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Context to the nugget

Mr Bhatt talks about the criticality of the Chairperson to build good one-on-one relationships with each of the Board members so that he/she can facilitate effectively during a Board discussion. He mentions that the biggest contribution a Chairperson can make is to orchestrate the discussion in the room effectively to ensure that all the relevant voices are heard and the group makes a robust decision.

Transcription

Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): I want to talk about the transition from being a board member to being a chairperson of the board, I am curious about again what are some of the new muscles the need to be built you know something that a board member doesn't prepare you for? In your experience what's the delta in terms of capability again if you could from your experience?

OP Bhatt (OP.B): So actually, I am chairman of a board before I became a board member. Then the other year there was this State bank of India and all the time telling now about board how they should behave and how other chairman of other people should behave. I didn't know any of that, so how I have behaved then verses you know. I guess some of them either now I am talking about. So, for me I was chairman first and I became board member much later I was there for 5 years, State Bank Board. And at that point of time how I have behaved as a chairman would be completely different from what I think how chairman or a board member should behave because that is mean by learning post that and it struck to my old point that people are not trained people do not know neither the company know people themselves do something about it so therefore in some sense it an opportunity lost. So, building from that if you want to become chairman from being a board member. So, if you look at the board as a place where we have dialogues and discussion around a topic or many topics for the good of the company. The role of the chair person to my mind is how to draw the best from everyone. Now in a board I have seen that everybody doesn't talk sometime it is not derisory for everybody should talk but their people who talk more and their people who talk less and just because somebody is talking less doesn't mean that he doesn't have anything to conclude maybe he has but the board room dynamic its own personal diffidence or shyness or variety of other factors inhabiting prospecting. Likewise the guys got most of the talking it is not necessary that they me be making the best contribution, maybe they are but me be they are missing out on the something on the other. So, these two things are happening simultaneously in the board discussion and nothing is done about it then I think it is the company and the board which is the loser. So, the chairman has to be wise to this that this is a talk shop you get wisdom out of dialogues how can you tease words out of people's mouth, how can you provoke people to talk more and more sense. You know you will find many of the dialogue "Whatever your stake is saying in the first instance, when 2 3 4 people start talking about same thing the sense changes, the meaning changes, the concept

changes, your understanding changes, everything changes and can happen very gentle very wise way or can happen in very confrontational way. So, if either a chairman to make it very gentle, make it very wise and make it continuing so that no egos are hurt yet everybody is able to have their point of view, everybody is able to unburden themselves of their wisdom for the benefit of the collective around which they are sitting. Everybody can do it in spirit of contribution and the chairman he was calling out to somebody "hey! Can I hear what you want to say about this or even stopping somebody from saying more because of he has hogged a lot of space already but how to do it gently without causing any offence making it natural or when the conversation going in a wrong direction or the conversation is going nowhere or he feels that not enough has come out. How does he tease meaning out of people, how does he tease sense out of people? This I think is at the board when the board is in action is the most attribute of the chairman. If you do this you know wonders can happen. So, there are many things that need to do it before and after that is the different thing right. But I think what is visible and what to me is more important is this part of the chairman's job.

DJ: You spoke about setting the right climate or setting the right tone for the conversation for people to listen to each other and have a constructive conversation, anything from your conversation that you have done to set the right tone? What does it go to ensure that...?

OP Bhatt (OP.B): So again, it will depend upon personality your own thought processes for example though I have said that I became chairman first and maybe I made many mistakes. But some of the things I would do talk to many if the board members one to one you know just myself and then before a board meeting after a board meeting. Now this is not people wise I don't know what people will I think everybody must be doing that but so one is to get your comfort level with this board member high and vice versa right he does not know who you are and where are you coming from what this is kind of what can be intimidating for him. What also exchange views. Exchange with in general say about the company or in particular about the kind of issues the company is grappling at this point of time or to be very specific about something which is very important for whatever reason it's a large balance sheet item, it's a fraud, it's a technology investment it's a customer that there is a... you can talk about this thing also right so some of this conversation cannot take place in the board level because, the magic of the one to one will go away. What happens, so some people may not to do one to one, they may feel they should not do it but I used to do it. You know so that is one of the things we used to do right and it could be as many people as it was possible or available or willing to do that was necessary so this is one of the things outside the board meeting. The other thing is that sometimes board members they don't know enough about the company. They want to know about something or they want to go somewhere, travel, and meet somebody there. You know to make the company's working information around the company, people etc. available to the board members not to the company doing by the favour but it's their right to know about their company they have rights to know about the people in the company, they the rights to know about process taking place of the company. So that they can serve for the company better so how do you make it so that its easy and natural for people to ask questions, ask for information or ask for engagement, want an hour meeting with the HR head because I think. So how do you facilitate all this thing so that it's a friendly club?

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: It was interesting to hear Mr Bhatt talk about the various things that the Chairperson should do outside the Boardroom to be credible inside the Boardroom. One of my earlier guests Ravi Venkatesan (RV) who is on several Boards including being the Chairperson of Bank of Baroda spoke about the criticality of forming a nuanced picture of the context in these situations.

RV: *“So, as you know about 18 months ago I took on a completely new role as the chairman of a public sector bank, now I know nothing about banking and I know even less about public sector, but yet Raghuram Rajan and Jayant Sinha felt that it was important that I take it on so I did, now what you do in this situation? And you know that the place is filled with landmines and you can step on anything without realizing it and get blown up, so what you have to do in is listen intently and I did I made it very conscious effort to listen to a bunch of people retired chairman of a bank of Baroda so it helped me understand from your perspective, what I should do what the issues are? How would you handle them? And you get a certain perspective, I went and spoke to Waghul of ICICI and P.J. Nayak of axis Bank because they had, they have been around and seen revolution of banking sector, I met a lot of our own employees and so forth, so from this you begin to piece together first the situation and then out of that emerges a theory of change which is, what interventions are really going to Make a difference and who are going to be an important alliances if you don't listen and you start to imide you are coming with the point of view you starts jumping into action right away you going to make a lot of mistakes because you hadn't built this nuance and reasonably accurate picture of the landscape”*

DJ: While Board members are hired for the quality of their thoughts and their opinions, how well they listen and build a nuanced picture of the context and bring that to the Boardroom can make all the difference.

Thank you for listening. For more insights on Transitioning from an Executive to an NED role and for being an Effective Board member, please visit Playtopotential.com and look for the relevant playlists under the category of Transitions. You might also find segments of conversations with Ravi Venkatesan, Vinita Bali, Vedika Bhandarkar and Rama Bijapurkar thought provoking in this context. This is your host Deepak Jayaraman here. To know more about the Executive Coaching and the Transition Advisory work I do, please visit www.transitioninsight.com

End of nugget transcription

Nugget from Ravi Venkatesan that is referenced: [Listening intently during Transitions](#).

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OP Bhatt - Nuggets

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About Deepak Jayaraman

Deepak seeks to unlock human potential of senior executive’s / leadership teams by working with them as an Executive Coach / Sounding Board / Transition Advisor. You can know more about his work [here](#).

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