

In light of the immense imponderables faced when venturing into the future, intuition becomes the defining quality in a great strategist. The competitive nature of business in a dynamic environment poses mathematically infinite options to choose from.

In developing strategy, rational thinking alone is of limited value, as information needed to make critical choices is hardly ever available in a fast changing world.

"Great champions need great enemies." Says Garry Kasparov - former world chess champion in a recent interview with the Harvard Business Review (Article is titled 'Strategic Intensity' – HBR – April 2005). In keeping with this thought Coke has Pepsi to thank. Steve Jobs is indebted to Bill Gates, and, at last, the West and Japan have China and India to contend with. Challenges posed by competition call for strategic responses from corporations and nations alike.

Strategy without proper plans for execution is like a body without a soul. And executing a strategy can be a real challenge when you consider the multitude of possibilities that need consideration.

Garry maintains that chess is a good metaphor for business strategy. There is plenty of uncertainty and abundance of strategic choices in the game of chess. Garry states that just after three opening moves by a chess player, more than nine million possibilities open up, and that's when only two players are involved in a game. Now imagine all the choices that open up to organizations with a whole host of corporations responding to their new strategies, pricing, products and services. The number of variables is mind-boggling!

Coincidentally, KASB Bank in Pakistan, in the recent past, has also used the game of chess as a metaphor for its media campaign on bill boards all over the country trying to communicate to its target audience the message that it makes the right moves. Considering the immense complexity involved in the game, maybe it is a tall claim to make.

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According to Garry, the total number of possible different moves in a single game of chess is more than the number of seconds that have elapsed since the big bang created the universe! However, the game of chess is often viewed by managers as a limited board game with sixty four squares and 32 pieces. Nothing could be further from the truth. The need to rethink corporate strategy is acute. If a world-class legend like Garry Kasparov can think no more than 15 moves in advance, and that's about as far as any human is known to have gone, where would our thinkers, planners, leaders and CEOs, stand? I really wonder.

Inevitably you reach a point when you have to navigate by using your imagination, perception and feelings rather than relying solely on your intellect or logic. And this proposition is hard to swallow for most of our corporate leaders who have forever relied on number crunching, and often falling into the trap of projecting the past into the future, using incremental logic. Strategic thinking is not about 'copying' the past and 'pasting' it into the future with a small increment in percentages for growth in market share or impact, top lines and bottom lines

Using logic and analytical thinking in dealing with the future is much like driving a car in reverse gear. Strategic thinking is about the future - a domain of fiction, of imagination, of uncertainty, of possibilities, of probabilities - where the stakes are high and risks abundant. On the other hand, facts, logic and certainty sit comfortably in the past. Our past is a data bank of wisdom and inspiration, if only we learn from it - be it recent history or a journey of five millennia.

Think of a grand banquet - a place where the greatest minds of the world have assembled for your benefit. They remain exclusively available to you for sharing their knowledge and insights, at your convenience, and for as long as you desire. They share of their time openly and keep no secrets from you. They give you their undivided attention and demand only your time in return. They share their mistakes and their achievements so that you may learn from their wealth of experiences. They pass on to you what strategies worked for them so that you may adapt their moves to your current situation and derive maximum benefit. Such a place is a library and one can build one at next to no cost. How many managers have a habit of reading books in our country? You don't have to look far...few do. The trend is slowly but surely changing.

My visit to Bombay to address a seminar a few years ago was an eye-opener in some respects. One afternoon, I went out shopping near Nariman Point. The car stopped at the lights. And I was approached by a street hawker, just like the ones we encounter in streets of Karachi,

Peshawar, Quetta and Lahore, where the chap is either selling combs, flowers, tabloids, napkins etc. What happened in Bombay was amazing! The lad displayed contemporary management books that are hard to find out here. They were neatly packed in transparent wrapping! Titles included: Winning (by Jack Welch); Blue Ocean Strategy; The 8th habit by Stephen Covey!

