

October 2015 Issue MARTIN GLOBAL LEADERS

Global Insider Interviews

Conversations with leaders around the globe

Hi <<First Name>>,

This month's *Global Insider Interview* is with **Paras Sidapara**, Global Head of Managed Services, Financial & Risk, Thomson Reuters, in London.

Gleaned from living and working in Tokyo, Singapore and London, Paras shares his insights into what makes people and organizations "tick" - both in the East and the West. He was interviewed by David Howells, EMEA Region Head, from our London office.

We hope you find this useful for your own leadership, and we welcome suggestions for future interviews!

Sincerely, Craig & David
MARTIN GLOBAL LEADERS





Paras Sidapara on Learning What Makes People Tick

"You can be empathetic without being influential - but the reverse is rarely true..." Paras Sidapara, Global Head of Managed Services, Financial & Risk, Thomson Reuters, London



David Howells: Who were some of your role models growing up?

Paras Sidapara: Many people have had an impact on my formative years, but the key role models for me were my parents. They had lived in Kenya, after my grandfather had originally moved there to build the railways, but moved to the UK as a result of the various crises in eastern Africa in the 1960s and 1970s. My father's attitude was "I am responsible for everyone" and he bore that burden squarely on his shoulders – I still identify with his sentiment.

Both my parents wanted me to have the education that they had been denied, because of their financial circumstances. My mother's influence was also highly significant - she had a

great ability to get on with people and to build rapport. She taught me that to be influential you have to be able to get on with all sorts of people.

I have learnt that you can be empathetic without being influential - but the reverse is rarely true.

What cultural values did you learn growing up to which you would attribute some of your success?

As is normal for an Indian family we spent a lot of time in each other's company: my quite traditional grandparents were always around and we chatted a lot, sharing our views and concerns. I also spent a good proportion of my time caring for my disabled sister. This meant that we were all very much "in tune" with one another and I guess this perhaps laid the foundation for developing the empathy which I believe is important when leading people.

My father used to say "make sure that everyone is looked after" and I believe that having an awareness of other people's frames of mind or situations is vital in most areas of leadership – particularly when it comes to working across national boundaries and cultures.

If you don't understand the other person's frame of reference, it becomes very difficult to get things done.

How has your leadership style evolved while working across a range of cultures?

My early career was spent in what many people might describe as a rather traditional British merchant bank which had a relatively sleepy and staid style. This was shaken up abruptly when it was acquired by a German bank with a rather different organizational style. Many leaders failed to make the changes required – more process, more direction, more method and even more conformity with central policies. The situation was made even more challenging when we acquired an American bank.

I quickly had to adapt my style to the new organizational environment, particularly after being appointed to a position where I ran a function where many people were both considerably older and more widely experienced than I was at that time.

How have you had to deal with differences between national cultures?

Two pieces of advice from a previous boss have helped me to work with the differences between national cultures within a global organization. He told me, firstly, "Do what you think is right" and, secondly, "Don't allow your need for perfection to get in the way of what's good and acceptable".

People from different cultures have different standards and measures against which they judge success. As a leader you need to take a pragmatic decision over what you deem as being in the best interests of the business and your overall direction. Getting total

conformity across cultures is probably an unobtainable, and possibly undesirable, aim.

Building rapport with people from differing cultures is essential for understanding how they judge situations. Linked to this is also the need to “tune” one’s message to the listener or audience.

It’s often a mistake to assume that people from different cultures will desire the same outcomes from a given situation.

What have you learned are keys to influence at the highest levels of an organization?

In my experience senior leaders expect candour, both from each other and their followers - this in turn depends on having developed high levels of trust. Whilst working in Japan I discovered that trust-building varies according to the culture in which you find yourself. In some it comes from speaking out, whilst in others it comes from being more cautious and holding one’s views privately.

When working within different organizational and national cultures, one element remains the same - that is the need to seek out those I term the “cultural champions.” These are the people who have their “finger on the pulse of the organisation” and a high degree of understanding of what top management are thinking.

If you can identify these people and work with them you have an enhanced opportunity of getting things done.

What advice do you have for leaders transitioning for the first time into international or global roles?

My most significant personal learning is not to assume that matters are viewed in the same way in different organizational and national cultures. I have transitioned between clients and vendors as well as between the “West” and “East” and what has become clear to me is how important it is to take time to listen to people and understand the new culture that you are joining.

Try to discover “what makes the organization tick”, what concerns people in the organization appear to share and how they view their work.

You often can’t gather this information easily or quickly, but a useful short cut that I have found is taking the opportunity to have some “social time”. Even though some cultures are keen to separate work time from social time, the learning that you can derive from just spending time in the company of others is immeasurable.

The value in meeting people face-to-face and “being accessible” are not to be underestimated.

Looking out 3-7 years, what challenges do you expect global leaders will face?

To me a significant challenge is something that we all experience – the world is becoming a smaller place, we are more interdependent and news, particularly bad news, travels faster than ever and often provokes a reaction. Our cultural awareness is generally higher and some of the physical burdens of travel, even relocation, are becoming diminished. But everything is also moving at a greater pace than ever before.

At the same time the business environment is becoming tougher and everyone wants more for less. This means that leaders have to be both shrewder and faster thinking than even just 10 years ago. The result is that leaders are under pressure to become more involved in dealing with both “information overload” and possibly “cultural overload” as well as having to balance a range of stakeholders even more carefully.

Previously it was acceptable for leaders to lead and have relatively little detailed knowledge about many matters. Today however, leaders are expected to have more depth of knowledge in a wider range of issues and in a more integrated manner.

What has been your darkest hour and what steered you through this?

The most difficult situations I have found myself in are probably those when my approach has been out of alignment with others’ and when I have had to question whether I wanted to do that particular job any more. The issues then had been around how much I should adapt and whether I was willing to compromise my intentions or ethics to fit the demands of the situation.

My conscience and belief system however was telling me that “what do I stand for?” and “what makes me happy?” were the essential questions to ask myself.

I think it’s always important to go through the thought process of assessing whether what you “want to do” and what you “are doing” is the same thing - and if not to have the courage to take action and do something different.

That’s something else that my father instilled into me...and I think that’s now brought us full circle.

THANK YOU, PARAS. WE REALLY APPRECIATE YOU SHARING YOUR INSIGHTS WITH OUR GLOBAL INSIDER COMMUNITY.

To find out more about our GLOBAL INSIDER INTERVIEWS, or to discover the details of our GLOBAL ACCELERATOR PROGRAM for global leaders, please contact Craig Martin (craig@martingloballeaders.com) or David Howells (david@martingloballeaders.com). We would be pleased to speak with you.



Note to Readers: Our interviews with global leaders, as part of our Global Insiders series, offer personal insights from widely experienced people on the issues that have impacted them, do not necessarily represent the views and positions of neither their current organization nor those in which they have worked.

Each month, Martin Global Leaders interviews top executives from diverse backgrounds across industries and regions to illuminate how culture informs leadership philosophy and practices in today's global business environment.



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