

— Developing a manager's competency in harnessing IT —

Dr. G.K. Suri, Honorary Professor, International Management Institute, India, and a former head of research and development in the APO Secretariat, recently conducted a workshop for senior managers on the “Role and Competency Development of a Manager for Harnessing the Potential of IT Infrastructure and Value of Information” in New Delhi, April 2003. The 30 participants including resource persons discussed advances in IT organizational infrastructure and their impact on the role of a manager; competencies required to harness the potential of IT infrastructure and value of information; and developing an organizational culture to tap the IT and information potential. At the end of the meeting, the participants reached some valuable conclusions and made several recommendations. Some of them are recapitulated below.

Challenges facing businesses today include: a) a new competitive landscape; b) major strategic discontinuities; c) rapid advances in technology and increased globalization; d) reduced time frame for strategic actions; e) increased focus on innovation and continuous learning; and f) changing career dynamics and employee expectations. Navigating in the new landscape requires organizational flexibility, strategic leadership, building core competencies, developing human capital, effective use of new technologies, and development of a new organizational structure and culture.

For those in management, the above challenges mean that they must: facilitate cultural and attitudinal changes; adopt new technology; create IT awareness and provide an IT-enabling environment; simplify systems and processes; resolve conflicts between business and technology teams; provide funds and optimize costs; restructure the organization; overcome the negative legacies of the existing infrastructure; ensure the compatibility of diverse systems in the organization; and manage a simultaneous process of training and implementation, including e-learning.



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Top management has a vital role to play, especially in the critical areas of providing vision, leadership, support and commitment, resources, and quick decision making; adopting a transnational approach to business; building a learning environment within the organization; enhancing the integrated use of technology throughout the organization; and involving the functional managers in the planning and implementation of each of these processes.

Organizational IT infrastructure comprises hardware, software, data communication networks, and customized information systems. It must be supported by IT professionals and an open mindset by

everyone in the organization. Recent trends in IT infrastructure can be summarized as:

- a shift from inward to outward orientation;
- a shift from thinking in functional terms to thinking in terms of relationships with key entities like customers, suppliers, partners, and employees;
- a convergence of various enterprise applications into a unified whole;
- a shift from a linear “chain-centric” to nonlinear “hub-centric” view of enterprise applications; and
- a shift from rigid applications and assets to dynamic services and resources that are accessed over a network.

For effective implementation of IT, a change in organizational structure—from one that is hierarchical to a combination of vertical and horizontal systems—is most desirable. Systems and procedures should be developed to support a paperless office. Any barriers between IT professionals and users of IT in the organization should be removed and prevented from forming again. Benefits accruing from investments in IT should be quantified and forecast at the end of each financial year. 