



Anurag Behar

EDITORS' NOTE Anurag Behar is also Chief Executive Officer for Azim Premji Foundation and Vice Chancellor, Azim Premji University. In a previous role as the Chief Executive Officer of Wipro Infrastructure Engineering, Behar led Wipro's investments in two strategic diversifications – the Clean Energy and Water sectors. He has also worked with GE Medical Systems, including being part of the team that built the leadership position of Wipro GE Healthcare in South Asia. Anurag has been honored by the World Economic Forum as a Young Global Leader. He has an M.B.A. from XLRI, Jamshedpur and a B.E. in Electrical & Electronics Engineering from National Institute of Technology, Trichy.

COMPANY BRIEF Wipro Limited (wipro.com) is a leading information technology, consulting, and business process services company that delivers solutions to enable its clients to do business better. Wipro delivers winning business outcomes through its deep industry experience and a 360-degree view of “Business through Technology.” By combining digital strategy, customer-centric design, advanced analytics, and a product engineering approach, Wipro helps its clients create successful and adaptive businesses. Wipro has a dedicated workforce of over 170,000 serving clients across six continents.

Will you talk about how you define the role of Chief Sustainability Officer and what you see as the key areas of focus?

Any business by its very nature is short-term focused, and I don't mean per quarter but even three to five years is short term from a social perspective.

Therefore, the sustainability role, which looks at things in “social time frames,” meaning a decade or more, has an important role in a company. This is because businesses operate in the broader society, so irrespective of its strategy and culture, society is going to shape what is going to happen to it, and what it will have to do.

Therefore, it's important that every company remain more broadly engaged in social issues, and that is a very important goal of a Chief Sustainability

Contributing to Society

An Interview with Anurag Behar, Chief Sustainability Officer, Wipro Limited

Officer. In the phrase “social issues,” I am including the environmental side as well.

How critical is it that this role has a seat at the table at the highest levels when it comes to how those efforts are tied into business strategy and driven throughout the organization?

By the very nature of these social issues, we're talking about the long term and also about issues that are far more complex than business. In this context, the commitment must come from the very top.

Certainly this commitment also has to convert into the strategy and execution of engagement with social issues. The strategy is crucial, because it must determine the choices we make. We have to choose carefully which social issues to engage in.

We believe that it is important for business organizations not only to continue to grow but also to contribute to the community and to society as a whole. In itself, this is an adequate enough reason, so it is not necessary that the social engagement of a company be tied to business strategy.

Wipro is certainly committed to the idea of contributing to society. That is the reason for our social engagement; there is nothing beyond that, since there is nothing more important than that.

This clear commitment of ours has also led to our strategy of focusing our social engagement and contribution. We are focused on education.

None of these issues can be addressed in the absence of engagement from the very top of the company.

To be effective, do the community efforts need to align with the business?

It's often dysfunctional and unnecessary to try to tie it in some artificial manner to the business strategy or to align it with the business. There may be cases where this can happen naturally.

Education is foundational to good society, and since we are a citizen of this country and across the globe and we want to contribute, we have to address this issue of education irrespective of its immediate relationship with our business strategy.

We also realize that good education for all will eventually help us in some ways, but that's such a tenuous connection that it can't be the basis for any action. The action arises from a deeper commitment to helping our communities improve.

Will you talk about how the partnership with nonprofit First Book has progressed?

When we started thinking about contributing to communities, focusing on education was a given, but within education, we were also clear that we would contribute in some way to teachers.

We looked around the U.S. and we realized that STEM had been recognized as a national priority, so we decided to work with teachers in STEM. This was the genesis of the program with UMass Boston, called the Wipro Science Education Fellowship (SEF). That program has expanded from Boston to New York to New Jersey and to Chicago, and that continues.

Within this program, for five years, we have been helping contribute to the continuing development of STEM teachers in K-12 schools that serve children from disadvantaged families. The program helps develop better STEM teachers and change leaders.

We have also added a second leg to our community engagement programs, the book donation partnership with First Book. When employees of Wipro see the company's social commitment, they want to know how they can contribute and engage.

This is a great partnership where we're donating 200,000 books across 10 cities in local community schools. Our employees, with the help of First Book, engage with the schools. The engagement ranges from being present at the ceremony to giving out the books and reading to students. It's an enormous motivator to employees.

We plan to expand this program since it has done so well.

How important is it to have metrics in place to track impact?

Almost 40 percent of Wipro Limited is owned by the Azim Premji Foundation. Mr. Premji (Chairman and largest share owner) has donated this 40 percent of the ownership (worth about \$8 billion) of the company to the foundation and this ownership supports its philanthropic work. The foundation has a large operating organization focused on helping to improve the public schooling system in India. The foundation also runs a philanthropic university, which is one of the foremost school education organizations in India.

Therefore, much of our thinking about school education is informed by what we have learned at the foundation, including that change in education takes a very long time. It is an intergenerational thing and metrics can be misleading.

The heart of the matter in school education is that good teachers can make the kind of difference like nothing else can. This requires significant and sustained investment in teachers. We can't see changes in classrooms in one year but, if we continue to invest in the professional development of teachers, we will see changes over time. ●