

Developing leaders @ Infosys

INFOSYS
LEADERSHIP
INSTITUTE

WHO is a leader? What is leadership? Are leaders born or made? Can leadership be taught? Such questions have been debated across generations and civilisations. The Hindu scriptures are a rich source of material on leaders and leadership. Chanakya's *Arthashastra* was a seminal work outlining the 'art of governance' and dates back to approximately 300 B.C. Confucius sought laws of order between leaders and followers. Plato described an ideal republic with philosopher-kings providing wise and judicious leadership and with the help of his colleagues established in 387 B.C. The Academy – a school for leadership in ancient Greece. The Italian Niccolo Machiavelli's book *The Prince* ranks as one of the important early contributions to published literature on leaders and leadership.

The word 'leader' stems from the root *leden* meaning 'to travel' or 'show the way' and appeared in the English language in the early 14th century. The term 'leadership' followed some five centuries later.

The early focus of the study of leaders and leadership was at a macro societal level. It was in the context of governance of societies and communities. Later, the Industrial Age provided the context for the creation of 'managers' and 'management'. Theories rooted in the disciplines of military history, economics and scientific management were the researcher's response to the challenges of the Industrial Age. The post-Industrial Age, characterised by the knowledge era has brought the spotlight onto 'leaders' and 'leadership'. Research on this theme during the 20th century has thrown up a number of theories and models. The table on page 40 gives a broad overview

of the evolution of leadership models and associated theories in the 20th century:

The shift from 'great man (trait) theories' to behavioural theories brought in the all-important dimension of 'leadership development'. The fundamental premise in the behavioural theories is



Today, leadership is a much taught and researched discipline in management schools, while 'corporate universities' are the corporate world's responses to the challenges of leadership and leadership development.

that 'leadership is a set of behaviours and actions' which can be partly, if not fully, acquired. GE's Crotonville facility is one of the early attempts at formal leadership development in the business world.

Today, 'leadership' is a much-

taught and researched discipline in most management schools. A new genre of learning centres, termed 'corporate universities' is the corporate world's explicit response to the challenges of leadership. A number of consulting organisations

have focused explicitly on offering 'leadership development' services to the corporate world. In the academic world, research on 'leadership' has become a multi-disciplinary subject. Organisational frameworks such as the one by Malcolm

A view of the Infosys campus in Bangalore.





The goal of the Infosys Leadership Institute is to groom and develop leaders from promising Infoscions.

Baldrige have given explicit recognition to the role of leadership and leadership development in corporate entities that aim at the 'built to last' concept.

The current thinking on 'leadership development' can be placed in the following broad segments:

- Identification of the competencies relevant to leadership.
- Evolving elements and offerings that support the development of these competencies.

A number of approaches to leadership development exist, from the classical 'intellectual construct' – traditional classroom-based instruction guided by academics with a research and teaching orientation to the action-oriented 'experiential learning' mechanisms. In the following paragraphs we discuss the philosophy and approach towards leadership development at Infosys Technologies Ltd.

