

GD-13

LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT IN INDIA – AN EXPERIENTIAL PERSPECTIVE

A Paper on how WIPRO's leadership development contributed to building its organization

Introduction

The objective of this paper is to help relate salient aspects of organization development as pertinent to leadership dimensions of a globalizing Information Technology (IT) service organization. The significance of this relationship is postulated on the following grounds.

1. Globalization of commerce and increased organisational influence on actors beyond the country of an organization's origin
2. "People" as the common element between the OD discipline and the value creators of a service organization
3. Emerging implications of the behavioral sciences as it deals with a confluence of variables in unprecedented complexity – e.g. diversity, coordination, control and autonomy across geographies.
4. OD Values in a rapidly growing global organization as it pertains to aspects like
 - a. Self-Worth – Through gainful, yet meaningful employment
 - b. Humanism – Genuine respect and regards for fellow employees
 - c. Opportunities – for acquiring competence through learning and development
 - d. Group / Organisational Behaviour – Cross-Cultural determinants of maintaining and developing a non-threatening developmental climate

WIPRO, which was formerly known as Western India Vegetable Products, began in the year 1946, a year before India gained freedom from British rule. After years of consolidation in agriculture based cooking oil production, WIPRO tried to fill the vacuum created by the exit of Information Technology (IT) majors like IBM in the late seventies. It began to manufacture mini-computers, and followed with attempts to make its own software. With increased intensity of activity in this sector, a demand for software professionals overseas became felt in the 1990s. WIPRO gradually reconfigured its software product business to meet requirements of the global services market in Information Technology. WIPRO's response to the economic liberalization unleashed in 1992 in India was to leverage its grown strengths in Research and Development for the global market.

In the recent past, WIPRO made strides in its global presence by fueling a steady stream of talent. It did so by innovating training and development processes for engineers and science graduates with unique tie-ups with educational institutions of repute that made it relatively easier to serve the growing talent demand. By the year 2000, it listed itself on the New York Stock Exchange (NYSE). Today, the company has 61,000 employees, of which close to 7,000 are spread over 45 nations across the globe. Table 1 below represents how WIPRO has managed to sustain a Compounded Average Growth Rate (CAGR) of 36%, over a five year period. It continues to make sustained growth strategies and plans both for its domestic India operations and across the globe.

Table 1: WIPRO Growth Indicators

Year ending March	2000-01	2001-02	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06
Revenues (\$ million)	384	475	625	934	1354	1815
Clients	217	226	288	399	421	494
Global Development Centers	22	26	28	34	40	44
Employees ('000s)	10	13	19	29	42	53

In order to appreciate this phenomenon, it would be worth examining the context in which WIPRO's achievements were possible.

Introduction to Indian History and Culture

India has had a rich and varied heritage contributed by a set of significant events in its history. India's rivers have been the cradle of a 5,000 year old civilization, one of the world's most ancient ones being the Indus Valley civilization, from which the word "India" is derived. After the initial wave of immigrants inhabited the mainland, they settled into a golden age of arts and sciences. Works of literature, scripture and music from this era continue to hold their place in contemporary Indian life. India later saw a host of invaders including the Mughals and the long tenure of the British Empire. One of the most unitary aspects of the Indian experience has been its freedom struggle and its ability to coalesce several linguistic and religious groups shone past initial struggle in this respect. In the six odd decades post Independence, the country has witnessed a consolidation of institutions, initially democratic and public organisations in government, infrastructure, education and the like, and of late private enterprise, cashing in on the wealth of human capital that lay in wait for such growth.

Some of the strengths that have endured through time in the Indian culture are referred below.

1. Respect for Knowledge and Educational Rigor - Indian society since ancient times has recognized the importance of knowledge. Folklore has it that kings and statesmen bowed their heads to the knowledgeable sage. Since time immemorial, this respect has been more than lip-service. This trend continues to dominate Indian society. Successful companies have capitalized on this long-standing strength of Indian culture. Indian professionals have gone through the grind of competitive educational systems, from nursery schooling to professional college education, and the hustle and bustle of corporate life. The Indian society seems to have become adept at filtering talent progressively. Competition has pervaded educational spheres as early as school and assumes significant force for professional courses. In corporate reality, this has implied that only few can reach the top management levels.

