

# Keep Learning

Debashish Roy Chowdhury, CFO of Ericsson India Global Services, shares some of the many lessons he has learnt over his career



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**‘H**ands-on’, ‘transparent’, ‘fair’, and ‘versatile leader’ are some words that characterise Debashish Roy Chowdhury, CFO of Ericsson Global Services. Deb (as he likes to be known) believes that leadership is all about building and empowering others. Upbeat and full of beans, he has a lot going for him. Leading Finance for the India unit of one of the world’s largest network-services providers is no small task, but he does it with passion. Deb is also the Finance Controller for Ericsson’s Global Delivery Centres in India, Romania, China and Mexico. His mandate is broad as well as challenging: optimising costs to increase profitability, and driving operational agility so as to take on

the competition.

Deb spoke to us about how his role has evolved, from number crunching to co-driving the delivery strategy, all while focusing on long-term growth. Today, a large portion of his time is spent dealing with planning the existing resources wisely to deliver on the company’s objective of ‘profitability over growth’. Close to three decades of cross-sectoral experience have afforded Deb the privilege of multiple vantage points through which to view the telecom sector.

These vantage points include stints in the manufacturing and IT sectors. Deb’s decade in manufacturing instilled in him financial rigour, and an orientation towards the finer details. His 11 years with IBM India were in a time when the IT industry was undergoing multiple transformations. He witnessed all three phases of growth, when India moved, first, from being a support provider to an implementer of solutions, and more recently, to one built around advanced analytics and machine learning. His experience at IBM was instrumental in honing his leadership, coaching and conflict-management skills.

In 2010, Deb moved to telecom, which was, at the time, rising up the value chain, from being a telecom equipment supplier. At the time, MNCs were setting-up multiple delivery centres across India, and their key engagement model was built around not just cost arbitrage, but also a services focus, strong

compliance, agility, and innovation. Equipped with his prior knowledge and experience, he took on the massive KRA of setting up five global delivery centres for Ericsson. Reflecting back on his journey, he is modest about his achievements in helping to build world-class delivery centres that are core to Ericsson's global footprint, and to achieving its broader vision. Today, India is witnessing a telecom revolution around fourth- and fifth-generation mobile services that will transform the consumer landscape over the next 5-10 years. The first wave of this revolution was marked by the huge expansion of voice services to the masses. In Deb's view, we are now in the midst of a second big shift, driven by the phenomenal increase in smartphone adoption, and complemented by surging data usage. The consequences are far-reaching, and hard for any company or entrepreneur to envisage. Clearly, though, to succeed in the coming decade, companies will need to embrace mobile technology as a critical performance driver.

### **A Personal Mantra of Success**

Today's organisations operate in an increasingly complex and ever-shifting environment. As a result, leaders need to rely more than ever on their teams' capabilities. Additionally, collaboration is no longer just 'nice to have', but an essential ingredient of organisational survival and success. In a participative and knowledge-based economy, individual performance is secondary, and Deb believes that a leader's success is based on how well he or she is able to empower and coach those who are second-in-line. Quite simply, a good leader should be willing to learn from people both above and below. Deb also believes that knowledge is key, and constantly pushes himself to be on top of the changes taken place in

## **Career Highlights**

With over 28 years of diverse business experience, Deb's core strengths lie in Financial Reporting and Planning, Corporate Strategy, Operations, Management of Real Estate, and IT, to name a few.

A Chartered Accountant and an Alumnus of Columbia University, Deb started his career with GEC-Alstom in 1990 as a Finance Manager. This was followed by a 6-year stint with ABB as Finance Controller. In 1999, he joined IBM India, serving there for 11 years in various roles, after which he moved to Ericsson India Global Services as its CFO.

the industry. To make that possible, he regularly engages with and learns from external consultants and industry experts. This, he believes, is crucial, especially for those who are part of a global leadership team. Continuous benchmarking and aligning to market best practices, Deb says, are also essential for one to remain effective and relevant.

### **Prioritising 'De-stress'**

Given today's hectic lifestyles, finding time for yourself is challenging, but crucial. Regular exercise helps Deb unwind, and he ensure that it is part of his daily schedule. Pursuing interests outside of work is also helpful. He regularly travels to different parts of the world to meet and connect with people of different cultures and backgrounds. Travelling also helps him connect with global clients. In his free time, he loves watching comedy films that carry a social message in a humorous way.

### **Noble Ambitions**

At the top of Deb's personal bucket list are giving back to society in ways that go beyond money, and going on a wildlife expedition in Africa. Professionally, he would like to take on the role of a Business Head sometime in the future. Deb believes that an effective CFO should be able to lead a business well. The standard ways of doing things are passé – and excellence today is achieved by taking on bigger challenges, and never giving up. ■

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