

# Managing cultural integration

In today's corporate scenario, leaders are those that make globalisation work in their organisations

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**B**USINESSES today are being hit by waves of globalisation, liberalisation and technology, resulting in a constant churn, competition and change. In such an environment, organisations have to drastically and continually reinvent themselves.

Globalisation is a trend that will have a major impact on the leaders of the future. Not only would leaders need to understand the economic implications of globalisation, they will also have to understand the legal and political implications.

Says Sisir Kumar, CEO, Intelnet Global Services, "Globalisation has removed geographical, linguistic and cultural barriers. Largely, this has been possible due to technology, communication and transfer of knowledge and awareness. Leadership in the new economy has called for a shift in the mindset which would mean being more 'outward focused'. A true global leader is one that possesses an interest in global business and utilises duality—thinking domestically as well as globally."

Moreover, in an environment where competitive pressures are rapidly increasing, leaders who can make globalisation work in their organisation's favour will have a huge competitive advantage. Given the uncertainties inherent in today's economy and the outlook for tomorrow, successful leadership in a globalised era has seen a paradigm shift. Today, leadership necessitates the ability to strategically find, motivate and deploy a diverse group of qualified people across geographies—whether through specialised skill-sets for specific functions or through a process of increasing re-

sponsibility for wide-ranging business operations, or sometimes both simultaneously, and lead through them.

Globalisation puts a premium on how well an organisation can build a bridge between different cultures and geographies. The challenge is one of building a value-creating mindset. Leadership, in today's scenario requires a person to be cross-culturally competitive and be able to navigate the complex nature of culture and understanding of businesses functioning in a global market. "Having a natural curiosity and openness to different types of people and cultures; acceptance (inclusion) of multiple perspectives and tolerance of different ways of working in a collaborative and realistic understanding of the demands on a senior executive in a global environment always helps a leader," says Naresh Wadiwa, president, India and SAARC, Cisco.

As increasing numbers of Indian companies spread their wings overseas, the primary challenge for Indian leaders is recruiting and managing a global workforce. Apart from talent acquisition, skill incubation or talent development in emerging markets is another challenge for the leader. Handling mergers and acquisitions successfully, is important—coming together of two companies is not about balance-sheets' merger, or distribution channels coming together, but about people coming together along with their values and cultures.

A leader must always take into consideration its employees, as you can have the most forward-looking vision and strategy, but unless you have a passionate and committed team to execute it, you



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cannot translate your vision into reality. Also there should be heterogeneity of people. Bringing in people from different cultures and with different skill-sets can be useful as a heterogeneous mix of people helps in the process of change.

"The focus should be to facilitate inclusion in this diverse workforce and create space for each employee to reach his/her full potential. Moreover, the globalisation plans require innovative and disruptive business models unlike

any the company has seen before. We at Cisco, work across geographies and organisations to pull together project teams with the right mix of people to get optimal results on the right task, regardless of location. And the challenge is to

source and develop these new capabilities ahead of business needs," adds Wadiwa.

According to HR experts, awareness, skills and knowledge of multiple cultures are necessary when managing a diverse workforce. Management strategists view these cultural shifts like the movement of waves in an ocean where each successive wave of technology brings with it a corresponding value-shift. Managing cultural integration may be the single most effective skill to warrant the survival of an organisation in a constantly changing global economy.

"Indian leaders have for several years not just been doing business with, but successfully initiating and managing global takeovers in diverse countries and continents. A significant number of large and mid-sized Indian companies across industry verticals have facilities and business interests in one or more countries and are on their way to becoming successful global companies," avers Kumar. "Moreover, globalisation has taught Indian CEOs to be more outward-focused, think and dream big and not be afraid to take risks," he adds.

Leadership is needed at all levels and there just is not enough of it to go around. In Indian organisations, leadership is mostly premised on functional excellence favouring and harnessing superior technical and managerial knowledge and neglecting soft skills and attitudes. The task of a leader is to identify and nurture talent. Developing talent is a priority at all levels of the organisation. Young and emerging leaders at the workplace must be offered multiple role-models who can mentor them and enable them to create their own distinctive form of leadership.

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