



Wipro's way

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," says Azim Premji, Chairman, Wipro Corporation, in the half-day session he regularly teaches in every 'Wipro Leaders Programme'. "Develop leaders under you, not only because it is good for the business, but because it will give you tremendous personal satisfaction." That, in brief, explains the moving spirit and energy behind Wipro's drive for developing leaders from within.

The importance Wipro assigns to leadership development goes back many decades to its early years when it was a relatively unknown company. Even at that time, Wipro went to the best college campuses to recruit. In fact, many members of the company's top management team today are from those campuses.

If leadership was important then, it is even more so in the times ahead. Recent economic trends have shown how everything can change abruptly and pervasively, in the twinkling of an eye. Leaders have to front-end the change. They have to interpret the future to the best of their ability and reassure those who are with them. They have to take charge, regardless of the uncertainty they may themselves face. Most important, they must motivate the best talent to remain with them and continue to contribute. Sustainable competitive advantage comes not so much from technology and process, but from an organisation's people. Leadership thus becomes the most important, even if a little elusive, force behind the continued success of any organisation.

But where do we find these leaders?

Are they born or can they be made? Should organisations just recruit ready-made leaders from outside or invest time and energy in developing them?

The correct answer is that leaders are to some extent born and some extent made. It is important to select those who have the potential for leadership and also to develop their intrinsic leadership strengths. Similarly, while it is important to bring in fresh talent from outside, at senior levels, which can shake up the organisation, it is equally important to develop leaders from within. Leaders from within have the advantage of having grown up with the core values of the organisation. Outside talent is scarce and untried, so unless it is specific talent one needs to change, there is merit in growing talent within.

This leadership development process can best be described in the following five steps that Wipro follows.

Articulating what we mean by leadership

The biggest problem with a concept such as 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, similar to a film hero! Sometimes, these include qualities that are 'irreconcilable opposites' such as a strong aggressive leader who chews competition, but at the same time is an extremely harmonious team player! It is like looking for Attila the Hun who is kind to animals! The truth is that such supermen or women do not exist and if they do, they may be impossible to attract!

At Wipro, we decided to be more prag-



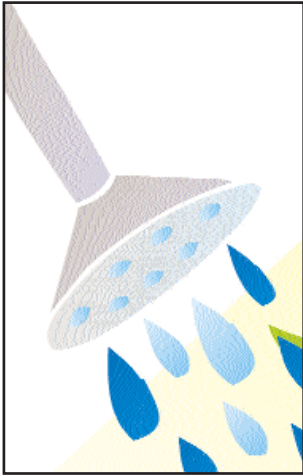
matic. We have identified eight leadership qualities after extensive research into literature, understanding best practices and validation with thought leaders. We first defined this in 1992 and have been changing these leadership qualities every year. The qualities we have defined are:

1. Customer orientation
2. Strategic thinking
3. Aggressive commitment
4. Self-confidence
5. Commitment to excellence
6. Global thinking and acting
7. Problem solving
8. Building star performers and teams

These qualities are illustrated by examples of leadership behaviours that are observable, thus making it easy to understand and identify the competencies.

Select for leadership

When we go to college campuses, we look for leadership qualities in



Wipro believes that leadership training is not an event, but a process, and has hence created leadership training programmes based on the lifecycle pattern of development.

addition to academic achievements. We ask ourselves a simple question: Will we ever make this person a member of the top management in Wipro? If the answer is yes, we consider him or her further. Also, since all the selection processes clearly look for the behaviours illustrated in the leadership competencies, it is easy to identify whether these competencies are present or absent.

We use these qualities to select young leaders on the campus and we also use it when we select very senior people, even though we may look for higher levels of proficiency for them. The axiom is simple: If we know what we are looking for, we will certainly find it, even if it takes a little longer!

Measure them

Every year, all leaders above the middle management level have to go through a 360-degree feedback. Every leader receives feedback from his or her juniors, peers and managers. Initially, it is a very traumatic process because to many it is a complete reversal of the 'Confidential Report' process. Here, the juniors give an anonymous feedback, which many times is a humbling process if not a shattering one! The report that each leader receives compares his/ her score with the scores of the peers.

But feedback is not enough. Most people prefer feedback as long as it is positive! We have another programme called 'Winds of Change' for converting feedback into action.

