

EXPERIENCES FROM REAL LIFE

By R. Gopalakrishnan

The ideas and lessons learnt by the author over a long career of 48 years have been converted into slide/AV presentation modules. Each module can be presented in 45 minutes with 30 minutes for Q&A

A. Tata Experiences

A.1. ORGANISATIONAL TRANSFORMATION: Tata experiences and lessons

This presentation begins with a brief overview of how India has evolved quite distinctively as a nation and as a market. It then focuses on the period from 1991 when economic liberalization began. How did the Tata leadership plan and execute the transformation of the group? What are some of the lessons learnt?

A.2. NURTURING A CULTURE OF INNOVATION: Tata experiences and lessons

This presentation considers innovation more from a “biology” point of view rather than a “physics” point of view. It seeks to make some distinctive points about “natural” versus “programmed” innovation, about moving from “first-in-the-world” to “difficult-to-replicate”, and about viewing the “invisible” part of innovation, all based on the Tata journey and experiences over 100 years.

A.3. DEVELOPING LEADERS: Tata experiences and lessons

Tata is an unusual organization in so far as it has existed and flourished in its original form for over 100 years. The Chairman, Ratan Tata, is only the fifth in over a century. And TATA grew an indigenous and professional management pool at a time when the country had no management education or training infrastructure. The experiences have provided lessons for the future.

TATA is attempting to develop future leadership by being centered on:

- I. Authentic Leadership
- II. Leveraging Cultural Diversity and Inclusiveness

- III. Spreading innovation throughout the organization
- IV. Heightened sensitivity to community and sustainability

B. Leadership and Innovation

B.1. INNOVATION CULTURE: Myths, Realities, Ideas

Innovation is the biggest buzzword in management nowadays. In the minds of people, the word carries mental prototypes, but the images vary widely. This presentation covers some myths and some realities. The presentation suggests a few innovative ways to think about innovation itself.

B.2. NAVIGATING THROUGH UNCERTAINTY: an unusual viewpoint

There is no doubt that business faces increasing challenge and uncertainty. There are many prescriptions for success – be flexible, trim costs, beware of complacency, etc. They come through as homilies. This presentation offers an inspiring and unusual viewpoint, based on Nature. It suggests that we might benefit by leveraging rather than suppressing turbulence.

B.3. WHY BAD THINGS HAPPEN TO GOOD INSTITUTIONS: Some lessons

In this presentation, certain case histories on the rise and decline will be presented from general history (The Ottoman Empire, The Ming Dynasty) ,from Industrial Development (Shipping, British Manufacturing, Disc Drive Industry) and from Corporate History (Ford Motors, General Motors). The broad patterns will be highlighted and some general lessons drawn.

B.4. THE ANATOMY OF FOOLISHNESS: why smart folks will continue to do stupid things

This presentation attempts to define “folly” and supports the definition with examples from history—Rehoboam of Israel, Montezuma the Aztec and the Chinese Opium War. The presentation brings out the point that smart people could collectively be very foolish under certain circumstances. Therefore, as has happened in the past, smart people will continue to do stupid things in the future as well. A few pointers on remedies will be suggested – but only pointers. The speaker has no permanent remedy for stupidity!!

B.5. SUCCESS IS A THIEF: anybody to somebody to nobody

We spend our lives trying to convert ourselves from an “anybody” to a “somebody” by pursuing success. But the very attainment of that success robs us of the endowments which contributed to our rise in the first place. That is when a “somebody” becomes a “nobody”. Like a thief takes away your very valuable possessions when you are not aware of it, success also does so. A number of examples from icons in business history will be mentioned. The presentation will focus on how to be watchful of the pitfalls of success.

B.6. DECISION MAKING: why we lead our lives through intuition but pretend to live through rationality

Our education and social training drive us to becoming highly analytical and left brained. Yet experience shows that some of our biggest decisions are taken through intuition and the right brain. For example, should I buy this company or not? Or, should I marry this person or not? Or, should I appoint this person to a senior manager’s position or not? Or, should I enter this new business or not?