Strategic thinking requires that we furnish our minds with distilled wisdom from the past and learn from current best practices being applied by leading corporations. We also need to flex our creative faculties to produce ideas of value. Check out Newsweek June 20, 2005 issue. It contains ten case studies of how leaders like Masatoshi Kumagai (CEO of GMO – No. 11 amongst Japanese Internet businesses with market capitalization of US \$1.5 billion) are sparking a revolution in corporate strategy. The article goes on to reveal that leaders of today are untiring innovators who challenge old models, take huge risks and anticipate change.

We need to consciously break away from the comfort of bad habits. For example, we tend to keep on repeating what worked in the past and want to continue the same way into the future. Just look at the recent transitions. See how managers resisted introduction of new technology for almost two decades – implementing ERP being a glaring example. The move from electric typewriters to word-processing to ipads and smarter phones is causing a huge revolution in communications and connectivity. But generally people continue to pay lip service to innovation till such time that adopting the technology or best-practice becomes vital for survival.

I was shocked to see that back in 1998 (less than eight years ago), significant organizations like PIDC (Pakistan Industrial Development Corporation) and SBP (State Bank of Pakistan), were using typewriters, carbon papers, telex machines and other such outdated tools. Thankfully, all this has changed at SBP a few years ago through a massive change management program initiated by Mr Ishrat Hussain, which also included infusion of new talent. Such bold moves require large investment in relevant technology, processes and people. SBP's example supports what Garry Kasparov asserts, "Often, your guts will serve you better than your brains."

New times require new thinking. This has become a cliché and hence considered redundant for the unimaginative and the risk-averse executives. The good news is that innovative leaders are using new thinking to carve heroic paths while triumphantly marching into the future.

Our subcontinent has more than its fair share of brainy but gutless managers, whether in government, not-for-profit segment or the commercial sector. It is the apathy of our so-called

educated leaders we need to address, while also tackling the problems of poor governance, poverty, lack of education and so much else.

In 2005, on a flight from Karachi to Islamabad, I met a Malaysian gentleman traveling with a delegation to meet with Shaukat Aziz the following day. I took the opportunity of asking him how Malaysia had transformed itself into a nation we admire today in less than four decades. I thought he will start by singing praises of Mahathir. I was wrong!

He immediately took me to the example of Tun Razzak, the 2nd prime minister of Malaysia. He said that Tun's sincere efforts and clear strategy are an inspiring legacy even to this day. Keep in mind that his story provides a useful example of the value of a clear sense of direction amidst chaos coming out of a strategy that everyone can relate to and willingly plays a part in its execution.

Successful organizations are distinguished by: a) a culture based on aiming high; b) a structure that is flexible and responsive; c) a strategy that is clear and focused; and d) its flawless execution. What often stands in the way of the flawless execution of clear strategies is management's tendency to be either over or under confident and its struggle to maintain the status quo at all cost.

Back cover of the book, "First, Break all the Rules" by Marcus Buckingham says, "The greatest managers in the world seem to have little in common. They differ in sex, age and race. They employ vastly different styles and focus on different goals. Yet despite their differences, great managers share one common trait: they do not hesitate to break virtually every rule held sacred by conventional wisdom." Of course, such freedom can only be enjoyed with immense self-discipline.

It is troubling to see people in high office, defer reverentially to authority by indulging in pomp and ceremony, thus helping maintain the state of affairs. Hypocritical silence is a global phenomenon, which is far more pronounced in the lesser developed and developing countries. Pakistan is no exception to this malaise.

If more 'education' based on outdated curriculum for the masses was the answer to our plight, then we need to ask ourselves who created the gross inefficiencies and waste in our public

sector organizations and government departments – the educated or the pre-literates? How have the highly qualified intelligentsia become so distant from their key constituents and stakeholders? Why is lack of professionalism so common amongst our managers? Why is it that those who lead are not held account for their deeds?
