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Context to the nugget

Vinay talks about how Narasimha Rao made decisions or chose not to make decisions strategically depending on the political context. He mentions that often people think of Narasimha Rao as an intellectual but Vinay argues that he was a man of action but also somebody who was acutely aware of his political ability to drive through change.

Transcription

Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): Even when I look at leadership in organizations in the corporate world, you often have people reporting to you who know much more about that topic of function than you do so in those situations when it comes to decision making where you are not as informed as the person reporting to you so how did NR make key decisions? What's the mechanism to make good decisions?

Vinay Sitapati (VS): I will give you NR's view he trusted people around him but he also realised that the expert knows only one thing but the problem may have multiple components, Manmohan Singh understands tariff reductions very well, MS doesn't know how to get it through the Lok Sabha, MS doesn't know how to get it through the Rajya Sabha, the IFS offices, diplomat tell you that we need to make overtures to Israel the diplomat doesn't know that you need the political signing of hugging Yasser Arafat so I think NR's remarkable ability was that he relied on experts but he knew that he alone had the 360 degree view and the how part. And the how part requires a 360 degree view, in fact I don't know where this is relevant to this conversation but my former boss Shekar Gupta would always tell me that the difference between Indian leadership and Pakistani leadership is that democratic politicians are forced to take the 360 degree view whereas Pakistani leaders typically military dictators are all looking at the Army view, and the Army view is just one view Mushrraf knows how to attack Kargil he doesn't know how to be a diplomat, he doesn't know how the economy works so in any organization we are going for specialist, specialist and specialist but the ultimate decision maker has to realise what is good for the entire organization and that was NR and that's another reason why he felt that even though MS knew more about him than in finance, AN Verma who was the former industry secretary, understood industries very well KN Venugopal, Yugan Dhar understood welfare schemes, he was the only person who had the keys to all kingdoms and decisions required that.

DJ: Sometimes even in the book you talk about the fact that not making a decision is a decision itself and NR in a lot of ways mastered the art of not making the decision in a strategic way so talk to us a little bit about that notion in the context of NR?

VS: NR has made a lot of fun off because the typical view of the NR was he was a scholar but he doesn't act and that's just a straight untruth as I show in the book yes he was a scholar but at heart he was a man of action, what he also was, he was acutely aware of his political vulnerabilities so when he didn't act it was not because he didn't want to act and not because not acting was important but because he just lack the political ability sometimes it was that not acting is important, not making a decision is important but very often he just lack the political ability that he could have made the decision he could have made the decision to privatise Air India which today we are trying to do but at that time he would have lost his job so he didn't make a decision on that matter so the stereo type of NR which comes from that idea, analysis until paralysis that was be that joke and the joke was NR knew that how to be silent in 10 languages and I think that misses something at the core of NR that he was the man of action but he was also acutely aware that as the book points out he lack power so his genius was where to act under which political cover and when he lack political cover he would withdraw and it's a fine art because most politicians you would argue only care about survival NR cared about survival but he also cared about other things.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: The point Vinay makes about relying on experts but having a 360 view is a profound point especially when leaders move from a Functional Leadership role to a CEO or a GM role where they oversee multiple functions and stakeholders. The axis of value add suddenly shifts from mastery in your domain to your ability to integrate multiple perspectives and come to a net-net view.

This is something that can be unnerving and discomforting to a lot of people where you start wondering if you are really adding value to the team and if the whole is more than the sum of parts. That is where some of the leaders really stand out. The way they develop a 360 view, solve issues at the interfaces where things sometimes break down and make decisions with a lot of nuance.

Thank you for listening. If you are new to the podcast and want to get a sense of the nature of content that is covered, you might want to go to Youtube and type "PlaytoPotential Highlights from 2017". I have tried to capture the key takeaways from my various conversations last year with leaders across disciplines. If you want to listen offline say during a car ride home or during airplane travel, you could also access the Podcast on iTunes, Stitcher, Saavn and several other podcast apps. Google has recently launched an app for podcast listening on Android platforms too. If you went to playtopotential.com, you would also have the opportunity to listen to multiple voices curated by a topic.

To give you a sense, one of the playlists is Maternity Transition. Women leaders talk about how they navigated this transition which is an important passage of play in the context of women building careers and rising to the top. If you find the content purposeful, please go to iTunes, rate the show and share a review. It will help others discover it. Thank you for listening.

End of nugget transcription

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Inflection points: Inflection points are when the notion of “what got you here won’t get you there” hold. Whether it is a company moving from a start-up to a scale-up or a leader moving from a CXO to a CEO role, these passages of play have to be navigated carefully as there is a high risk of derailment. You can access the playlist [here](#).

Driving change: Ability to drive change in an organization is one of the critical Leadership Competencies for a CEO today, given more and more is getting done at the intersection of different ecosystems, and a large portion of value add is not directly under the leader’s control but in the wider realm of influence. In this segment, leaders talk about how they drove change through a complex system/organization. You can access the playlist [here](#).

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Vinay Sitapati - Nuggets

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About Deepak Jayaraman

Deepak seeks to unlock 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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