



A Glimpse Into Factual Success Mantras Of Business

Management - Evolving With The Times

■ By Rajeev Aggarwal

THE world across all our horizons is evolving, and that too at a breath-taking pace that gets unnerving and destabilising at times. I remember the days when communication moved with "snail-mail", a letter would be sent to the recipient by ordinary or registered mail, the letter would be received in a couple of days, and go through official receipt stamp in the recipients office. The letter would then start doing its rounds from desk to desk getting comments and observations from each reader, and then after calling for a joint meeting, the top manager would determine the response. These internal musings may take a day in case of very urgent matters, or a week in routine cases. Following this, the response would be drafted by someone, and then be approved by the boss, and then the typist would type out the response, that would again get despatched by ordinary mail addressed to the other party. The cycle time would be a fortnight.

The current generation of readers may think I am talking about something pre-historic, but then, I am talking about the 1980's when I started working. Then the telex machine became a bit more popular, then the fax came in, and when internet came into being, a major disruption to the speed of communication got initiated. And now we are communicating using many tools like WhatsApp, and others using our smartphones and all other gadgetry. The response cycle time has now shrunk from 2 weeks to One Day! Expectations of clients and customers has shot up and they expect everyone to be available on their toes 24x7.

Noting this change in expectations of customers, the speed of response has become a major differentiator in selection of service providers by customers. New competitors are emerging who are using the speed of response as a tool to make an entry into a crowded market. One wonders when all these disruptive events will come to a halt and one can relax with a sense of comfort and lead a "relaxed" life as a manager. We speak about disruptive technologies, use of automation, Artificial Intelligence, Big Data, IOT etc. These are all very obvious changes that stare at us in our faces while we try to go about moving with our daily work routine.

Advent of social media has made life more difficult for organisations that make a mistake in their delivery commitments. The dissatisfied customers waste no time in venting their impressions on X (earlier Twitter), Facebook, Glassdoor and other social media, which has a reach that punches directly into the sternum of the customer base of the organisation that committed the mistake. Ratings given on the performance metrics are freely available on various sites and the new customers access that very consciously prior to making any selection of the service provider.

Well, such is life, and one has to accept that changes of such nature are inevitable. The ability to adapt to such changes is a major component of the success factor of any organisation. The core attribute that any organisation must possess to address this rapid revolution caused by evolution is - Agility. It's a challenge

that organisations face today, and have always faced, is the ability to be agile. It's the organisational ability to be supple, to be malleable and be able to make adjustments to its structure and behavioural forms that can fit into the new "Real" that is evolving in the global or local environment.

This is not a new phenomenon, it's a rather old one, and we have seen many erstwhile successful organisations bite the dust when they refused to display the agility to adapt. They have simply disappeared from the list of Fortune 500 companies, and then vanished forever. In India we have seen so many business houses that continued with the old management practices, and refused to adapt to the emerging world around

them. One can see many names that became history, and even if they are present, then they are just due to their adamance, and not really behaving like corporates that are flourishing.

The changes are not only in the areas of technology, but also in the socio-environmental segments. The concepts of human resource management has evolved in a very major scale. During my early days of executing mega projects, rules of management of labour were quite basic and primitive, the discrimination of treatment between blue collars and white collared staff was immense. I recollect when I took charge of a project site in Oman in 1998, I was shocked to see that the food served to the blue-collared workers was being

cooked in a separate kitchen as against the food being cooked for the senior staff. We can accept if the quality of basic food items was hygienic and of acceptable quality, but I was dismayed that the quality being served to the blue-collared workers was quite sub-standard.

It was a revolutionary decision that I took to combine the two kitchens into one. The food being prepared for all came from the same kitchen and same vessels. I allowed some extra items to be served in the senior mess to allow some acceptable privileges, but the common items served in both messes was from the same cooking pots. This caused a major jump in motivation of workers, and with no increase in costs as I had not changed the menu at all. The world had moved and such discrimination was not relevant in today's era, and it was a decision that I took entirely at my own risk. It was gratifying to note that the Managing Director of the company acknowledged that the move was relevant, and needed in the prevailing times, and made this as a standard across all project sites.

Companies have to be agile, and it's the courage of the leadership team to lead such moves from the front, then the rest follow. But the conviction of making such moves rests with the leader and the leader should not take the path of consensus while taking such bold steps, as consensus errs on the "safer" side - to avoid change.

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