Leadership development in Infosys

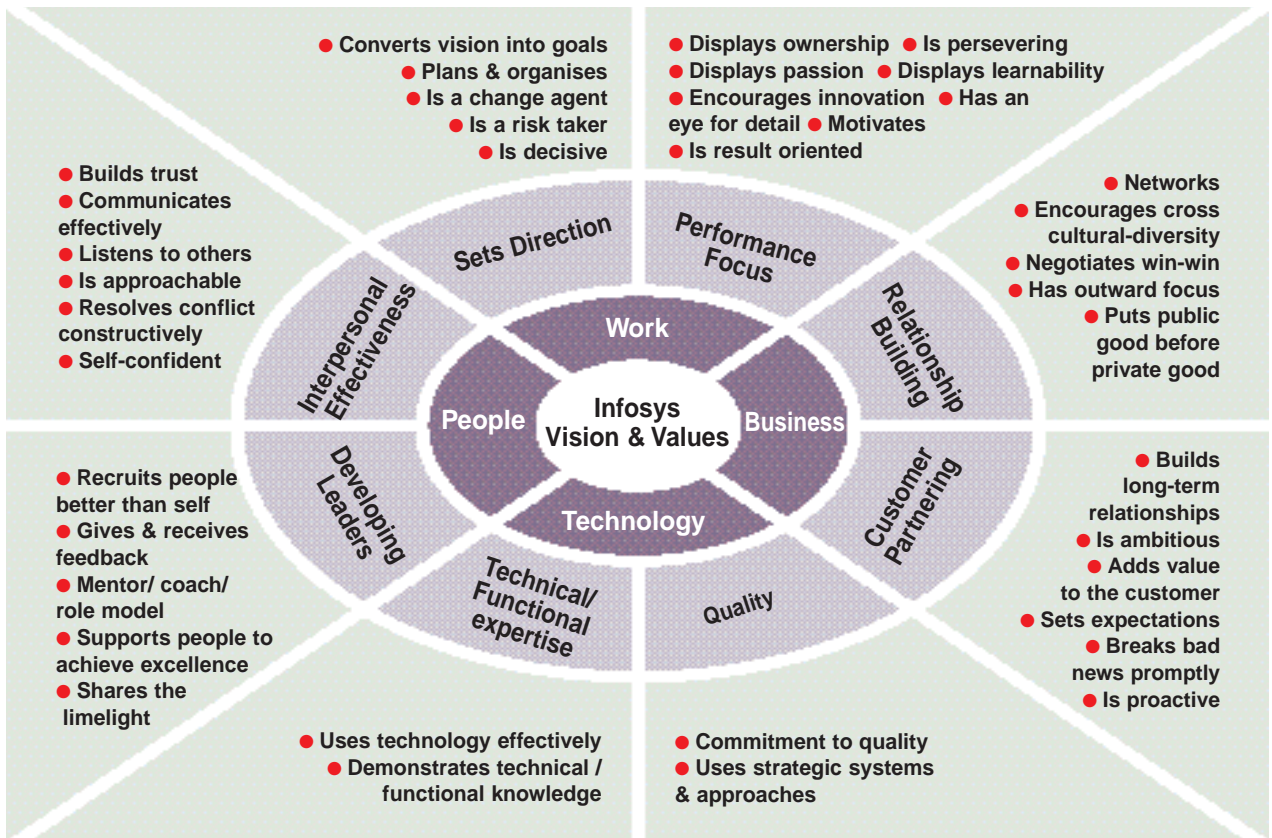
The vision of Infosys is to create an organisation that is 'built to last', and has the agility to manage ambiguity and uncertainty under all circumstances. It was in keeping with this vision that Narayana N. R. Murthy, the founder and former CEO of the company, carefully

put together the Management Council – an advisory body that took strategic decisions about the company. During the Management Council meetings it was found that young achievers in the company were hesitating to come forth with their suggestions. On encouraging them to speak, Murthy found their suggestions and thoughts had a lot of substance and could help the company significantly. These people had not contributed to the discussions not because they had nothing of value to add, but because they were afraid of transgressing hierarchy. This bothered Murthy significantly and from this concern was born his grand plan to build a leadership institute that would groom and develop leaders from promising Infoscions, irrespective of hierarchy and give them the opportunity to shape the future of the company they were helping to build.

The fundamental goal of the Infosys Leadership Institute (ILI) is to fulfil this stated need. The institute was created in early 2001 to assist Infosys in responding to specific challenges of the present and future, as described below:

- To prepare the company to man-

Generic group	Focus	Premise	Major concerns
Great man - trait theories	Identify the traits leaders possess	Primary source of leadership effectiveness lay in the personal traits of leaders	Does not address the 'how' dimension of leadership
Behavioural theories	What do leaders do?	Identify determinants of behaviour of leaders	Does not address the situation, the followers
Contingency theories	Interaction between the qualities of the leader and the situational factors	The appropriate leadership style is dependent on the situation and other factors.	The categorisation of situations at a meta level
Transformational/ charismatic leadership	Individual as the leader	Leadership is rooted in leaders and is a capability partly inherited and partly acquired/ acquirable	Current status



age its phenomenal growth.

- To prepare Infosys to face the complexities of the market and the rapidly changing environment.
- To create higher customer value through 'thought leadership'.

Leadership competencies

The starting point for creating a robust leadership development process is defining leadership competencies. Leadership competencies exist in the context of the organisation's vision and its core values. The soul of our leadership competencies rest in the vision statement of Infosys which reads: 'We will be a globally respected corporation that provides best of breed business solutions, leveraging technology, delivered by best in class people.' To achieve this vision, leadership competencies have been defined along four broad dimensions stated below:

- Work
- People
- Technology

● Business

Each of these is further amplified into smaller operational elements, as illustrated in the graphic above.

These competencies were identified through a process of debate and discussion with an initial competency set developed through benchmarking studies of formal leadership development systems across the world.