Attention will be drawn to the fact that we are spending our lives pretending to be analytical but, in reality, we use intuition to take the “final leap”. How can one get the balance?

This presentation is based on the author’s book THE CASE OF THE BONSAI MANAGER: lessons for managers on intuition. (Penguin, 2007)

B.7. UNLEARNING AND RELEARNING: the manager’s three worlds

This presentation serves as a sort of reflective master-class on leadership. Through 45 years’ experience in his business management career, the speaker addresses common-place and frequently encountered dilemmas, such as:

- What is the trajectory that a business career takes?
- How can I enjoy what I am doing in my job?
- Who will teach me the lessons that are not taught?
- Why am I my biggest enemy?

The ability to become self-aware and to find answers to these questions can help successful executives to avoid getting derailed by their own follies and foibles.

This presentation is based on the author's book WHEN THE PENNY DROPS: learning what is not taught. (Penguin, 2010)

B.8. A MARKETING APPROACH TO CAREERS: viewing the company and bosses as customers

Most of us feel quite smug about our own accomplishments. This smugness increases as we get selected into elite companies. Our sense of privilege and rights takes precedence over any sense of obligation and service. A career can be vastly different if we can view the employer and boss as customer – and yet not be an apple polishing, cringing subordinate. There are challenges; the remedies are discussed through real life anecdotes.

This presentation is based on the author's book WHAT THE CEO REALLY WANTS FROM YOU: 4 As for managerial success. (Harper Collins, 2012).

B.9. OBLIGATIONS, SELF-AWARENESS AND INTUITION: lessons from real-life experiences in followership and leadership

This presentation contains valuable insights from the author's trilogy of published books. It has three messages that we all know but fail to recall at crucial times.

First, that a career is born and developed in the crucibles of duty and obligation. Most of us spend our career in quite the opposite mode. The big secret to success in career is the same as for success in any consumer-oriented industry: Sense, Serve and Satisfy the customer – which is your organization and your boss.

Second, that there is a hidden enemy who prevents each manager from achieving the full potential of that person. That enemy is very close to the manager. There are cases and lesson on self-awareness.

Third, that a manager can rely on analysis only up to a point. After the value and powers of analysis are fully exhausted, the manager has to rely on intuition. What is intuition and how can it be nurtured?

B.10. LESSONS FROM A LONG CAREER: shaping young minds

I have enjoyed a 45 year corporate career. Three decades in India's most Indian Multinational, HINDUSTAN UNILEVER, and one and a half decades at India's most multinational Indian Company, TATA. There are many lessons about ambition, career, relationships, values and dilemmas. A few have been selected for sharing with young managers in the hope that they may benefit from such sharing.

B.11. AUTHENTICITY IN LEADERSHIP: before shooting the arrow, dip its point in honey [to be finalised]

Commonly, authenticity is viewed as just being yourself and saying exactly what is on your mind. But if you did that literally, you would have a disastrous set of relationships. So, quite contrary to popular perception, authenticity has to be "managed." Authenticity is perceived to go hand-in-hand with integrity, which comprises three distinct elements: inspiring trust, confronting reality and acting on those realities. Integrity is not a characteristic but a dynamic manifestation of authenticity.

(Zingardo / church-chaplain / Sally meets Harry / Auschwitz)

B.12. PREDICTIONS, LUCK AND DESPAIR: the pillars of real life and learning to confront realities [to be finalised]

This presentation is about the inaccuracy of experts' predictions, our awareness of this inaccuracy and our constant search for more experts' views. Luck and despair are our inevitable part of existence and history points to lessons on how to reconcile good luck and bad luck.