Leadership training programmes

Leadership training is not an event, but a process. We have created training programmes along the lifecycle pattern of leadership development. There are five programmes.

1. Entry Level Programme (ELP): This is the first programme a fresh

A leader is not simply someone who, by hook or by crook, has managed to occupy a chair. Leadership involves far more than that. True leadership is based not on force, favour or factionalism; rather, it is based on vision, integrity and courage.

A true leader does not lead because he can manage to mobilise a mob of undesirable elements to advance his cause; he leads because he has a clear vision of what people can achieve together and the commitment to see it through. He does not use patronage – and worse – to win the loyalty of his followers; he consistently acts on principle and leads on the basis of the respect that integrity engenders.

A true leader does not survive because he is able to pit one group against another and to deftly shift sides and causes at each turn of the tide; he is an individual of courage and conviction, ready to stand on principle and committed to unify rather than divide.

Leaders should make bold to examine and question the guidelines and rules handed to them from funding agencies, the State, or whomsoever. The role of leaders is critical to harmony – harmony with the State, harmony between members, harmony between tiers of the movement, and harmony between the cooperative and non-members.

Leaders should develop a sixth sense to critically assess innovations without stepping into the

V. Kurien is Chairman of the Gujarat Cooperative Milk Marketing Federation and the chief architect of India's White Revolution.



V.Kurien

areas where the professional is responsible. Leaders who like to keep others on a short leash are doing the wrong thing. Power 'with' is always far greater than power 'over'. And finally, education of the membership is a prime responsibility of leaders. It comes not from preaching, but from example.

When I think of how effective leadership in the face of crisis made all the difference, the following episode comes to mind:

On December 2, 1983 a Member of Parliament raised an unstarred question in the Rajya Sabha. The question read, "Whether the Government's attention has been drawn to an article which appeared in the October-November 1983 issue of *Illustrated Weekly* describing the White Revolution as a blatant lie and in which dairies' functioning and the works and policy of learned dairy scholar Dr Kurien have also been severely criticised and, if so, what is the genuineness of the points raised in the said article."

In reply, the then Minister of State for Agriculture, Yogendra Makwana said that it had been decided to evaluate the working of NDDB (National Dairy Development Board) as also the projects implemented by it. The recurring attacks on the NDDB and the lukewarm attitude of the Government had been galling the NDDB staff, which had put up with a lot of lies about them. The article in the *Illustrated Weekly*, so full of falsehoods and insinuations, the staff had felt, should have been more fully

answered and by the Minister of Agriculture himself, not his deputy.

The NDDB/IDC staff thought that the time had come to indicate their distress in a concrete form. They called a meeting at which a decision was taken to resign en masse. Eleven days after the Minister of State had answered in the Rajya Sabha, 736 professionals – almost the entire staff of the NDDB (326 engineers and draughtsmen, 231 animal husbandry experts, 120 dairy technologists and 59 others) sent in their resignations to me (as the then chairman of the NDDB) through the Secretary of NDDB, R.P. Aneja. Aneja not just forwarded their resignations to me, but also attached his own resignation letter.

In my reply to him I refused to accept the en masse resignations and said, "Our work has been evaluated many times by many agencies both foreign and Indian and each time, these evaluations have recognised the good work done by NDDB/IDC. The results of our work are there for all to see. We can, therefore, be quite sure that any high level objective and impartial inquiry would only be in our favour and will, in fact, expose the machinations of a few who do not desire the type of changes we are trying to bring about to benefit the farmers. I have a feeling that this attack is more against me personally than against NDDB. As such, if the situation so warrants, it is I who should resign and not the officers of NDDB."

The mass resignations of most of

the NDDB staff and the confidence they had reposed in me as their leader came as a shock to the Ministry of Agriculture. It sought the first possible opportunity to retrieve the situation. In response to a calling attention motion moved in the Lok Sabha on December 21, 1983, the Minister of Agriculture himself made a statement and said, "...the Government considers that the action of the officers of the National Dairy Development Board to resign en masse was an over-reaction to the statement given by the Minister of State in Parliament. The Government is glad that the Chairman has not accepted the resignations and is confident that the officers would continue to work with dedication..."



Leaders need to be coached specifically for certain skills and mentored by other successful leaders.

recruit goes through. The programme helps the newcomer in becoming a good management employee, and deals with areas such as how to become an effective team member, how to participate in meetings, communicating one's thoughts and feelings to others and so on.

