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An Interview with Ms. Aparna Shama

Ms Aparna Sharma is the HR Director of UCB Pharma.

UCB Pharma is one of the few organisations that believes and lives the philosophy of Triple Bottom Line Reporting. Their management team wishes to go beyond just making profits and their aim is to build an organisation that will make a difference to society. This is the reason why they started implementing the triple bottom line concept two years ago. This had started as the managements' brainchild and now it has been integrated into the culture of the organisation.

The following are excerpts of the interview with Ms. Aparna Sharma:

Literary Committe: How did the organisation start the implementation of this concept?

Ms. Aparna Sharma: The first step was to present this concept to the management. Then, we started defining UCB's vision for India and the mission statement. After this, we introduced the core values of UCB. They are seven in number and embody everything UCB Pharma stands for. This process almost took us a year. We created a special logo as well and then introduced the concept to the employees. Now, a KPI tracking sheet is being used to track the contribution of each employee towards this cause. This is made mandatory for all employees across departments in the organisation.

LC: What prompted the management to initiate this concept?

AS: We have always been an organisation that is unique and different in its approach to business and people. Keeping this in mind, we did not want profits to be the only rallying point for the organisation to sustain and grow.

LC: How has the journey been so far?

AS: The journey has been gratifying and rewarding. It has been possible only due to the unflinching support from all quarters of the organisation. The management had initiated and encouraged numerous healthy discussions and debates about the value-

addition of implementing triple bottom line reporting. We did not want this to be just another "window-dressing" concept or a fad that would fizzle out in the next couple of years. However, it has now been seamlessly integrated into the organisation's way of life. This year, it has also become part of each employee's KRA.

LC: What are the difficulties that were faced while trying to integrate this concept into the organisational culture?

AS: There were quite a few difficulties encountered. Whenever a concept like this is being introduced, conflict and resistance is inevitable. Along with this, a sense of disbelief and struggle also exists. However at this point, the role of leadership played by the management is essential. The concept and its significance have to be explained to each employee over and over again, with humility, and patience. The tangible and intangible benefits need to be emphasized as well.

LC: Would it be possible for you to elaborate on some of the initiatives taken by UCB Pharma towards this cause?

AS: Definitely. The air conditioners are switched off after six in the evening every day. The taps in the offices have been changed to as to reduce water wastage and consumption. The lights being used are eco-friendly as well. At the same time, we are very conscious of our waste disposal policy and carbon emissions. Just to cite a simple example, we reuse treated water for gardening. We also believe in rainwater

harvesting projects and recycling. We also organise tree plantation programmes, health awareness programs, blood donation drives, etc. for society. We are so conscious about the environment that we even made it a point to go in for 'Leed' building certifications while considering expansion plans. In addition, we have incorporated a "No Paper Day" which is celebrated every month. On this day, paper, in any form is not used at all.

LC: What is your personal view on triple bottom line reporting?

AS: This concept was first introduced by John Elkington. Since then it has been modified, revised, and implemented. Personally, I see it as a framework for measuring business performance encompassing financial, environmental, and social considerations. In the case of our organisation, these have been propagated from the management to the five stakeholders of the organisation. This concept plays a key role in sustainability as well. It takes care of business ethics, aspects of climate change, the environment, etc. along with the primary healthcare of society.

LC: What, according to you, is the relevance of the concept today?

AS: This concept is vital for every organisation, especially in today's times. It should ideally be a part of every business decision-making process given the fact that it helps evaluate viability and sustainability of any organisation policy. Thus, it becomes a necessary evil. This is because none of the '3Ps' exists in isolation of each other. People, Profits and Planet can never be looked at from a mutually exclusive approach.

LC: What are the initiatives currently existing in India, with respect to triple bottom line reporting?

AS: There is increasing awareness of this concept, but it is rather slow. Some companies like Novartis India have implemented this concept. They have circulated a policy and protocol, thus they have the processes in place.

LC: How feasible is the implementation of triple bottom line reporting?

AS: It is definitely feasible, and our organisation is a living example. However, strong leadership is required during implementation. Efforts should be directed towards change management in the organisation. Gradually, a switch will occur over time. Nevertheless, in order to achieve success, the management should ensure that the concept is consciously directed forward. The concept must become embedded into the day-to-day processes of the organisation.

LC: What alternatives could be used by organisations?

AS: According to me, balanced scorecard can be used as an alternative but it would have to consider all aspects, political, socio-economic, etc.

LC: What are the challenges faced by organisations while implementing this concept?

AS: Firstly, ignorance of the concept is a major challenge. It is followed by adopting a sole financial focus. Also lack of or improper tracking or measurement of implementation causes problems. Finally, short-term thinking is the most difficult challenge to overcome.

LC: Would you like to add in any final words about your organisation with respect to this concept?

AS: Yes. We aim to tackle challenges and opportunities with a focus on systemic thinking, balancing the long-term perspectives with the short-term performance so as to provide stakeholder engagement.