CIB Round Table in Pune

A Report

"How can we translate from an environment of leadership by example to a system of leadership by design – one that itself creates more good examples?" asked Farhad Forbes, Director, Forbes Marshall Pvt. Ltd. who graciously hosted the event that this report covers. This was a thought he had picked up while in a program at Stanford and which he so honestly shared, "we're still struggling with." This and other such profound statements were heard by the 37 senior business leaders and observers who participated in the CIB Round Table deliberations that took place at the Forbes Marshall Hall in Pune on September 25, 2015.

The deliberations focused on the theme, "Is business ready to change to change India" and from the very onset it began with honest sharing. Vivek Asrani, MD, Kaymo Fastener Co., Mumbai who moderated the Round Table posed this question in the first part of the discussion: "What are the issues that are hampering business' need for change?" Setting the tone of what was to follow, he then spoke of two words that constantly keep coming up in the running of today's business – volatility and disruption. Elaborating further he said, "A few years back the focus was on quality, planning and strategy. Now however the

situation is different. There is constant uncertainty of whole economies, both nationally and internationally — even that of countries going bankrupt." Explaining what he meant when he

used the term disruption he shared how the status quo of companies is being threatened. "Today, a lot of established businesses are starting to find themselves vulnerable; coupled with the fact that the speed of change is probably the fastest that we have ever seen."

Picking up from this, senior leaders from business and industry then openly shared the challenges faced today:

1. Industry is more reactive than pro-active to issues today. The tendency in business is to wait until we are forced to act. While there is a lot of talk of compliance, we must realize that compliance is merely the most basic expectation for a business. We just have to look around to see that there are so many issues that need our attention beyond just the standard norms expected.

Pradeep Bhargava, Director, Cummins India Ltd. making a point

2. There is a cost for inaction. Businesses have a tendency of taking action only when it comes to survival.

3. How can business take advantage of an entire younger generation who are looking for transparency? Youth today are willing to take up challenges.

4. The challenge to Include, Collaborate and Standardize in addition to bring in best practices is a key aspect

in good companies. Can we rise to this challenge?

5.   It is so easy to find fault in others. Yet, we don't have the right to criticize or condemn others but rather, be responsible for our own actions.

6.   With regard to incentive systems, we need to question, what are we incentivizing. What message are we seeking to convey?

7.   If business is to change, we need to go beyond compliance. We need to do the right thing because it is the right thing to do.

Taking the discussion further, a Managing Director of an IT firm spoke of two aspects that industry had to grapple with. The first was of how just as the role of the entrepreneur is to build an enterprise, the role of the enterprise must also be in building the nation. Citing an example, he then shared of how a huge business opportunity was lost when the Group Chairman of a multi-national company, visiting a plot to set up a venture, was stuck in a traffic jam for close to two hours. The Chairman turned to return to the airport saying, "If it takes me so long to see a plot of land, I would not want to make the life of my future employees miserable in commuting to work." This gave rise to a few smaller technology companies in the locality to reason how they could help ease the situation. The resultant idea was if a shared pool of buses could be created, instead of each company having its own, with some travelling half empty, it could make a difference.

However the idea could not take off because the HR heads of companies were afraid of what the resulting interaction with employees of other companies could do. This brought in the second aspect —

deficiency of trust. A simple show of hands corroborated that as a culture, Indians do not collaborate.

Before the close of the first part of the discussion, a few more valuable points were made on the question — Is industry's role merely to make profit or does it have a higher purpose? One Chief Financial Officer shared how it was important for promoters to be supported and guided by professionals. With constant pressure where the focus is on a quarter-by-quarter performance, it is for the professional managers to withstand the pressure by doing what is the right thing. Another spoke of how it was important for industry to move from a share-holder perspective to a stake-holder perspective.

Following a short coffee break, the leaders of business and industry reassembled to then share ideas and experiences of things that worked with them in their endeavor to bring change. What resulted was a slew of impressive solutions that one could take away to their own work-place.

1. A Maturity Matrix for Ethics must be created. (It was suggested that CIB could be in the best position to look at this.)

2. A help-line for Small and Medium-scale Enterprises should be established.

3. Stories of best practices must be shared as a way of encouraging the other.

4. There must be a forum for sharing of industry's best practices.

5. Exemplary stories of business leaders who despite all odds, ran their enterprise ethically and with a view to benefitting other stake-holders; must be compiled and published.

6. The time-tested, best solution is — lead by example.

7. Business associations must be more pro-active.

8. Regular supplier meetings to discuss issues at hand transparently can help immensely.

9. Decisions in HR policy must also take into consideration the human aspect — be it employee's general welfare and flexi-timings amongst other factors.

10. There are a large number of competencies in both industry and amongst the academicians. It is therefore necessary to harness this by bringing the two together.
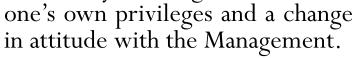
11. Industry must look at ways in which they can take some ideas from not just the urbanites but also from rural areas.

12. Influencing young minds is another area that industry can look at.

13. Celebrate what is good. We must not just zoom in on the negatives but amplify the good work that is done.

14. More of such meetings (as the CIB Round Table) with greater frequency must be planned.

15. Use technology to get people together.

16. Industry must also focus some of its energy to educate on consciousness.

17. Putting the nation before the company is a sure way of ensuring that decisions are in the interest of the community and the environment.

18. Introspection and quiet-time are useful tools to aiding right decisions.

19. We must invest in skill development with international standards as our benchmark.

20. Making dinner-table conversation on ethics and episodes of good business practice is a good way to heighten Corporate Social Responsibility.

21. It is important to have the knowledge of law. It helps overcome fear due to ignorance.

22. It is important to build a culture of accountability and ownership.

23. We must move from leadership by example to leadership by design.

24. Staying in touch with employees is key to feeling the pulse and getting a sense of ground realities.

25. Communicating the convictions and values of the organization constantly and unambiguously is a necessary part of creating a culture in an organization.

26. Involve employees in CSR activities to sensitize them to the plight of the weaker sections of society. It brings realization of one's own privileges and a change in attitude with the Management.

27. There must be a paradigm shift from health to wellness.

28. Develop catalysts – iCatalysts – where "i" is Integrity.

29. While there is often much spent

on trainings, it is necessary to also focus on follow-up.

30.   Listening to people and touching their heart while leading with humility is always a winner, every time.

To conclude a fine morning of meaningful deliberation, Vivek then asked if each could identify at least one take-away from the time spent together. The genuineness and eagerness to take something back was unmistakable. It was greatly heartening to listen to the many that had some thing or the other to take away. Here are a few take-aways that were shared:

"I would like to start with being positive and focus the change first with myself and my own company and if possible, extend this to others around," said one delegate.

"I have learnt that strong communication put in the right context can change a situation," is what another took away from the deliberations.

"I would like to create in my company an environment where we could foster leadership by design, not just by example."

Is business ready to change in order to change India? Judging from the interest and sincerity that came through in the three hours of discussion, I believe it is.