2. Hospitable Warmth - The Indian nation has been known for its gentle accommodation of alien cultures. The traditional Indian home has been always the welcoming host, generous and caring for the stranger. This warmth when extended in the

business sphere inculcates better bonding between team members. Many Indian business leaders have exploited this strength. The human capital in India therefore only inbreeds this warmth in every culture it is in interaction with.

3. Tolerance for Ambiguity - Ever since the institution of the Indian joint family, tolerance for diverse opinions has been in the Indian social fabric. Fathers and sons, uncles and nephews within the same joint family would debate over complex family issues and still remain undivided. A similar spirit of accommodation of viewpoints prevails in successful organisations. However, in contemporary experience, we begin to wonder if this tolerance is a mask for a sense of fatalism and external locus of control. It cannot be denied however, that diversity of viewpoints abound in an Indian group setting.

4. Multiculturalism - The Indian educational setup has the three language formula, which has implied a multilingual dimension to the Indian workforce. Diverse Indian languages make for a natural adaptation right from school to work life. Add to this the Indian tradition of 'arranged marriages' have been a strong enabler of multiculturalism. The key in all such adaptations has been tolerance for diversity and the capacity to learn in different situations. In work context, this has guided creation of harmonious business relationships.

5. Quality of Processes - To deliver Quality, several Indian software firms have attempted to adopt appropriate processes for software development and delivery. WIPRO, for example, adopted the Six Sigma approach. Later it aligned its Quality processes to requirements specified in the Carnegie Mellon standards enshrined in the SEI-CMM® Models. This has ensured quality output for the client even as development cycle times were crashed on a continual basis. In our experience, the workforce in India seeks commitment from top management in process initiatives. Employees are willing to comply with organization-wide quality methodologies, as long as this leadership commitment is consistent. The urge for compliance is today a natural asset of the Indian workforce due to demonstrated high Power Distance, and a collectivist orientation in terms of confronting uncertainties together.

Such enablers are today understood to help organisations such as WIPRO to move ahead in the global marketplace. In this paper, we would like to share some of the practices that have taken root due to such enablement in the context of the knowledge economy.

Leadership in India

In the past, leaders of multinationals from developed countries would come on deputation to India to build leadership. As a result, depending on which nation the Indian operation owed allegiance with, the culture of the parent company nation would mingle with that of the Indian company. Inevitably, the American, British, German or the Swedish culture left their imprints on entire organisations as it were. From performance appraisal systems to management development programs, the trend was influenced largely by the leaders from the parent multinational.

Amongst a host of factors that explains the peculiarity of the country's leadership behavior is its high-power distance (Spector, et al, 2001). This has implications on how leadership as a dimension plays out in its culture. This indicates a largely supplicant attitude towards the boss. Underlying this construct is the concept of social inequality. Simply put, the Indian culture has in it features, that puts in place individuals who exert more power over others.

These individuals are in a position to determine others' behaviors; and rarely vice-versa. Another consequence of this inequality principle is that often full grown adults are excessively dependent on superiors and are therefore unwilling to take decisions that they confront. This often slows down organisational response and does not free top management for strategic thinking and future developments (Chattopadhyaya G P, 1975). In fact, many a senior leader will find the self insecure, if not informed or taken into confidence on the smallest of work related issues.

Changing Times at the Modern Indian Workplace

Contemporary professionals in the IT world may argue that Indian organisations are more egalitarian than when their parents went to work. The new generation workforce feels that individuals are treated with respect based on the worth they bring to their knowledge intensive roles. We must however remember, that the Indian professional leaves office in the evening or daybreak, only to return to a larger society in which disrespect for the elder, the teacher; and such father-figure roles is not taken lightly. No matter how strong the corporate culture in terms of merit based decision making and compensation structures, organisations of tomorrow will continue to recruit individuals from a larger social milieu where values of inequality are not entirely uncommon.