(Pistorius)

B.13. STRATEGY UNDER RAPID CHANGE: more or less and its relevance

Every generation thinks and feels that it is going through rapid change, more so than the previous generation. It is true, but the tools to cope are also better. This leaves us better prepared to handle change. But there are always areas to debate about whether strategic planning is still relevant for business enterprises. If so, do we need more or less? This presentation covers some practical experiences and lessons.

B.14. INNOVATIONS, INFLECTIONS AND IMMORTALITY: some case histories [to be finalised]

In this presentation, the listener learns about the contexts in which path-breaking and socially relevant innovations occurred e.g. the ball point pen, the air-conditioner, the zip and the tea bag. Each of them turned out to be an inflection in social habits and moves.

B.15. INCULCATING INNOVATIVE AND CREATIVE THINKING: the interplay of intuition, innovation and folly

In this presentation, the author draws a few lessons from Nature on being natural as a way to nurture intuition. The experiences and programs of the Tata Group in fostering a culture of innovation are covered to provide an institutional case study. The presentation concludes by tracing the history of folly, which, anyway, can appear as the flip side of creativity and ambition.

B.16. MANAGING A FLOTILLA OF COMPANIES: some issues and lessons

A battleship represents power and strength while a flotilla represents agility and flexibility. Group of Companies can also viewed as organized like battleships or a flotilla. With the rapid emergence of EMNEs (Emerging Market multi National Enterprises) and the concept of “upmarket FDI” (capital flow from developing to developed markets), new challenges of organization have arrived. To address the resultant issue requires one to consider national culture and firm culture on the one hand, and the delicate relationship of parent and subsidiary on the other. This presentation covers some issues and lessons with respect to managing a group of companies as a flotilla.

B.17 DEVELOPING CREATIVE IDEAS THROUGH OPENNESS: the interplay of experience and inexperience

This presentation begins by debunking five of the myths about innovation because these tend to cloud the approach and mindset. There is a discussion about what ‘mindset’ really is. A helicopter view of some Tata tools used in shifting mindset follows. Finally the results of trying to accomplish the mindset shift are discussed; clearly some were successful and some not.

C. India

C.1. THE BENJAMIN BUTTON EFFECT: the distinctiveness of economic, political and social evolution in India

This presentation touches upon the distinctive features of the political, economic and social evolution of India. The facts and narratives are told in a manner that will interest business audiences in particular. Why does India display characteristics that others find difficult to comprehend? Why does India not follow the path taken by other emerging countries? Is India really that different and, if so, why? In its youth, it looks frayed and old and in its ancient traditions, it looks young and fresh—a bit like Benjamin Button!

C.2. THE INDIAN MARKET: some ideas for entry / development

International companies find entry into and development of the Indian market quite intriguing. They appreciate the distinctiveness of India as an economy and as a market. But how does that distinctiveness manifest itself practically in business terms? What specific actions can be considered by international companies? Case examples of the water purifier market, auto-plastics market and vinyl car wraps will be briefly referred to.

C.3. CONFRONTING REALITY: India's adolescent democracy and some lessons

India's middle class is expanding very rapidly as the country experiences among the fastest growth rates in per capita income that human society has ever experienced anywhere in the world. There is a clash of traditional values and modernity, specifically with regard to corruption and its influences. This presentation traces the evolution of corruption in other societies and tries to imagine how the future might turn out in India, based on others' experiences. Certain case histories on the rise and decline will be presented from general history, from Industrial Development and from Corporate History. The broad patterns will be highlighted and some general lessons drawn.

[for ppt: (i) US film on Brutal Reality, (ii) Cartoon on organized crime (private or public sector)]

C.4. CORPORATE GOVERNANCE AND CULTURAL REALITIES: why all societies cannot behave similarly with similar laws

Anglo-American legal systems dominate the Indian legal environment. Thus India has some very fine laws and legal thinking. But these ignore social and behavioural realities. This does not mean that the laws should be changed or that they are irrelevant.

This presentation first establishes the point that culture does matter. It then explores a few novel ideas. Both these have been applied to the field of corporate governance.