



HR Summit

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The HR Summit was conceptualised by the Mumbai Chapter of the National HRD Network as a one-of-its kind thought leadership event for senior HR leaders. The by-invitation event brought together over 153 CHROs and HR leaders and explored five topical themes with eminent thought leaders from diverse professions like public policy, sports, history and business providing unique perspectives on Business and Leadership.

This note captures the summary and the teachable points of view that were shared by the speakers at the HR Summit. The following themes were covered at the HR Summit:

- The Leadership Dilemma: Specialists or Generalists? – Ms. Kalpana Morparia, CEO, JP Morgan India, in conversation with Ms. Rajkamal Vempati, EVP – HR, Axis Bank
- State of the Global Economy & its Impact on India – Ms. Shilpa Kumar, Head, Global Markets and Proprietary Trading Group, ICICI Bank
- Managing Performance Pressure – Mr. Vasudevan Baskaran, Former Captain, 1980 Olympic Gold winning Indian Hockey team; Former Coach, Indian Hockey team; Padma Shri and Arjuna awardee
- Decoding Leadership – Dr. Rudrangshu Mukherjee, Historian & Author; Vice Chancellor, Ashoka University
- Is Labour Legislation Really the Roadblock for Investments? – Mr. Ramkumar K, National President, National HRD Network; President, ICICI Foundation; Executive Director, ICICI Bank

The Leadership Dilemma: Specialists or Generalists?

This topic was explored by Ms. Rajkamal Vempati, engaging in a conversation with Ms. Kalpana Morparia, about her views on the subject. Ms. Morparia, who had successfully made the transition from being an expert lawyer to a highly successful CEO, had some interesting insights to share:

- There has to be an institutionalised mechanism in organisations to help employees hone business skills through giving them challenging assignments. While people want to specialize early on in their careers to be of value to their organization, it is the job of the manager to encourage job rotation and varied exposure in order to avoid restriction of career possibilities.
- Managers need to be evaluated on their ability to drive intra-organizational mobility. Organizations must encourage leaders to 'share' the talent that they develop rather than to hoard it.
- Talent spotting by leaders should be second nature and should also work independently of a formal process or structure. "Leaders should very quickly spot a person whose vision is larger than their current job". Leaders should test people early by taking talented team members and placing them in stretch assignments and helping them experience diverse job roles.
- Leaders must surround themselves with a team that 'differs' from them - they should allow their teams to challenge them and 'show them a mirror' in order for the Leader to develop as well.
- All roles can be stripped into core specialization and operational areas – This exercise will allow identification of those roles which would have to remain specialized and thereby need separate career paths.
- Diversity needs to be looked at through the new lens of educational background. While organizations build teams that have gender, ethnic or demographic diversity it is equally important to build teams that have varied educational qualifications. "If you get people from diverse educational backgrounds and give them challenging assignments at the start of their career, they will make for great future leaders".

State of the Global Economy & its Impact on India

This session was led by Ms. Shilpa Kumar and she focused on the key changes that are impacting the global economic landscape and their potential impact on the Indian economy. Some of the points she highlighted are captured below:

- Overall, the global economy is in a low-growth and low-inflation phase. While low-inflation sounds optimistic there is a resultant postponing of consumption. The economy would do well to trade in the low-inflation for some controlled inflation if it can bring in some growth too.
- Economies will have to look inwards for this growth. Options such as seeking help from the Government (debt and deficit) or the Central bank (pumping in money) have already been exhausted and extensive protectionism (world is growing despite little or no trade growth) make it hard for economies to turn to their neighbours.
- There are three big factors to be considered when looking at the Global economy today – China's slowdown, the falling commodity prices and the US Federal Reserve's lift-off. Together these three have resulted in a sharp slow-down in global capital flows.
- Aside from these, there are geopolitical risks such as the migrant crisis and the insurgent situation that are also likely to impact the economy further.
- Impact on India is not as bad as other economies – We will continue to meet our BoP even if there isn't a single Dollar flowing into FII. However, we will still see some depreciation in our currency due to some realities of the current size and linkages of our economy.
- The speaker felt that India was in the best macro-position that it could be in – it is essential for India to avoid being complacent and leverage the falling commodity prices in order to strengthen the economy.

Managing Performance Pressure

This session was a truly unique opportunity to get inside the mind of Mr. Vasudevan Baskaran, and understand performance pressure from the perspective of a man that has carried the expectations of a nation in captaining the Indian hockey team in the 1980 Olympics when we won Gold. Some of the key takeaways from his speech were:

- There can be no achievement in this world that is devoid of pressure. Excellence and achievement come from stretching oneself, and pressure is intrinsic to personal growth.
- While experience teaches one how to manage pressure effectively, being open to new learnings & taking on new challenges and observing and learning from the examples of others are crucial. Mr. Baskaran spoke about many of his experiences and his learnings from taking on challenges – from coming from a small town, playing multiple sports & balancing academics to learning a new language.
- For a sports person, pressure manifests itself from multiple quarters - coach, teammates, fans and the country at large. While it is easy to crumble under such pressure seasoned sports persons know to channelize it to drive personal growth.
- An approach of 'plan, prioritize and practice' is often effective in leveraging the pressure to bring out the best in yourself and deliver that extra mile.
- Finally, Mr. Baskaran concluded, "Never give in to pressure, never bend to it or submit to anger in the face of tremendous stress ... Pressure or stress needn't be managed ... it needs to be channelized to drive performance".