WIPRO, which began its formal leadership development journey in 1992, has an experience unique in its social context, distinct by its identity and shaped by its leadership, that can offer pertinent learning to practitioners and theorists of OD. It is in many ways a case of how 'management' through applied leadership can succeed and flourish. We shall now see glimpses from WIPRO's experience as depicted below.

WIPRO's response to its Context

When tracing WIPRO's efforts into its present global status a few important issues come to mind. The reader may like to reflect on reading as to how and why it was possible for WIPRO as an institution to speak about its strongly subscribed values through its leadership development processes. The process of institution building given the constraints in Indian society appears clearly to have built on clear expectations and focussed nurturing that came from a sentient leadership at WIPRO. Some of the salient steps WIPRO took are as follows.

1. Defining Leadership Qualities

The biggest problem with a concept like leadership is that it can mean so many things to so many people. There is a strong temptation to attribute all possible good qualities one can think of and come out with hundreds of qualities. Sometimes, these include "irreconcilable opposites" in qualities. Like a strong aggressive leader who chews competition but at the same time is an extremely harmonious team player! At Wipro, we decided to be more pragmatic. We have identified eight leadership qualities. Currently they are

- 1) Strategic Thinking - Anticipating the future through an articulated vision
- 2) Customer Orientation - Customer at the center of the vision.
- 3) Aggressive Commitment - Pursue stretched commitments with determination and focus
- 4) Global Thinking and Acting - Global cultural synchronization with respect to issues and trends

- 5) Self Confidence - Belief in the abilities of self and team
- 6) Commitment to Excellence - Commitment to surpass the best with respect to global standards
- 7) Working in Teams - Encouraging harmony and synergy for getting multiplier effect from team
- 8) Building Future Leaders - Spending time with team; coaching and pursuing developmental needs of team

This was done after extensive research into literature, understanding best practices, and checking with thought leaders. We first defined an initial set of seven qualities in 1992 and have been changing these every year. One of the qualities that we adopted after listing on the New York Stock Exchange was that of Global Thinking and Acting. For one band of leadership, for example, the following behaviours are measured.

Leadership Quality: Global Thinking and Acting

Anticipates global trends impacting relevant markets and actively develops people and processes to be globally competitive. He/she is at ease while interacting with people from diverse national and cultural backgrounds.

1. Encourages his / her team to constantly update themselves on global issues / trends.
2. Actively attempts to understand and respect the cultural nuances of the host countries of customers and employees.
3. Is able to build rapport and is at ease when dealing with clients, partners or colleagues across geographic and cultural boundaries.
4. Identifies and contributes to the development of best practices to suit the team's need for process improvements through benchmarking with world-class practices.

Competencies for the Leader Role are based on behaviours of Successful Performers. Behaviours that relate with high performance are used to describe the competencies. Based on demonstrated behaviours, levels of competency are defined. The levels are scaled as competency indicators. These descriptions also help users to identify positive and negative indicators of the competencies. Reliable methods for this phase are used, such as Structured Interviews - as part of Job Analyses and interviews held with stakeholders for the Leader Role. The Repertory Grid Technique is used later as a special technique that involves stakeholders to compare and contrast roles (e.g. boss, supplier, and customer) and formulate *important ways in which the roles are like the Leader role, and different from the rest*. These efforts converge in a Competency Dictionary, comprising level-wise descriptions of successful role behaviours.

All of WIPRO Leader Qualities are similarly created, and increasingly tend to reflect the success of WIPRO in global geographies. These qualities are illustrated by examples of leadership behaviours that are observable. This makes it easy to understand and institutionalise the competencies. These qualities are regularly reviewed in keeping with the changing context.

2. Measuring Leadership Qualities in Global Competitive Context

The impact of Global Thinking and Acting runs across all of the WIPRO Leaders' Qualities. A few excerpts from WIPRO's measurement criteria will help us appreciate the same. E.g. Let us look at a few other leadership competencies and the changing emphasis

ODN, 2006, GD-13, Leadership Development in India – An Experiential Perspective, Acharya, Ranjan; Anjilvelil, Joseph George – WIPRO Ltd.

based on global context. We consider here two critical competencies that help globalization. Both are different, in that one requires reflective thinking, and the other requires concerted actions that are experienced by many others in one's team(s). One of them is Strategic Thinking – required for both strategy planning and making. Strategy making is the expressive act that follows strategic planning. The other is of Working in Teams. Today working in teams encompasses motivation and bonding for members with whom face-to-face interaction is minimal to say the least.

