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## Context to the conversation

Neeraj speaks about how growing up in India helps one deal with ambiguity and diversity that is often helpful when one is leading a heterogeneous group of markets.

## Transcription

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Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): While you spoke about servant leadership, was there any tweaks to the leadership style based on the culture? Is there a certain kind of leadership which is a little more effective in China versus Japan versus India? Any nuance?

Neeraj Aggarwal (NA): Huge nuances, Asia is loaded with culture. In Japan, once you make a decision, everybody listens, everybody follows and it happens. Once aligned, it happens. In Korea,

DJ: It's like seven continents within.

NA: also, very classically hierarchical society. So there is a bit different from certainly very different from Japan, but has elements which are like the boss is saying it kind of stuff. I mean, has elements about that. But there were multiple in our business, were multiple iconic leaders and they didn't see eye to eye at some stage. So it also had its second layer complications of, you know, they were out to aligning their... No, even in one market itself, So aligning that itself was a different challenge. like, think of it as, I don't know if that's word, but it could almost be seem like, are you in this camp or that camp kind of a problem. I think China, while my... At the end, learning wars, their DNA is very similar to ours. You know, they are very driven, very hungry. On some aspects, not on every aspect, on some aspects very similar. The family matters. Every mother and father have spent time to make their kids, you know, they're extraordinarily invested in the family and their success.

DJ: Everyone have their version of the shaving test.

NA: I'm sure or the piano test or whatever the you know everybody has worked there you know whatever which body part you would imagine off they work really really hard to get to where they are hugely driven but I think they were in a more homogeneous environment than India has a heterogeneity of environment so heterogeneity gives us a certain calmness which comes the homogeneity sometimes can rattle them when the environment gets a bit, you know, I think that's

because it's much more culturally, language wise, a much more homogeneous kind of environment, right? So there is some differences. And South Asia is multiple cultures, right? I mean, can't paint it with one brush. So Indonesia or Vietnam will be very different or Singapore will be very different. But I think the gift I would say which the Indians have, which I think certainly is our ability to deal with ambiguity.

I think you find a lot of Indians in leadership positions across the world. It's not because I think certainly Indians are smart but there many other people who are smart. I think our ability to believe in a world which is hugely ambiguous. So ambiguity is a part of our DNA. Ambiguity does not rattle us. In many Asian cultures, ambiguity creates problems. People like... So one of the things I was difficult as a leader to deal with is I could keep things ambiguous till the last moment. I never... But people like... two weeks before we commit and then we deliver on the commitment. know, last minute disruptions are very hard for the Asian cultures. that part of my leadership style was hard for people to deal with.

DJ: What is it about India, let's say growing up in India that sort of, I mean, different people have different takes, but what's your instinct on the reasons why a lot of people grow up with comfort, with ambiguity? What is it about the Indian system?

NA: I think partly given our state of infrastructure, given our state of everything, you always have to have a plan A, plan B, plan C. So you're naturally wired to, in the moment, just drop a plan and pick up a new plan. I think there's also, I think we underestimate how much diversity we have and how, and people look at the same problem differently. I mean, we are... I mean we are a Europe state, we are a continent-sized country, in some sense of certainly in terms of diversity. So that naturally makes us ready for not one point of view and a multitude of point of view. So I these two things, certainly.

## Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: Talking about ambiguity and uncertainty, I am reminded of a conversation with a former colleague Claudio Fernandez Araoz. A senior leader at EgonZehnder based in Argentina. He would say that things are so volatile in Argentina that you cannot even predict the past! I guess, while there is messiness in India, I guess one has to celebrate the fact that it makes us more resilient to deal with the ambiguity around us!

## End of transcription

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### About Deepak Jayaraman

Deepak seeks to unlock the human potential of senior executive's / leadership teams by working with them as an Executive Coach / Sounding Board / Transition Advisor. You can know more about his work [here](#).

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