

VOICE & DATA

The Business of Communications



BUILDING INDIA'S TELECOM TALENT POOL



ECOSYSTEM LEADERS SHARE IDEAS, EXPERIENCES AND THE WAY FORWARD





—**Manoranjan Mohapatra**
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“WE START COMPETING TOO SOON AS OPPOSED TO COLLABORATING. WE HAVE TO COLLABORATE TO MEET OUR CHALLENGES”

With the coming of new age technologies in the telecom sector, what changes do you foresee?

Now the revolution is happening at the bottom i.e., at the consumer level. The DTH industry is completely revolutionised with service providers. The content is available, through internet, through Skype, Youtube, Facebook, you have a choice of the service provider content. What really happens is, it's more design thinking. It's more in terms of who the user is and what solutions you are using. People have a time shortage. The day has fixed 24 hrs and can't be extended. Within this time frame, the person who makes the people's life easy is the one who will win. This has to be practised for people to experience. It's no more a B2B; now it's a B2B2C system in the businesses.

There were 12-13 mobile service providers and in the last 3-4 years, half a dozen of them disappeared. Look at the airline services. There was a time when there were several airline services in India. Very soon all airless may get merged in one or two entities.

From a skills and competency point of view, our method of teaching and our method of evaluation etc is still a fair amount of legacy. The thought process has to change.

What are the challenges in meeting these expectations?

As the industries go through automation they have to think about how to do more for less. But if the business model is how to make 500 people work in Europe then it's basically a wrong construct. Now the IT industry is not going to die because of this. Let's go back and look at the industrial revolution. The bullock cart owners with well-maintained bulls were the most advanced. The moment the automobiles came in, the animal-driven carts died. It is the inability to see the change and hold on to your values for long is what was wrong. The industry didn't die. The industry grew. Some adapted quickly, some took time and that made the difference in who reached where in life. Same is happening

in regards to AI, ML etc. We are reacting to a situation than forecasting about when AI happens, how we are going to position in the right opportunity.

We're holding on to our old values for long, even in education. We're judging people on how much they learn rather than how quickly they learn new things. I personally think adaptability has to be taught. Your mindset has to be tuned to how to adapt to the change. The change has to come at the cost of time, money and infrastructure. It has to be leading the revolution. The government sector funding the education has come down rapidly. Someone has to fund the education. The private sector institutions are not going to wait for 5-7 years to get the benefit of investment.

Do you have some thoughts about how this change can be brought about?

We can't go to the grass roots and change the system at the lowest level. But the industry people can collaborate and train skilled people at the graduate level. If the skill training is done by the industry people, then it's easier because the industry would have a stake in it and they would take the success of the training programmes more seriously. Industries know better than the academics the needs of the industry.

Is there some such initiative in the pipeline in the industry?

Not really. There may be something in the initial stages, but we are fragmented as industry bodies too. We're too worried about who steals the thunder. And we start competing too soon as opposed to collaborating. When cross-service provider companies collaborated in the early generation mobile technology, sms traffic was allowed, sms traffic multiplied and the revenue generated was much larger in volume. So, we have to collaborate to meet our challenges.

Is there some such initiative at your organisation?

At the larger Mahindra level there is talk of Mahindra university etc., but it's too early to talk about it in detail.

What would be the important areas in the industries as far as employment generation is concerned?

As much the operators would like the 5G to come a little slowly, they can't control it. It will come soon. Telecom industry is evolving fast. Investment cycles are shrinking too soon. But we are part of an environment which is becoming weaker and weaker financially. Opportunities will be there. The OTT phenomenon will perpetuate further. A lot of information would be shared and would be available. There will be new consumption of video, audio etc. What appears to be an attractive technology 3-5 years from today, suddenly becomes redundant. What will bring down cost is speed, IoT, Cloud, AI and ML. Earlier, consumer behaviour is studied by the groups of women, children, professional men etc. Now the consumer behaviour is studied by the individual choices. This can only happen with speed, Big Data Analytics and AI and ML. If the network knows a consumer's preferences, it will give him or her only those preferences. People will pay more only if it helps them in making their life easier or making their life easy or if it's an SME, if it helps it earn more. Cloud mode of delivery is significantly cheaper than the on-premise system. If some other technology comes to unsettle cloud, then cloud will die.

When you're hiring people, what are some of the observations?

There are 2 kinds of recruiters. One set wants the people ready who will run the challenge today. They look for people who have the skill competency rather than the ability to learn new things. I belong to a school where I was taught to hire for attitude. Teaching attitude is not easy. The pressure to deliver makes us go for the readymade resource here and now. If an employee has potential but if the industry has to invest in him/her for 6 months, it's not a good thing for the industry. So people who have expertise in an area become more attractive than someone who really has a potential. The

talent definition in my HR content has performance and potential. We're hiring for performance not for potential.

Are there specific challenges that you can discuss?

Lateral hires are becoming increasingly difficult to get the right people. The challenge is the quality of resources that are available. The old-fashioned IT system where people go on-site and learn on hand is still very relevant.

What's your message to the engineering colleges?

Education in general is going to become expensive; students have to contribute a lot more because faculty with industry experience will demand a lot of money as salary. There should be more industry-affiliated collaborative programmes. More importantly, focus should be on what would be important 3 years from now rather than on what is important now.

Is there any role you see for the govt in all this?

Industry and vision that are required have to be long term say, 5-7 years. No private investor is going to take risks for a 7 years horizon. Investors in infrastructure and skill competencies want to have return in 3-4 years. Hence, some support is required if you want to improve the quality of institution.

Do you think that there are areas of concern in the telecom sector?

For sure the system will correct itself and get there. Why should you let someone else get there if you have a leadership position? How do you keep your leadership position? Do we want to give away part of the market because we did not change in time adequately, or do we go for that change and make it happen proactively and accelerate our growth further? These are the areas which require careful thinking and planning. 🌟

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