

Interview: In Conversation with Mr. Tarun Sharma, CEO, BMC Software India Pvt. Ltd.

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VIM:What are your major roles and responsibilities in BMC Software Pvt. Ltd.?

Mr. Tarun Sharma:First, as the CEO of BMC Software India Pvt. Ltd., I oversee all aspects of BMC Software's operations in India which include product development, customer support, procurement, legal and human resources. Second, I am part of global R&D of the BMC Software Pvt. Ltd. and I spend a lot of time on the products. I am an Engineer by training and I have grown through that rank. I used to be the chief architect and I have done all sorts of roles in software development. Third, I manage BMC Software's Ukraine operations. We have about 200 people in Ukraine who are mostly working on product development for BMC software. The fourth role is a very specific one in which I run a group called "The Incubator". The incubator's job is to come up with products of the future. Most product organizations are serving existing customers and they continue to make refinements to the product to keep them new, current and competitive. The Incubator looks at the product with a completely different perspective and thinks about how we introduce a new product that capitalizes on new technology trends in the market.

VIM:What are the future implications of the technology and products you are developing?

Mr. Tarun Sharma:It is a very interesting time for companies not just in software space but for all kinds of companies. Every industry is going through major transformation because of technology related disruptions. At present there are 12 different disruptive trends like 3-D Printing, Renewable Energy, Internet of Things and Mobile Internet to name a few.

You might think 3-D Printing is small but it is huge because it disrupts the entire supply chain in numerous industries. For

instance, for making a car there is so much of logistics involved. The parts come from Japan, China, Germany etc. and then they are assembled somewhere. If all of a sudden you don't have to move the parts you just have to print the parts. Now that fundamentally disrupts every industry because every industry depends on movement of materials even in space station they can just print the required parts and there need not be a rocket sent with parts every time. Even human parts like kidneys and livers can be made by 3-D printers.

I cannot sit here and tell you what is going to happen ten years from now, I cannot tell you what that impact is going to be as every industry is changing very rapidly. Software is key and it will continue to be. Even today every large project that is done, be it building a port or a railway station, 40% of the capital expenses are technology related. So, we don't know what the future will look like but software will play a key role in it as will other forms of technology. The rate of disruption in next five years will be much faster than the disruption rate in the past century.

VIM:What are your organization's strengths and weaknesses compared to your competition? Sir, what strategies are used by BMC Software to deal with the key competitors?

Mr. Tarun Sharma:We are a market leader in many of the industries that we serve and being the market leader our approach is always defensive because everybody else is trying to get into your market. So, our challenge is how to remain a thought leader by introducing new things that will change the game for the competitors while preserving our existing customers and existing revenue. Our value proposition to our customers is an integrated solution. In other words, when you buy more than one of our product the value is more than the sum of the products because the value proposition is in the integration of what we do. However, when you run an IT organization as an integrated solution with this kind of value proposition, the competitors go after one of your products and attack you. A big

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challenge companies like us have to face being a market leader is to preserve the whole and keep our value proposition intact while preserving the parts and ensuring that the customers are not lost.

VIM:CSR is a priority with most leading organizations and businesses. We would like to know the key CSR activities of BMC Software.

Mr. Tarun Sharma:We try not to get too diluted in CSR .We try to stick to our mission and focus entirely on children. If you look around in India, everything needs help. We can't help everyone. We focus on only one differently abled kids. Some have physical disabilities while others have mental or financial disabilities. We try help out these kids.

One of our CSR projects is a project in a Satpur village. This village is approximately 100 kilometers away from Pune. We have provided solar and LED lamps to light up the village primarily for children in that village. They are in danger .There are leopards who come and pick up children, their mom and dad have to work in the farm whole day. By bringing electricity to the village many things happen. One is the children will no more be afraid of the dark and they will stay out longer. The second is that they will start studying more. In addition, women could work more and get more income. So, just a simple initiative of bringing light changes their life completely.

We have adopted a school run by Ushatai Charitable Trust and we help kids studying therein from 7th standard to the 10th standard through scholarships. Ms. Leela Poonawala takes them over from there onwards to help them become engineers.

Our strategy is not a mass strategy, it is a narrow strategy and we are happy if we can impact even 2-3 lives through our efforts. I would like to cite an example of 3 blind girls currently working with us. Once Ms. Sakina Bedi asked us to hire 3 blind girls as an employee, may be to wash dishes. However, one of our engineers who was aware of this matter came and told us that we have already build up software for blind people and we can hire and these girls for quality assurance or certification. Today we have those 3 blind girls working for us doing all the certifications.

VIM:Sir, we have gone through your profile and came to know that you were the Vice President at Virtusa prior to joining BMC Software, can you please brief us about the cultural differences you observed in these two organizations.

Mr. Tarun Sharma:There are different equations. Main

difference between these two companies is that the Virtusa is a service company while the BMC software is a product company. A software product company requires relatively small number of people – people who are skilled and technically qualified whereas a software service company requires more number of people – mostly junior and inexperienced people. In Software product we don't have any rigidity because there are less people and I can provide them with best and expensive facilities whereas as in a service company the facilities may not be that impressive. Both these companies are people oriented for sure but they manifest differently. We have more qualified software people hence the rigidity goes away. The BMC Software tries to have different and flexible work environment.

VIM:Sir, Can you tell us about your corporate journey from being a PICT graduate to becoming a CEO of BMC Software India Pvt. Ltd.?

