

Scale it up

If you are not scaling, you are stalling, says Subroto Bagchi



Go after the big fish. Once you have established your company, it is time to go further. Those seem to be the key messages from Mindtree chairman Subroto Bagchi latest book – *The Elephant Catchers: Key Lessons for Breakthrough Growth*.

As always the entrepreneur author, given the sheer speed with which he has written one book after another, draws on the experiences of his own life to offer suggestions. This book is aimed at organisations which need to grow beyond a certain level, but seem to be unable to do so. Bagchi urges such organisations to look at themselves and begin to address the issues so that they can grow. “If your vision is to cross an ocean, you won’t build a bamboo bridge,” he writes.

Mindtree, which began in 1999, wants to be a \$1 billion company by 2020. Bagchi has a roadmap to achieve this, that can be applied elsewhere as well. Bagchi says it is important for organisations to be challenged by scaling people who can see the bigger picture. He takes the title of the book from incidents of his childhood in Odisha. While catching rabbits was relatively common and easy, being able to net elephants required a whole different level of teamwork and scale. If the wish for organisations is to grow bigger, they need to have elephant catchers in their teams. He writes that even with his organisation, it is not an easy task and talent is being

brought in from outside so that the new goal can be achieved.

Nor is the book just about companies and institutions. Even individuals, he writes, need to take charge of themselves and scale up. Written in six parts, the book deals with different aspects of scaling up, starting with getting comfortable with the idea of scaling up itself. It goes on to stress the need to scale the business by getting large deals, about the need to adapt business models that would lead to growth, while avoiding those that would not. However, Bagchi is not an advocate of uncontrolled scaling, which he says comes at a cost. Many examples from Mindtree’s growth period are cited – e.g. the time they acquired business from Dutch telecom company KPN, or how they associated and then disengaged with GE as their paths were divergent, or how they bought a SAP company, and tried to persuade the founders to stay, in vain.

There is an entire section on scaling up people. Never far from stressing the role of logic and reason and emotions, the book devotes a few chapters to the necessity of realising that scaling up requires an intellectual capacity as well. That is followed by a section on the necessity of scaling reputation. The last section deals with scaling adversity, stressing on the need to do ordinary things extraordinarily well when extraordinary events threaten to unravel progress.

Through all his books, Bagchi’s credit lies in his efforts to humanise business. While the book still deals with the often harsh and unforgiving world of cut-throat competition and mergers and takeovers and challenges of every sort, he has somehow always managed to take note of the human at the core of the process. He has always attempted to link business and emotions, a rare trait in businessmen anywhere!

As always, the message is delivered



“Successful organisations invariably mimic living beings designing their infrastructure. The more they incorporate a systemic view, the more evolved and truly scalable they will be. While progressive organisations understand the importance of this and build capacity ahead of time, it remains an afterthought to most others during their growth phase. That in itself settles the height of the glass ceiling for the organisation.”

♦ ST

simply, but effectively, which have seen his previous books become popular. There are plenty of anecdotes, which always make the perusal that much more pleasurable. And yes, with a rapid succession of books since *Go Kiss the World*, he must have set a record of sorts in Indian business books, and definitely among company chairmen!

♦ SUMAN TARAFDAR