

Leadership in a time of constant flux



BOOK REVIEW

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Unprecedented change invariably brings in its wake a host of new responsibilities and opportunities. The faster its pace and deeper the level of disruption, the faster we need to learn how to direct and leverage it. It is against this backdrop that Faisal Hoque and his co-authors make out a case for a more impactful leadership paradigm.

In the midst of constant flux, leadership cannot remain in the “transactional” straitjacket to which it has long been confined. It has to be “transformational” instead, which would entail a

conscious practice of empathy and systemic execution as well, Mr Hoque points out. So, where do we turn to for acquiring the new skills needed? The answer lies in “experiential learning”—learning on the fly from what we experience. Real-life observation and evaluation are central to identifying the practical strategies that would work, he adds.

Mr Hoque’s expertise is spread across a wide spectrum and this adds to the clarity with which he blends his insights. He is a thought leader, serial entrepreneur, technology innovator, and also the author of many books, including *Everything Connects*, *Survive to Thrive*, and *The Power of Convergence*. When it comes to disruption, he observes that it is not just the Fourth Industrial Revolution that has been a phenomenal force. There is a “perfect storm” of other factors too—Covid-19, climate change, and misinformation. These change drivers are the focus of “Where we are now”,

the first section of the book. The next section explores the opportunities we have as consumers, workers, educators, and individuals of an increasingly connected society. “In such a world of seismic shifts, transformational leadership at

all levels—from heads of state to individuals—offers the best opportunity to leverage change to transform all our lives for the better,” Mr Hoque says. This is also the theme the book’s title is woven around—

Lift—the opportunity all of us have to contribute to the betterment of everyone though transformational leadership.

He talks at length about the opportunities that have opened up and the perks they offer at an individual level as well as

in education, healthcare, and so on. In the business sphere, the opportunity is both financial and ethical. The primary opportunity is driven by an explosive change triggered by the pandemic—expansion of the customer and marketplace appeal beyond issues such as price. Although price is still an issue, it does not hold the single dominance it once commanded. What consumers look for is not

just the least expensive choices; they are keen on being associated with businesses that “do good”. This demands that businesses align their priorities with the shift in consumer thinking, and establish strategies

and systems with which to better understand others, Mr Hoque adds. Empathy has to be an imperative internally too, in order to ensure that employees feel valued and understood. Those that practise an active form of empathy are also

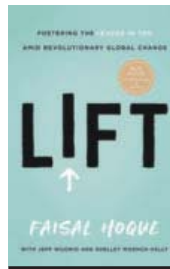
identifying social responsibility, environmental practices, and employee relations as factors that can influence consumer decision-making. Businesses can also play a seminal role in the war against misinformation—through planned partnerships with governments. Such social commitments would serve as a powerful marketing tool. As for the public sector, Mr Hoque says that the future lies in “a decidedly less tech, more human form of operation”.

The book’s last section is a lowdown of sorts on the components of “transformational leadership”—a concept introduced by leadership expert James MacGregor Burns—and how it is positioned to direct change. “If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together”—Mr Hoque quotes an African proverb to portray the dichotomy in which we are living. The explosive change around us has elevated the individual to a newfound level of leadership. And we have the tools and the environment to communicate, adapt and impact like never before.

At the same time, we have to come

together to build lasting change, he explains. This unified effort demands the practice of transformational leadership. Mr Hoque elaborates on its overriding essential—emotional intelligence, the key element of which is a willingness to accept uncertainty. Nurturing this trait would help in shaping a shared vision and uniting everyone towards a goal that transcends the immediate and the short-term. Collaboration is important too, as opposed to mere cooperation that tends to be passive at times.

Wrapping up, Mr Hoque reiterates that as individuals we are more empowered and involved in choices and decisions that earlier seemed to be out of bounds. However, there is no single approach to tackling the challenges and leveraging the opportunities that come our way. “It will be a confluence of ideas, strategies, and actions that will prove effective in managing and making the most of sweeping change”. Besides experiential learning, this will involve a willingness to experiment and improvise—the only way perhaps to create a new future devoid of the reflections of a fraught past.



Lift: Fostering the Leader in You Amid Revolutionary Global Change

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