Table 2: Emerging focus of WIPRO Leadership Qualities

Leadership Quality	Earlier	Now
Strategic Thinking	Focus on Domestic Players and addressing local competitive forces	Focus on Global Game Changes and Players
Working in Teams	Focus on face-to-face interactions and morale in location	Focus on Virtual Teams that work asynchronously across date and time zones.

Thus, WIPRO continually evaluates the business environment for cues that affect the effectiveness of leadership strategies. E.g. One of the transitions made after the adoption of Global Thinking and Acting as a Leadership Quality is in dropping a few qualities that seemed more managerial in nature. One such deletion was that of Problem Solving as a Leadership Quality.

3. Leadership Composition for a Global Organization

With the sure presence of WIPRO in diverse geographies, it became imperative to manage cross-cultural and multinational workforces. Leaders who have the advantage of meeting up with client needs from as close a quarter as is possible is best suited for local management. To ensure such an impact, WIPRO has infused its top management with leaders from host nations itself. This has been the case with the largest of geographies like USA, Japan and Europe. These leaders are naturally capable in their own nations, and are quick in understanding the business of customers.

4. Modifying relevant People Processes

Several ongoing processes like recruitment, training, compensation and communication itself are affected by a global scale of operations. WIPRO has suitably modified such people processes so that employee behaviours are seen as consistent with the leadership vision. E.g. When selecting for foreign territories the Employment Opportunities legislations, in the host nation has relevance to the conduct of selection processes. The Recruitment Team is required to be certified on an Interviewing Skills programme, wherein several nuances of interviewer behaviour are taught. Legal implications and cultural orientation of the interviewer are critical to effectiveness.

Similarly, for Training conducted overseas, Trainers are made aware of cultural implications of instruction and employee diversity. To engage with the field force, for example, a European (Ph.D.) with cross-cultural negotiation expertise and sales experience has been charged with the office of Field Capability Enhancement.

5. Developing Leadership Talent From Within

The process adopted for Leadership Development follows a lifecycle pattern. The same is described below. To develop leaders WIPRO trains its employees on a regular basis. We have created development programs along the lifecycle pattern of leadership

development. There are five programs that focus on sharpening leadership skills of individual leaders.

1. **Entry Level Program (ELP):** This is the first program a fresh recruit goes through. The program helps the newcomer into becoming a good management employee, like how to become an effective team member, how to participate in meetings, communications thoughts and feelings to others. **Country-specific cross-cultural training and the opportunities to work in different nations has made our workforce adaptable and resilient.**
2. **New Leaders' Program (NLP) :** This is designed for the first time manager. Many people continue to be more comfortable managing technology rather than people. This program teaches them how to build teams, communicate, lead according to situations and coach others. **In the NLP, leaders are particularly trained on aspects of managing virtual teams.**
3. **Wipro Leaders' Program (WLP) :** This is addressed to the manager of managers who still want to manage the teams directly. From here on, it is a corporation-wide program. **At the WLP leaders are sensitized on the Diversity Principle, and mingle with leaders from all parts of the world.**
4. **Business Leaders' Program (BLP) :** This program is for General Managers in waiting who need to look at business as a whole and understand bottom line implications. It covers relevant elements of finance and environmental scanning. **The BLP has focussed attention on a single business case, which has a strong international flavor and is run over several days.**
5. **Strategic Leaders' Program (SLP)**
This is the highest program aimed at Chief Executives. It helps them to design and develop strategies in a global environment. From the inception the SLP has been addressed by thought leaders from all over the world. Luminaries from Wharton, London Business School, the Indian School of Business, and the like are invited to share recent perspectives on leading large corporations.

At this level of leadership interactions with senior leadership of client organisations are also important. Therefore additional inputs on being one-on-one with the Fortune 100 corporation leaders are also given. Participating effectively in each of these programs is necessary to progress in one's leadership career. Similarly, it is very important to have the complete involvement of the senior and top management of the company to participate as faculty.