Mr. Tarun Sharma:I worked at CDAC for sometime just after graduating in 1992 on Artificial Intelligence before joining a small start-up company Men at Work. After serving Men at Work for short time, in a deliberate move, I joined NIIT as a trainer by accepting a salary cut to acquire presentation and public speaking skills. I had realized early in my life that a leader requires the ability to stand up in front of large audiences and present the most. But as an engineer you do not get that opportunity and as a software engineer you might be sitting in a cubical and writing code all day long. I was clear right from the engineering days that I wanted to be a CEO by the time I turn 40. I planned my career in 5 year chunks and said this is how it's going to be so that by 40 I am a CEO. Teaching was the best way to do so, which is why I chose teaching back then. After a while I understood that I have got enough of the skill I needed and got out of teaching and as part of consulting I landed up in a different part of the world, USA where here I met some of the smartest people on the planet and we ended up starting a company together called EC Cube. This was a business to business e-commerce portal. We had launched 8 new products before the dot com bubble burst. Although we were not a dot com company, a lot of our customers filed for bankruptcy forcing us to file for bankruptcy as well. Then I went to Virtusa which was a very small company that time of less than \$10 million in revenue. I worked there for 8+ years. We took the company public and we went from \$10 million to \$110 million and I ran their largest business of banking, insurance and technology and later BMC recruited me and wanted me to run their operations in India.



VIM:We would like to know one of your most challenging achievements as CEO of BMC Software India which is very close to your heart?

Mr. Tarun Sharma:One of my most challenging achievements is changing the culture of the company. BMC software was not the way it is today. BMC is more than 35 year old company and we have grown from mainframe and tools business. I felt that BMC should change, it should feel more like a young company with a startup mind set, with soul of a startup and assets of a big company. Having all the assets, company should behave like a startup, innovate like a startup and be agile like a startup. That's what we did in the last 5 years. So, the biggest thing we did was to transform BMC Software to make it look and behave like a startup.

VIM:As you just mentioned that you were associated with NIIT as a trainer, how was your experience with the students over there?

Mr. Tarun Sharma:Fantastic! Absolutely Fantastic! I was a very young teacher, in fact many of my students were older than me. I was just 22 years old and I had a different equation with the students.

VIM:You have acquired various skills and expertise in Cloud computing, SaaS, Enterprise Software, etc. According to you, does being versatile help in today's competitive environment?

Mr. Tarun Sharma:I think it helps a lot every time. There are two options for a professional. One is to be a specialist and other is to be a generalist. Both of them have their spots, but given my plans to be a CEO, I knew I have to be more of a generalist than a specialist. Now you cannot be a generalist CFO, if you want to be a CFO, then you cannot be a generalist, you have to be a specialist. Even in HR, at some point, you have to be a generalist. If suppose you have an head of HR, and he comes from compensation and benefits, then that's what he really knows, but by the time he reaches the top, he better knows everything about regulatory compliance, recruiting and this and that. You have to be versatile enough to learn everything that is required for you to succeed in your job and have an opinion on it, but you always have to be specialist in at least one thing.

To me, being versatile is very important but it also depends on what is it that you want to do. However, at some point of time being too much of a specialist can be a problem. Suppose if I am a specialist in databases and if tomorrow

there are no relational databases anymore, being a specialist will hurt me. If I was very good at VCR repair, I don't have a job today as nobody uses VCR anymore. So, you have to be versatile to pick new things as you move forward and as life around you changes.

VIM:Given your hectic schedule, how do you achieve work-life balance?

Mr. Tarun Sharma:I plan for it. I am very picky about it. I have built a very strong team. Sometimes people get confused that when everybody needs you it means you are very important but I don't think so. If your team is good enough you have time for lot more things to do and in that lot more things you do the things you like. Also remember that the more rich and successful people are the more balanced their work-life is. If I lost money, I can bring it back; if I lost family, maybe I can bring it back by remarrying or whatever, but one thing you cannot bring it back is time. The successful people are very particular about time. Every minute is important and they treat time as a precious resource. I focus and spent time carefully.

VIM:What do you like to do in free time?

Mr. Tarun Sharma:I like listening to music, singing songs and playing instruments. I spent time my kids and work on their homework and projects. I also like socializing and meeting people.

VIM:Pursuing MBA, we understand that a leader must be equipped with a set of competencies that are necessary to perform his/her role. Which one would you say is the most important quality a leader should have?

Mr. Tarun Sharma:The important quality a leader should have is the ability to build a strong team and feeling secure enough to delegate. It involves putting a team together and align them together. The team should understand their roles and responsibilities. Even Jesus Christ needed 10 disciples to work. More simple the better; make the task simpler.

VIM:What skills and qualities you look for in a fresh MBA student stepping into the corporate world?

Mr. Tarun Sharma:I look at attitude. Often people look for IQ i.e. how intelligent you are and you will find that all people that succeed in life are not always with high IQ but the one with the highest EQ. Biggest thing to do is to



develop your EQ and next is taking risks. In short term you might end up getting a massive salary cut but in long term you will acquire much more important skill set. I don't look for hiring a best engineer who understands what he is building and puts his/her heart and soul in whatever he/she is doing. He should also inspire other engineers to do the same and it all boils down to EQ and that is what I look for in a candidate while hiring.

VIM:Sir, we thank you for giving us the opportunity to interact with you. We appreciate you sparing your time to share your experience with you.

