

IN CONVERSATION

In the past, people often confused strong management with strong leadership.

Leadership is leading from the front and setting an example, says the global Chief Executive Officer of Pedersen & Partners,

Gary Williams in this interaction with BW Businessworld's **Noor Fathima Warsia**



Photographs by Vilas Kalgutker

“MANAGEMENT IS NOT LEADERSHIP”

You are a global CEO based in Asia. What are some of the challenges you face due to this?

When I moved to Asia two decades ago, it laid a good foundation for me to be much more culturally, professionally and personally available. The lessons I've learned over the past 20 years have prepared me to embrace this global role. As we know, once you get into this emerging market, every country has its own culture and way of doing business.

It's not only in Asia, but it's the same in eastern Europe, where we are in other emerging markets. Being a global CEO from Asia based in Bangkok has challenges and opportunities as well. It gives us a chance to bring people together internationally and not just from a headquarters standpoint. In a way, it compels everyone to work internationally and more closely together. Time zones have proven to be the most difficult challenge though. There are long days but also rewarding days at different times throughout the world.

In your role, you are required to observe leaders and leadership trends. What qualities define leadership today?

In the past, people often confused strong management with strong leadership. Before the pandemic, typically everyone worked in the offices or on-site, and management was overseeing the work. You had people controlling and directing staff.

When the crisis struck, a different approach, one of leadership rather than management, was required. Leadership is leading from the front and setting an example. Leadership is letting go and giving people their freedom, empowering them and also holding them accountable. With freedom comes accountability but leadership transformed external management and the top-down approach to directing and a more frontal leadership, guiding individuals.

Everything has a hybrid version now but will the pandemic-related trends come to pass as we return to normalcy?

Normalcy means different things to different people. Everyone has an opinion

about working in an office versus working remotely. I think there is no single right answer but I do not think that we will go back to working full time from offices. There will be a hybrid approach. Particularly in emerging markets, some companies are saying productivity increases because people are not commuting two hours each way to work every day. The way people lead teams will also continue evolving and when you look at the working environment, people have tasted freedom, empowerment and flexibility. Leaders are going to need to try all that. It's no longer black and white. It needs to be a system that works best for each organisation, depending on the businesses, corporate culture, and diversity of the teams.

Any comments regarding recent changes in hiring and how you see it evolving?

Everyone has met face-to-face in the last few years, and the level of engagement and trust increased immediately. Then it became virtual and people adapted to it. The pre-pandemic resolutions revolved around who was the best candidate, the best manager for the business. Now, it's about who is the right candidate given our business and external marketplace, and that companies need leaders who can really be doing the job rather than just managing.

Leadership profile has changed, and that is why we are not discussing the best but the right candidate. It's everything from values to behaviours to emotional quotient and intelligence quotient. When our clients look for leaders, they are not looking for the yesterday metrics like industry experience anymore. The pandemic accelerated transformations and as a result, they are looking for something new.

But does this apply to everyone? Sometimes we find people reverting to the pre-pandemic ways...

Not everyone has changed and that is the reality. Traditional managers or



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leaders are still leaders on an operational level, which is going to continue. But, even in that, companies need leaders who can take complete charge, with the entire organisation, function or department following them. This will lead to change because, in my opinion, the traditional manager will not be effective going ahead. Leadership will need to be agile, should have adaptability, speed, and should be dynamic.

What does Pedersen & Partners bring to the table given the company is more global and not market rooted?

We have a unique value proposition.

Our global competitors work office by office but we work as one global team. Historically, and even now, others tend to operate like individual sports teams but we are more aligned as a team sport. Our resources and our offices are focused on emerging markets. We know how they operate because we have the teams on the ground. Our approach is to bring the best team that has geographic expertise, industry expertise, and domain expertise. This is the best way because when we partner with our clients, it's because of the value and quality that we can bring to them, and as a team, we feel we do it better than anyone else in the market.

What will be some of the areas of importance for Pedersen and Partners?

Emerging markets will continue to be an area we will invest in. To truly bring that expertise to the table, we need to keep expanding the local teams with on-ground experience. From the perspective of our service offerings, we also need to keep developing leadership consulting practices and board service practices that will complement our research practice.

There are tremendous opportunities in India. We as a firm are committed to India and we see growth both in terms of capabilities and market. The sky is the limit. Resilience is something that we all need to keep at the top of our minds in emerging or mature markets. Because, as we have seen, it has been one crisis after another, and you know how important resilience, agility, perseverance and commitment are.

For our team in India, we always tell them we are in it to win it. We value each client relationship and all the candidate relationships we have as well. Everything is built on trust and respect, which are our top priorities. Let us, therefore, provide the market with the quality and behaviours that customers expect.

Any advice you would like to offer leaders or aspirants who are considering recruitment consulting?

Executive search is a great career. I have spent most of my career in consulting, whether management consulting or executive search. I will say to younger folks who decide to get into executive search that you can make the most of it. You can learn about different types of industries, and businesses and you will be able to enhance people skills. You will be involved in an industry that is evolving as well. For younger people, this career offers flexibility, learning and international experiences as well. **BW**

nfw@businessworld.in



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