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Meditate on a new mindset for India

ITOSDA council member Waseem Hussain explains why understanding Indian culture is essential for successful outsourcing in India – and offers some hints

For a long time, India and innovation have been an unhappy couple. The country is famous for spiritual guidance, corrupt leadership, holy cows and slum dwellers who seem happy to live a life below the poverty line. But you hardly ever hear about breakthrough technological research originating in India. This image of lack and deficiency is both made in India as well as a common piece of fiction in the minds of people elsewhere.

Successive governments have mostly been playing with power and done little to provide meaningful healthcare, safe drinking water or useful education to their citizens. India, in the first decades after independence from colonial rule in 1947, rightly claimed that it had to learn to stand on its own feet. But it is equally true that it missed – and dismissed – almost all obvious opportunities during that time to advance.

A prohibitive as well as enigmatic framework of laws, taxes and stamp duties has discouraged investment in research and development. The people of India and the rest of the world are lucky that this has started to change.

For good reasons, businesses in highly industrialised economies that are trying to find ways to maintain their strength nowadays turn to India. A decent proportion of the large population is well educated, many of them even skilled. Labour costs are still clearly lower than in most industrialised economies, and ramping up or down teams is accommodated by service providers.

Engineered processes

More importantly, any IT or BPO services provider of importance in India can boast significant names and brands on its global client lists. Such companies have collected and analysed much knowledge of their clients' business. Many of them have re-engineered and rationalised ▶

Jugaru, from yoga to business

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▶ the processes for how that knowledge may be used. New clients will thus benefit from the accumulated insights and experience.

In the meantime, entrepreneurs and technologists are doing impressive things. For example, Indian restaurant search service Zomato is raising $100m in a fresh round of funding. It is now present in 22 countries and more than 500 cities worldwide. Flipkart, India's largest online retailer, is now pegged at $11bn. Paytm, an Indian mobile wallet brand, is valued at $2bn. Info Edge, JustDial and MakeMyTrip each are valued at around $1.7bn.

As India wants to make a big technology leap, Google is ready to help the government implement its Digital India initiative. Likewise, Cisco is gearing up to cash in on the initiative. Even very small players such as Zesscom in Mumbai are surprising everyone with their innovative mobile and web concepts.

Finally, let's not forget the operating systems installed on millions of PCs or fuel injectors embedded in motor engines around the globe that were made in India. There is a lot of "India inside", but not printed on the surface of such goods.

All this is happening while India is in the midst of properly industrialising, which started only about 15 years ago. For a national economy to industrialise you need 50 to 75 years; India has a long way to go. This needs to be kept in mind when looking to improve processes or drive organisational change by outsourcing to India.

That India has less industrial heritage is not necessarily a shortcoming, but rather can be an opportunity. It's as if engineers and managers are working on a blank sheet; they benefit from their familiarity with a shortage of resources when finding creative and lean ways to

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solve problems.

Many businesses in rich economies have been doing things in a very successful way for a long time, but their loss of economic steam calls for a new approach that India is glad to propose. The key word in this respect is *jugaar*, a colloquial Indian word that can mean an innovative fix or a simple work-around, used for solutions that bend rules.

Jugaar is an optimistic, meandering mindset that lets the engineer and entrepreneur always see a glass that is already half-full, not half-empty. It is interesting to examine this mindset and contrast it with that prevalent in societies in western Europe and north America.

Why do we in the so-called west think in a linear way? Why do we prefer to carefully plan and coordinate our activities? One useful answer can be found in our classical music. Mozart, Beethoven, Chopin, and Rachmaninov gifted us with monumental compositions, which they conceived equipped with instruments, quill feather and sheet paper. Perhaps it was only thanks to solitude that they were able to create expressive polyphonic music where a large range of

instruments are played harmonically. In many cases their music was intended to praise the god of the three monotheistic religions: a god that is unrivalled and almighty, but also lonely.

This is quite different from divine imagination in the Hindu tradition, which is the dominant belief system in India. A multitude of gods and goddesses crowd the world, sometimes living peacefully but sometimes at war; they can be envious and fallible. Their actions often have reason and purpose, yet sometimes seem random and completely dissociated from any context.

Music to our ears

Classical Indian music sometimes sounds like that. There are no compositions in the western sense. Musicians agree on rhythm, melodic progression and rules for decorative sound bites and improvise.

The modern pace of change requires businesses to cultivate both careful planning and playful improvisation. It is useful to understand *jugaar* for skills that will help the west succeed with providers in India.

The word *jugaar* stems from the word "yoga", which is of course very well known to Western culture. In Vedic mythology, which is a key source of India's culture and mentality, a person who has the ability to create optimal conditions based on a flexible way of thinking and behaving is called yogi (male) or yogini (female), but also yogaru or jugaru. These words actually mean yoga master, but an alternative definition is "magician".

Consequently, when people in India refer to innovation, they have a specific concept of magic deep in their mind. No doubt many businesses in the rich and highly industrialised part of the world could do with some magic!

7 Key success factors for successful collaboration with India

1) Contextual business analysis
India's proper industrialisation started only about 15 years ago. Keep this in mind if you are looking to optimise your processes or drive organis tional change by outsourcing to India. Its IT sector is capable of delivering what you are seeking. But when you determine business needs and solutions, don't forget to provide contextual information.
Tip: *Illustrate and emphasise the why at least as much as the what.*

2) Explicit requirements
We inevitably commu nicate between the lines, even in technical documents. We must not rely on the reader to understand implicit information.
Tip: *Let your Indian partner tell you what is not 100% unambiguous. After reworking, your document will have 1.5 times the volume: more work, but also more clarity.*

3) Narrative use cases
Take the example of ATMs. People in mature economies have a process-oriented relationship with ATMs: card > PIN > money > goodbye. But ask people in India's suburban and rural areas and many will tell you they think a bank employee sits behind the machine, handing cash over to you.
Tip: *Narrate the user's environment, motives and expectations vividly.*

4) Inclusive documentation
As in points 1-3, your documentation will have 1.5 times its regular volume after review by a dark horse.
Tip: *Whenever you catch yourself thinking "Well, that should be clear anyway", check for comprehension.*

5) Express expectations
Do you use the subjunctive form to show you are respectful? Does your seemingly polite "could," "should" or "would" not deliver desired results? Indian idiom prefers a more direct approach. **Tip:** *Say "our expectation towards you is …" As long as your tone is amicable you can expect good results.*

6) Stringent roles and responsibilities
Generally speaking, India still is a society that adheres to seniority, authority and hierarchy. Teams avoid trespassing organisational boundaries, showing respect for the other's area of influence, expertise or designation.
Tip: *In your HR and communications management plan, demarcate roles and responsibilities more stringently. You may even hear a sigh of relief from teams in the west.*

7) Cross-cultural competence
Knowing India's mythology, culture and values and how these can be leveraged beneficially in modern business is indispensable. There is empiric evidence that interculturally trained managers and teams contribute significantly to project success.
Tip: *Get yourself, as well as client and vendor teams, properly trained to work cross-culturally with particular focus on India.*