

Acrobatics of Change: Concepts, Techniques, Strategies and Execution, Moid Siddiqui and R H Khwaja, Response Books, New Delhi, 2008, pp. 291.

The general and the partial equilibrium theories forming the part of economic framework first discussed about 150 years ago, pointed out an everlasting truth that economic organizations need to continuously evolve and face change, or become extinct. The theory of the survival of the fittest only reinforces this in many ways. The modern organizations have to perform the balancing act each and every second to cope with the limitless challenges posed by the market. The Adam Smith's theory of production copiously dealt with 'change' as a necessary factor to be managed for incessant functioning. Peter Ducker, a colossus of our times, observed that survival of a firm is an outcome of how it tackles the variety of challenges it faces from one to the other minute. C K Prahalad, an eminent management guru, gave the mantra to the business firms for their continued existence by asking them to link them to the bottom of the pyramid instead of looking at the stakeholder from the top of the summit.

Acrobatics of Change: Concepts, Techniques, Strategies and Execution by Moid Siddiqui and R.H. Khwaja is a classic in the area of managing change. There are several books on 'managing change', but what sets this book apart is its different tone and tenor, its 'storytelling' technique and its critical, in-depth and practical treatment of the subject matter. Throughout, the reader finds a blend of philosophy and pragmatism, which makes the book all the more exclusive of its kind.

The book is divided into two parts. The first part, written by Moid Siddiqui, Managing Director, Intellects Biz, Hyderabad, deals with the concept and techniques of change. The second part, penned by the former Chairman and Managing Director of Singareni Collieries Co. Ltd. (SCCL), R H Khwaja, is the true story of the SSCL's turnaround which gives an invaluable insight into the strategies and execution of change management. The foreword from Jamshed J Irani, Director, TATA, highlights the 'Indian flavor' of the book, which again is a feature worth mentioning in the effort that has gone into the making of this volume.

Jamshed J Irani gives three reasons as to why he appreciates the book under review. First, he finds the book a realistic, depictive and expressive of both, anxiety and excitement. Second, it is a unique blend of 'concepts' and 'practice', and third, it inspires hope of turning around and creating a new fortune. He appreciates the approach of the authors of redefining the concept of 'change' itself by observing that change is all about the change in structure, processes, and enterprise resource planning (ERP) through technology. Change means change of mindset and approach at micro levels and change of culture and work ethos at macro levels. It is significant to note that Jamshed J Irani acted as a crusader of change in Tata Steel initiating the exercise with the change of mindsets of employees of this great company. Jamshed J Irani lauds the strategy adopted by one of the co-authors of bringing about revolutionary change through ceaseless communication of the vision and objectives of the business to all personnel.



Part I focused on ‘Genetics of change’, has been elucidated in two sections: ‘Change dynamics’ as the first section and ‘Change techniques’ as the next one. Throughout the ‘change dynamics’ section, one finds lots of aphorisms illustrated through anecdotes and examples. “Scarecrow does not scare the crow”, “Why can’t you step into the same river twice?”, “A boiled frog never jumps out of the frying pan” etc. are a few cases to cite.

The authors strongly believe that “change is not a dance! Dance is always rhythmical- the steps are predetermined and the performance is predictable whereas the process of change is more like acrobatics. In dance there is no risk involved; gymnasts, trapeze and acrobats take risk.” (pg: 29). Change management is a trapeze feat, writes Moid Siddiqui. He compares transition in change management to hovering in space without any support or anchor, “a situation where both morale and self-esteem are at their lowest ebb.” (Pg: 35). Managing change is like managing two opposite forces, viz. the desire for stability and the desire for change, like two crossbars each swinging in the opposite direction, describes Moid Siddiqui. “The former provides comfort and complacency and the latter creates anxiety and fear. Obviously, most people choose the easy option and continue to follow the beaten track”. (pg: 37). The authors deserve full credit for the way they have beautifully compared change with the Trapeze act.

People don’t resist change. They resist being changed. Change cannot be enforced upon, change has to be gradual. “Good leaders are normally good communicators. Good communication is vital in the process of change to allay fears and promote the right kind of enthusiasm” (Pg: 62). Employee- involvement is the best weapon to counter adversities, writes Moid Siddiqui.

The second section of part 1, ‘Change techniques’, has devoted substantial attention to the element of creativity, in terms of generating creative ideas and managing creative change. The book reflects that a creative change maker must either wear five hats or associate five creative people, each playing different role, that of Columbus, Artist, Judge, Sufi and Warrior. The imaginary phase and practical phase of creative process and their respective focuses on quantity and quality bring out the essence of the process. While addressing the issue of generating creative ideas, Mr. Siddiqui explains the importance of articulating the problem, and has suggested eight techniques which are not only easy to implement but also prove to be interesting exercises.

The book goes on to very poetically explain the change paradox with a comparison to the musical notes. The reader can find oneself immediately in a pragmatic realm when patterns of change and the four broad patterns of restructuring, revitalization, stand-alone projects and renewal are explicated. ‘Walking the tightrope – Change stories’ highlights live examples of two public sector companies, HMT and BEML and a private company NFCL. Mr. Siddiqui also mentions that managing change is about managing transition, with the two approaches: ‘hard track’ and ‘soft track’, wins admiration. The concluding chapter of Part I on ‘Change without pain’, goes on to elaborate the change process comprising: unfreezing, pouring fresh inputs, internalizing, institutionalizing and refreezing and concludes with three simple considerations on what should one continue doing, what one should stop doing and what one should start doing, that can work the magic of handling change effectively.



Book Review

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The second part, titled ‘The Singareni Love Story’, deals with the turnover success story of SSCL. Rightly titled ‘turnaround from the heart’, Mr. Khwaja highlights the reforms taken up with a human touch. With a workforce of 1,00,000 workers, hostile trade unions and an accumulated loss of Rs. 5700 crores, the power of bonding and promotion of the concept of ‘One family, One Vision and One Mission’, along with constant communication worked the magic of change for the better and SSCL could pay dividend to the Government of Andhra Pradesh after 37 years. In the chapter, ‘The magic of communication’, the author has succeeded in bringing out the significance of communication in the change process. He has categorically mentioned the various ways in which the people of SSCL were made involved in the change process through open communication and employee participation.

The chapter, ‘Learning from adversities: The test of true leadership’ narrates the nature of trade union strikes and how they proved to be an acid test of leadership. The Lakshman Rekha principle of maintaining complete transparency and effective communication with all stakeholders also carries a message to all corporate entities. The personal experiences shared in the undermine ground tragedy in Godavarikhani area are also considered as rich learning experience by the author and urges the reader to take inspiration from the leadership displayed. The success of teamwork and the suggestion to adopt a green pasture from the heart to see lovebirds visit more often leaves a sense of good feeling, and some profiles of courage in the final chapter gives a fine finishing touch to the book.

This is a fresh approach adopted on the subject of change management, where the book is a treat to the reader! The lucid style used to convey powerful thoughts is a definite plus of the book. Finally, the book leaves a sense of excitement and the satisfaction of having read a good book for the reader, where the authors deserve kudos!

The book could be considered as a path breaking contribution in the area of organizational dynamics which is so crucial for effective governance in organizations and society. The book is a must for the policy makers, business leaders and researchers in public administration, business management and public service.

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