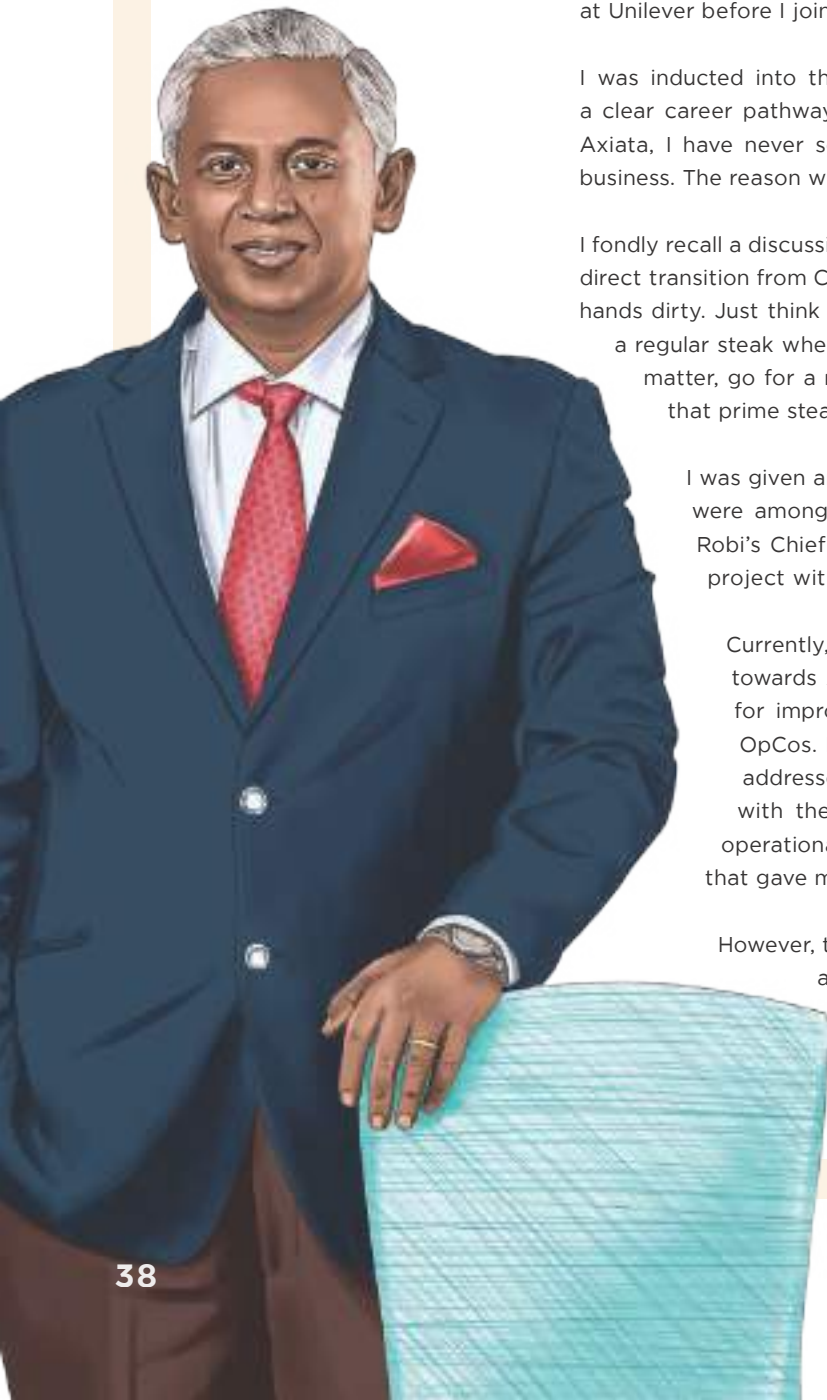


“The best part is that the company is still hungry to grow and has the right vision, strategy and - most importantly - the people in place to make it happen.”

Mahtab Uddin Ahmed

MD/CEO, Robi, 2016 – Present

Served in various roles in Robi and Ncell, 2010 – 2016



When I first heard of Axiata’s tagline, “Advancing Asia”, I thought to myself that they had probably picked the wrong continent to advance. But, as I started my journey with Axiata, I realised that the company is sincere about its promise.

Axiata’s solemn focus on developing its people convinced me that the company means business. After eight riveting interviews over two days with Axiata’s top management, I felt compelled. Even though I was at the peak of my career working at Unilever before I joined Robi in 2010 as its Chief Financial Officer.

I was inducted into the Group Accelerated Development Programme and given a clear career pathway. Many top corporations cut their training budget but not Axiata, I have never seen the company compromise on this vital aspect of the business. The reason why I am where I am today.

I fondly recall a discussion with Tan Sri Jamal. I had asked him why I couldn’t make a direct transition from CFO to CEO. He told me: “Mahtab, I first want you to get your hands dirty. Just think that you’re walking into a nice restaurant. Would you order a regular steak when you can see that a premium steak is available, or, for that matter, go for a regular lobster instead of a fat, juicy one? I need you to be that prime steak or the fat, juicy lobster.” That sealed it for me.

I was given an opportunity to grow as an individual. INSEAD and Harvard were among the stepping stones towards my current position, as was Robi’s Chief Operating Officer in 2014 and my short stint for a special project with Ncell.

Currently, all OpCos have stepped up and contribute almost equally towards Axiata’s growth. However, I feel that there is a lot of room for improvement in order to achieve optimum synergy across the OpCos. Besides, Axiata is too accepting of failure, this needs to be addressed. When I look back, I regret one of my notable successes with the company. As the project sponsor, I was responsible for operationalising edotco in Bangladesh. In hindsight, this was a success that gave me plenty of nightmares down the line.

However, the best part of this company is that it is still hungry to grow and has the right vision, strategy and - most importantly - the people in place to make it happen.