The 'nine pillar' model of leadership development

The nine pillars are the operational elements for leadership development in Infosys (see graphic on page 43). This model was developed after careful research of the processes followed by 18 of the most successful global companies.

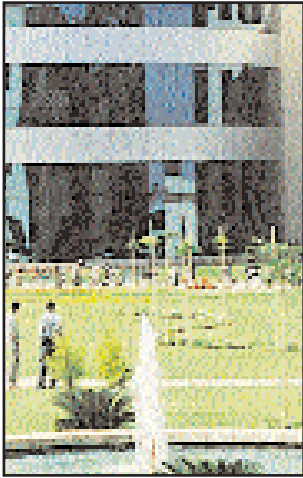
Each pillar has its own unique importance to the development of leadership competencies at the individual level. An individual may choose one or more of these pillars for his or her own development. Participation in most of them is

optional, except for the 360-degree feedback, which is the starting point of the leadership journey. The premise is that learning in general and adult learning in particular is varied and a model of leadership development which caters to multiple learning modes is that much more effective.

In the following paragraphs we have outlined the contours of each of these pillars.

360-degree feedback

The 360-degree feedback is a method of systematically collecting data about a person's performance and capabilities from a wide range of co-workers. This includes peers, direct reportees, the manager and customers (both internal and external). It is a structured method of collecting and processing data and provides the employee an opportunity to reflect on this valuable information. ILI uses a comprehensive tool that is aligned to the leadership competencies. The feed-



At Infosys senior managers are involved in leadership development, based on the belief that “the company is the campus, the business is the curriculum and leaders shall teach”.

back received from this 360-degree process is used as the basis for the preparation of individual personal development plans (PDP's), which are the blueprints that guide the individual in acquiring new skills and enhancing existing skills, all aligned to the basic leadership competencies model. Each individual is assigned an ILI faculty member to help prepare and actionise the PDP

Development assignments

Development assignments (DAs) are a traditional and potent form of leadership development. High-potential employees are given experience in diverse functions through internal job rotations and cross-functional assignments. DAs enable employees to gather practical leadership skills outside his or her zone of experience.

Infosys Culture (IC) workshops

These workshops help participants understand the core values, purpose and processes followed in the context of leadership development. The design of these workshops allows for extensive interaction among participants leading to reinforcement of the Infosys culture, and ensuring enough empowerment to guarantee adherence and refinement to the culture of the organisation.

Development relationships

These are one-on-one relationships in work settings that facilitate the sharing and transfer of knowledge and experience between individuals. The Infosys leadership development model views mentoring as a developmental relationship in the context of leadership development. A 'mentoring for leadership' pilot programme is operational and learnings from this programme will be used to refine and extend this element of leadership

development across the organisation.