In Wipro, for instance, Mr. Azim Premji, Chairman, addresses participants of all Wipro Leaders' Programs, Business Leaders' Programs and Strategic Leaders' Programs. In his own words *"What you will remember when you retire, is not which quarters you exceeded your sales target or won large deals, but leaders whom you helped in developing. Develop leaders under you, not only because it is good for the business, but because it will give you tremendous personal satisfaction"* He invests significant time as a faculty in leadership development programs.

Advanced Experiential Learning

Recently, WIPRO has collaborated in a Global Learning Alliance (GLA) with Learning and Development wings of large global organisations, namely, Schneider, L'Oreal, Nissan, and Alcan. Each organization sponsors approximately six senior leaders (at the

level of Vice-Presidents in WIPRO) from within its multiple lines of business to represent learning and development challenges in a common forum, where facilitation is done by eminent faculty from institutions like the London Business School, and legends like Prof. Ikujiro Nonaka. These sessions are held at different points in the year. The model on which it is based embraces globalization in terms of cross-industry learning on ‘burning issues’ and socialization to create a supportive climate for leadership skills development across business models and organisational change contexts. The working model of this initiative is depicted in Fig 1, below.

Similarly, for leaders at lower levels, WIPRO has begun to engage in similar fora, with the Indian Institute of Management, Bangalore and Henry Mintzberg as a partner facilitator. That, in brief, explains the moving spirit and energy behind Wipro’s drive for developing leaders from within.

WIPRO’s recent emphasis on non-directive coaching, and teaming interventions at senior and middle management levels have a deliberate design around key learning experiences. WIPRO’s Corporate Human Resources Development team has the custodianship for Leadership Development in the company. From a team identified with a composition of high-caliber leadership trainers, the emerging emphasis of this group has been on facilitated interventions in top management groups across the corporation. Their interventions have facilitated interactions between clients and Delivery teams, Strategic Business Units and top management strategy making in critical businesses.

