

# The Daily Star

Published on: April 28, 2017

## Five key leadership lessons for managers



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*Mahtab Uddin Ahmed is the first Bangladeshi CEO of a foreign-owned mobile operator in Bangladesh. Following a successful career in finance in various capacities at Unilever Pakistan, Unilever Arabia, and Unilever Bangladesh, Mr. Ahmed joined as the CFO of Robi in 2010. After a four-year stint as the CFO and a further advanced management training (AMP) at Harvard Business School, he was appointed as the Managing Director and CEO of the same organization in November 2016. 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.

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