Leadership skills training

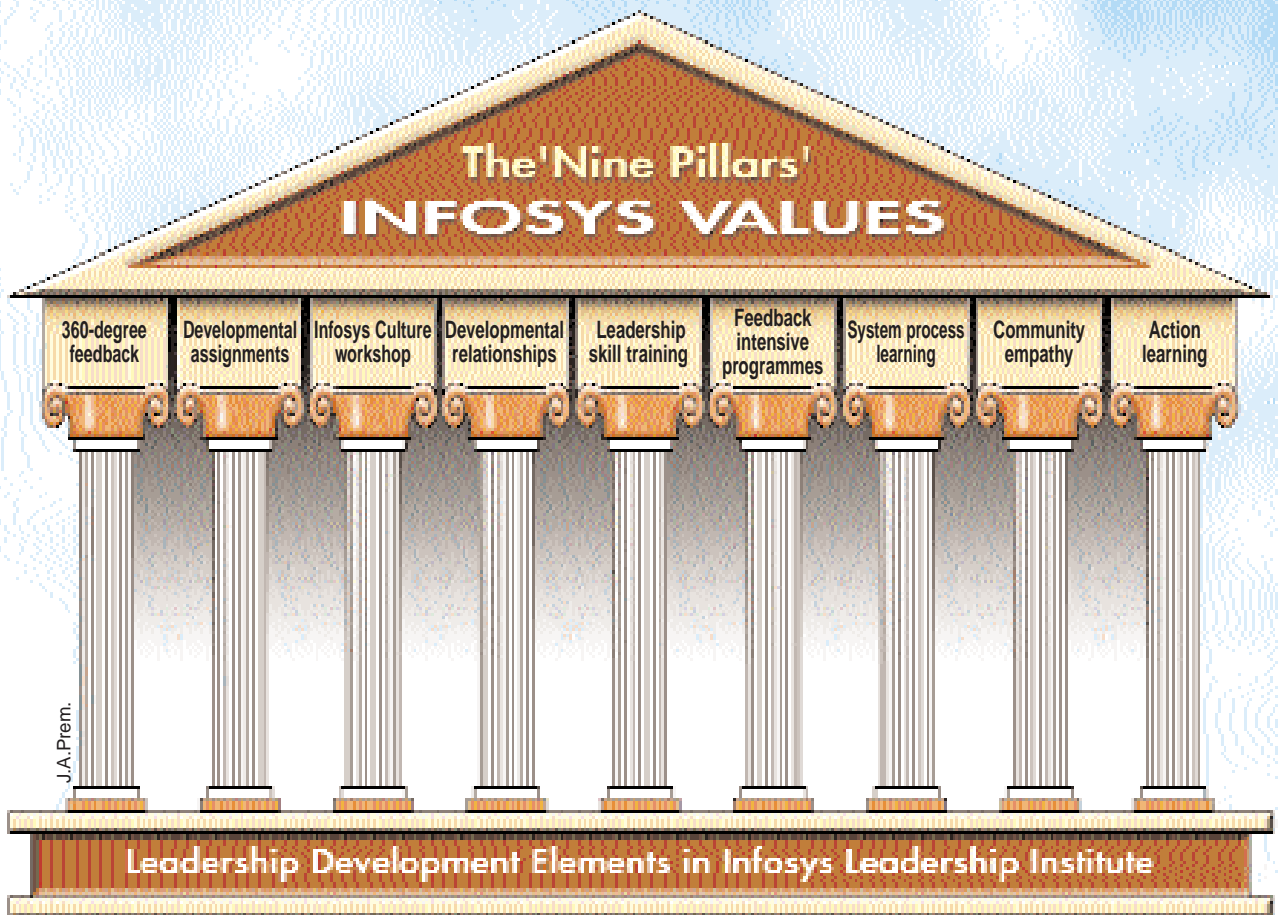
This is a process by which employees of the organisation go through a series of learning interventions on topics of relevance to leadership. ILI has started the process with the 'Leaders Teach Series'. These are workshops conducted by the Board of Directors with help from the ILI faculty. This series includes workshops by the Chairman and Chief Mentor, Narayana Murthy, and Nandan Nilekani, the Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer, and other members of the board. The 'Leaders Teach Series' resulted from the belief that “the company is the campus, the business is the curriculum, leaders shall teach”. A study of successful global companies will show that it is essential for senior management to be fully involved and committed to the development of future leaders.

Feedback intensive programmes

These are intensive behavioural interventions, which are based on formal and informal feedback received from individuals that the employee interfaces with. They are structured in a manner so that the participants receive and give feedback in a non-threatening environment and yield a workable plan for setting goals for continued personal and professional development and strategies for attaining them.

Systemic process learning

This is an intervention that enables participants to view an organisation as a whole system comprising innumerable interacting sub-systems. It yields plans for continuous improvement in systemic processes and details how an individual will initiate such improvements.



Action learning

This is a team-based real-time experience used to solve real, systemic and unresolved organisational problems. It is a pragmatic process aimed at yielding a resolution to the 'problem' or 'issue' that has been identified, and a workable plan for setting goals for continued development, with strategies for attaining them.

Community empathy

ILI aspires to create, on a regular and structured basis, opportunities for high-potential candidates to enrol themselves in causes outside Infosys that contribute to the greater good of the less fortunate. The importance of community empathy in overall leadership development is in line with the fun-

damental belief of the organisation that social conscience needs to be nurtured and enhanced in each one of its present and potential leaders.

The leadership journey

The leadership journey commences with the selection of high-potential employees of the organisation. The top management of Infosys identifies a pool of candidates based on their past performance and an assessment of leadership potential. The formal duration of the leadership journey is three years. These identified individuals are classified as 'high potentials'. Each high-potential employee has one ILI faculty member assigned to him/her. The faculty member acts as a guide in the leadership journey with the creation and actionising of the PDP.

The faculty member provides support in implementing the individual change objectives. The majority of the 'high potentials' have undertaken at least one or more of the leadership skill training interventions. The 'high potentials' have access to the pilot 'Mentoring for leadership' programme. ILI faculty members in their role as internal consultants enable 'high potentials' to undertake various interventions that help to resolve real business issues. ■

(The faculty of the Infosys Leadership Institute, Mysore, have authored this article.)