Decoding Leadership

This session was conducted by Dr. Rudrangshu Mukherjee, who shared a comparative analysis of the leadership styles of three iconic leaders of the Indian Independence movement – Mahatma Gandhi ('Bapu'), Subhas Chandra Bose ('Netaji') and Jawaharlal Nehru ('Panditji').

➤ Mahatma Gandhi – Dr. Mukherjee spoke about Bapu's immense charisma and innate understanding of the people he represented. While he had come from South Africa a Westernised gentleman, Bapu was quickly able to get to know his people intimately, their sentiments and their aspirations. He reinvented himself in the image of an Indian peasant and was able to reach out to the masses and make himself relevant to the poorest of the poor in early 20th century India. He had an uncanny knack for symbolism (salt, the 'charka' and so on) that he used to mobilise people. Ultimately, his leadership was about mobilising the masses, and he was able to use multiple vehicles to do this such as the non-cooperation movement, the civil disobedience movement, the swadeshi movement and more. He also was able to pick out smaller issues first and then slowly ratchet up the pressure to tremendous levels. Dr. Mukherjee summed up this leadership style as "charisma, fearlessness and an ability to identify with people".

➤ Subhas Chandra Bose – Dr. Mukherjee highlighted Netaji's growth as a leader from the time he volunteered to be a foot soldier in the cadres of the Indian National Congress till the time he led the Indian National Army. He spoke of Netaji as a man who stood by his ideologies even when they differed with the prevalent beliefs of the Congress leadership of the times, and had the gumption to realize his vision in the face of adversity. This was a leader who led by example, 'marched with his people' and bore their sufferings and sorrows. He came to represent a leader that stood by his people, cared for them and had an emotional connect.

➤ Jawaharlal Nehru – Dr. Mukherjee described how this self-proclaimed 'upper-class westernized man with no political ambitions' was converted upon witnessing the Jallianwalla Bagh massacre. He spoke of how circumstances forced Panditji into witnessing the struggles of the nation and how incident after incident influenced and shaped Panditji into the political powerhouse he grew to become. He was a leader who learned from the incidents he witnessed and then leveraged his experience of these incidents and his own knowledge to make a lasting impact. While he was an accidental leader, he grew to build his vision of an independent, secular, industrialised India.

➤ In a closing line that only a master craftsman could put together so well, Dr. Mukherjee spoke of how these three stand to represent the classic adage of how "some are born great, some achieve greatness and others have greatness thrust upon them". He reminded us that there is no secret key that unlocks the cipher of leadership and that not all great people were great leaders but that there are many lessons to be learnt from the pages of history.

Is Labour Legislation Really the Roadblock for Investments?

The closing session for the evening was led by Mr. K. Ramkumar, who delivered an impassioned session on the real reforms that are needed in the area of labour legislation. Some of his views are captured below:

- The real problems faced by industry is not corruption or license raj. In reality, there has been no instance of a factory being shut down, a license being revoked or a senior official of any company being arrested due to any issue with licensing or factory inspections. It would also be unfair to state that it is harder for an employer to exercise rights against an employee in India than in other countries.
- The most critical labour legislation reform that is the real need of the hour is “an effective dispute resolution machinery that delivers justice and fairness to all stakeholders in a timely manner”. Currently disputes go unresolved for tens of years and the welfare of employees are compromised by those who profess to represent them.
- The other issue that organizations often complain about is their inability to ‘hire and fire’ at their convenience. While companies should definitely be allowed to close down sick or non-performing units or let go of excess staff, it cannot do so without paying the right price. In a country that has no social security provisions it is the duty of the employer to bear the cost of redundancy. Any other solution to this problem cannot and should not be acceptable to the Government.
- Finally, when it comes to the flexibility to employ contractual labour – companies must enjoy this flexibility but only if they bear in mind the mantra of ‘equal pay for equal work’. Contractual labour cannot be misconstrued to mean that one can employ a person to do the same job at the same place and for the same hours as a full-time employee at lower pay and without access to any medical facilities or care.
- This calls for a lot of change in the outlook of HR – for example, the courage to push for equal rights and access for contractual employees even at additional cost. Most of all, it calls for a humane outlook to labour and therein lies the real solution to India’s labour problems.

Few moments captured from the event...