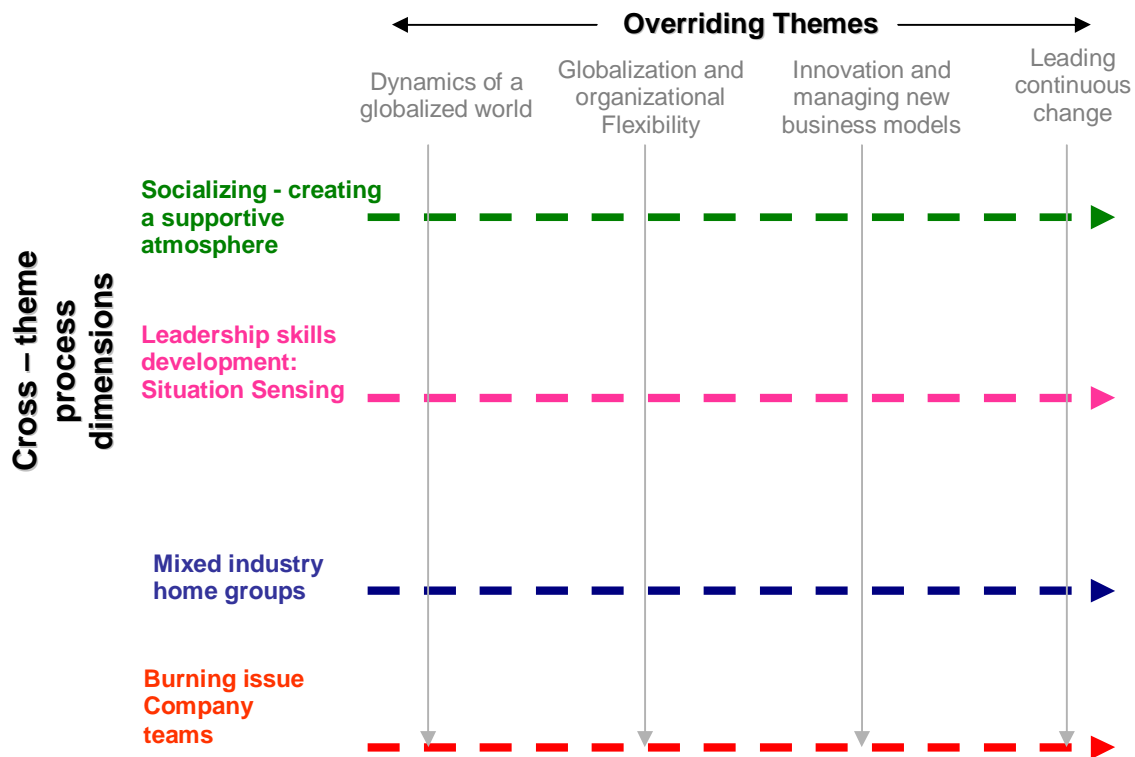


Figure 1: The Global Learning Alliance Framework

Challenges in Leadership Development

Although, WIPRO's success with leadership development is acknowledged in India today, challenges of growth continue to represent itself through unprecedented scale and speed dimensions. Implications for leadership in WIPRO's current environment include

1. Fostering a climate in which a younger workforce rises to challenges of leadership faster than their predecessors, given the rate at which business opportunities present themselves across diverse business sectors in multiple geographies. The younger generations in most parts of the world stand on newer educational paradigms and are seeped in possibilities that can be accessed faster than was once imagined. A major challenge for leadership development in a relatively young workforce is to be able to balance the needs of novelty with a sense of responsibility for the future.
2. Sufficient learning required to embrace the diversity of cultures, business sector models in different markets and geographies, has to occur more comprehensively. The dominant thinking around institution building has largely originated in India. Accommodating newer thought from foreign cultures and workforce within its mainstream culture is an act of leadership that needs closer attention.
3. We now have lesser time in which to help teams discover their purpose, and follow through in performing service operations. While such teaming is more common, the complex teaming problems arise at managerial and strategic levels as leaders grapple with rapid and complex information flows that affect short-term and mid-term business outlooks. This dimension is amplified when teams work across virtual spaces from different continents.
4. Business Growth can often hide many a weakness in organisational routine. A focus and repeated stress on creating a winning culture could potentially instill a sense of infallibility. Leaders who are insensitive to such possibilities may project a false sense of confidence. A square challenge for leadership at WIPRO then is to be able to manage the scale and speed of business growth with a sense of realism and requisite humility.
5. As service providers in IT, the variety of market sectors served is generally a source of revenue potential. However, this potential can be realized only when leaders come to terms with the business model dynamism in client domains. Leadership response to changes in clients' business models is key to future enablement of business.

Conclusion

Today, WIPRO is known the world over as an IT company from India. WIPRO's growth from a vegetable oils company to its present status as a leader in IT services is the lesser known aspect of WIPRO. Recent accolades include being world's first company in IT Services and Software to be assessed for People CMM® Version 2, and in 2003 being rated #1 across Asia Pacific for Leadership by Hewitt. In 2004, close to 25 years after it entered information technology markets, WIPRO crossed \$1 billion in revenues. It took just 18 months thereafter to reach the \$2 billion mark. It has also received recognitions from the American Society for Training and Development (ASTD), the most recent ranking being 6th on the ASTD list, and 1st rank from India.

We have attempted to outline factors that affect effective global leadership for a firm that has Indian roots. It is fascinating to note that even as the larger Indian society had a reality all its own, beset as it is with social, infrastructural, health, nutrition and educational challenges, WIPRO's leadership made a difference in modern India. Many of the factors here may not exhaust the reader's own context. However, we hope that the reader gets a feel of the experience WIPRO has had traversing a disciplined and consciously deliberated path to leadership development.

It is only close understanding of the organization's global competitive context that will help WIPRO surge ahead in the current period where India seems to be enjoying a national competitive advantage over other similarly endowed or resource rich nations. In the words of a client as mentioned to one of the authors of this paper "*We look forward to India, because it is the land of genius. You are the gurus. We hope this intelligence and hard work will benefit our business. That is what we are looking for*". That, we understand, is no small expectation.

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