2. New Leaders' Programme (NLP): This is designed for the first

time manager. Many people continue to be more comfortable managing technology rather than people. This programme teaches them how to build teams, communicate, lead according to situations and coach others.

3. Wipro Leaders' Programme (WLP): This is addressed at the managers' manager who still wants to manage the teams directly. From

etc.
RAVIKANTH



**“Thanks for coming young man.
But we're looking for somebody with
followership skills for the cashier post.”**

here on, it is a company-wide programme.

4. Business Leaders' Programme (BLP): This programme is for 'General Managers in waiting' who need to look at the business as a whole and understand bottomline implications. It covers relevant elements of finance and environmental scanning.

5. Strategic Leaders' Programme (SLP): This is the highest programme aimed at Chief Executives. It helps them design and develop strategies in a global environment.

Participating effectively in each of these programmes is necessary to move to the next step on the ladder.

Exposure and an opportunity to implement

While focused training is useful, it is not enough. True learning comes from exposure to various situations. It is important to ensure that we create opportunities for people to grow by moving across various functions, roles and by living and working in different countries. Leaders need to be coached specifically for certain skills and mentored by other successful leaders. Developing leaders takes time and patience, but in the long run, it is worth the investment.

A true leader does more than managing tasks or people. The leader has to create something new that has a personal stamp on it. That takes more than competencies or qualities. It has to do a lot with the passion the leader brings into the organisation. Gone are the days when a leader could get by on administrative skills alone, or for that matter, just rely on power and authority to get things done. The leader must be able to value add by providing new perspectives to a problem situation. Sometimes, it is not ability but attitude that is at the root cause of the issue. At that

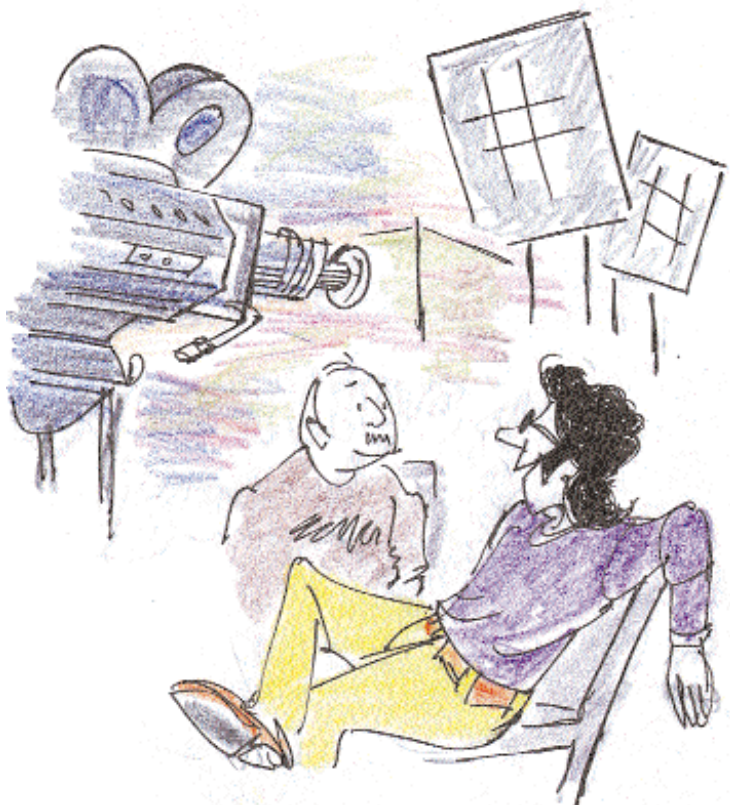
time, the leader should be able to listen.

Finally, leaders create enthusiasm. Somebody once said that art is the ability to define new relationships among existing entities to create a different meaning. Leadership, too, must help people find a new meaning to what they do, one that energises them to think beyond what they have been doing all along. An old timer recently said, "The most satisfying part of my job under this leader

was that I was able to achieve things which I would have never thought I was capable of." In essence, leaders do not spend all their time assessing capabilities or even building them. They help their people discover their potential by themselves. ■

(The author is Corporate Vice-President, Human Resources Development, Wipro.)

etc.
RAVIKANTH



“That’s the art of playing the leading role – you make the stunt double do a damn good job.”