.

● Prior experience in management of ERPs like SAP/Oracle will have an added advantage.

Minimum experience: N/A

Apply through the official LinkedIn page of HSBC.



in relation to your total income. You'll have categories for various expenditures, allowing you to input the amounts and add comments. These categories cover things like food, clothing, accommodation (including auto, transportation, household, and utilities), children's education, and any other expenses. Once you've filled in these details, the system will calculate the amount of tax you owe.

Step 9: Tax and payment

This is where you can display any source tax and advance tax that you have already paid. Your total tax payable will automatically be reduced by source tax and advance tax. The Payable Amount is zero if there is no tax due on your income. 'Zero Return' refers to a return whose 'Payable Tax Amount' is zero.

Step 10: Return view

When you choose the 'Online Return' option, you can electronically submit your tax return. You'll see a preview of the return form. To give your consent, simply select 'Yes' under the Verification and Signature section on the form's bottom. Once you hit the 'Yes' button, your return will be sent, and no further changes can be made. If you have any doubts about the information, you can select 'No' to review the form. When everything looks correct, go ahead and submit by choosing the 'Yes' option.

Step 11: Download acknowledgement receipt

If the income tax return is successfully submitted, you will see the message: "Congratulations! Your return submission was successful". Here you will see the option to download a Reference ID and Acknowledgment Receipt of the return submission.

Your income tax return is finished at this point. You can now file your return electronically or print a copy of the form and mail it straight to the income tax department.